

are as many ways to use or derive pleasure from the *Reader* as there are sides to Coyote himself.

The only minor complaint resides in the issue of how much Bright has altered some of the narratives he has translated from native tellers or retranslated from other scholars. Bright subscribes to the ethnopoetic school of translation, and while his arrangement of narratives into standard European poetic lines does seem to enhance both ease of reading and appreciation of content, it would have been beneficial in some cases at least to have the originals, translated as literally as possible, set beside his versions for comparison. Nonetheless, Bright is to be commended for drawing together the diverse materials of *A Coyote Reader* into a rewarding and thought-provoking whole.

Joan Newlon Radner, ed. **Feminist Messages: Coding in Women's Folk Culture.** Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993. Pp. xv + 309, photographs, notes, notes on contributors. \$39.95 cloth; \$16.95 paper.

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The study of women's folklore has received a valuable, and long-awaited, contribution with *Feminist Messages*, a collection of a dozen articles on subjects ranging from knitters of doll clothing to female rappers to traditional healers. This wide diversity of subjects is very effectively organized under the concept of coding: the theory that dominated groups within societies develop ways of communicating messages with double meanings, only one of which is available to outsiders, allowing insiders to understand the full meaning, and thereby "protect[ing] the creator from the consequences of openly expressing particular messages" (3). Collection editor Joan Newlon Radner, together with Susan S. Lanser, fully spell out the theory of coding in an introductory essay, "Strategies of Coding in Women's Cultures." This article is an adaptation of their article from the 1987 *Journal of American Folklore* special issue on Folklore and Feminism, "The Feminist Voice: Strategies of Coding in Folklore and Literature," which was, in turn, based on a paper presented at the 1986 annual meeting of the American Folklore Society, during the series of panels devoted to feminist issues in folklore. This makes *Feminist Messages* the third written collection to grow out of the 1986 meetings, after the *JAF* special issue and the collection edited by Beverly Stoeltje in the *Journal of Folklore Research* (1988).

There are a number of different strategies for coding, as Radner and Lanser outline in their introduction. They have come up with a working typology which includes six types of coding: *appropriation*, or adapting forms usually used by men; *juxtaposition*, the "ironic arrangement of texts, artifacts, or performances" (13); *distraction*, deliberately drawing attention away from the subversive message; *indirection*, such as the use of metaphor; *trivialization*; and *incompetence*, or deliberately failing at those tasks and abilities deemed feminine. In addition to these strategies, Radner and Lanser distinguish among three kinds of coding: *complicit*, where the code has been agreed on in advance; *explicit*, where even those who don't know the code understand that there is one; and *implicit*, where it is not at all clear that coding is taking place, and it may not even be a deliberate, conscious act on the part of the sender.

Since implicit coding is of greatest interest to Radner and Lanser, perhaps the most important issue dealt with in the book is that of intention and interpretation. That is, is the encoded "feminist message" created by the sender or the interpreter of the message? This question, raised in the introduction, is carried through the discussions of the contributors, and is intelligently discussed in reference to feminists' concerns with scholarly authority. The conclusion reached in the introduction spells out the attitudes taken by the authors of the other eleven chapters: "with careful and respectful scholarship grounded in the *specific cultural context of the performance, it seems feasible to posit at least the possibility that an act of coding has occurred*" (9, emphasis theirs). Moreover, this work is important because, since "*ambiguity is a necessary feature of every coded act, any instance of coding risks reinforcing the very ideology it is designed to critique*" (23). It thus becomes part of the feminist enterprise to demonstrate evidence of coding in these messages.

The wide-ranging articles in *Feminist Messages* are organized into four sections. The first section, "Women in the Patriarchal Household," looks at women's strategies for emotional and physical survival in a male-controlled domestic sphere. Here Susan S. Lanser raises the issue of domestic incompetence as a protective strategy and Polly Stewart suggests the role of the Child ballads in teaching girls how to survive in an environment hostile to women. Section Two, "Women Together," looks at contexts where women gather together, for instance in quilting bees in Linda Pershing's article, which looks at questions of intention and ambivalence in a quilt parodying Sunbonnet Sue. Section Three, "Women in the Larger Community," moves out of the domestic and private realms and looks at women taking on roles previously identified as male, and women dealing with changes in the gendering of public spheres of influence. In one of these articles, Cheryl L. Keyes looks at the strategy of appropriation among

female rappers, who modify male styles of dress and modes of behavior in order to succeed. The final section of the book, "Women Interpreting the Stories They Tell," is also the most suggestive. Two articles, one by professional storyteller Susan Gordon and one by Kay F. Stone (in her storyteller role), take on the evolution of meanings in two favorite stories, "The Handless Maiden" and "Frau Trude" respectively. Here, two stories that are extremely misogynistic on the face take on new and positive meanings through continual retelling in a variety of contexts, and we have a chance to see the powerful roles stories can play in the lives of performers and listeners.

There is an unusual degree of coherence between the articles of this collection and the frequent cross-referencing gives the reader the feeling that she is participating in a dialogue on the subject which is open-ended and intellectually exhilarating. You get the sense that the authors were eagerly sharing their articles among themselves, which they probably were. The articles are, on the whole, well-written and clear, and contain examples that clearly illustrate concepts. I would recommend *Feminist Messages* for use in both undergraduate and graduate classes in folklore or women's studies.