

wave of Grimm scholarship and the current boom of fairytale analysis in Germany. Such a book could have been a valuable source for folklorists. From his vantage point, however, discussion of the folktale and folktale scholarship was not a priority, so for the uninitiated reader, his presentation of folktale scholarship is confusing and often misleading.

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*Dancing with the Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican-American South Texas.* By José E. Limón. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994. Pp. xii + 240. Bibliography, illustrations. \$24.95.

José Limón has given us a meditation on the folklore of Mexican-Americans in south Texas and on its representation in scholarly works. Among the delights of this volume are encounters with a set of precursors, portraits of Mexican-Americans doing folklore today, and a narrative depicting the author's attempt to make sense of a folklore and a folkloristics with which he has intimate association. If the reader is obliged to wade through a few patches of trendy discourse, to suffer an occasional blast of polemics, and to disregard too many typos, the rewards are significant, for Limón has fashioned a compelling interpretation based on sensitive readings of fresh ethnographic data.

One salutary effect of Limón's treatise is to dispel the notion of a single, homogeneous Mexican-American community. Much of the drama in this volume arises from its focus on perceived points of fracture among Mexican-Americans, primarily along class, gender, and generational lines. Limón positions himself as spokesman for the *fuereños*, the families who entered Texas within living memory in search of economic opportunity in the north. He recognizes the eminence of his mentor, Américo Paredes, but at the same time attempts to carve out a distinctive niche for himself:

For, if the heroic ballad was at the center of Américo Paredes' youth and enabled his scholarly poetics of culture, then the expressive culture I grew up with might do the same for me. . . . As a *mexicano* working-class native of south Texas born of *fuereño* parents, growing up in the late forties and fifties, I never knew a time of small ranches and country stores; I knew only the asphalt-concrete *pachuco* mean streets of the cities. (p. 94)

This shift in the angle of vision entails a relocation to scenes and settings where *fuereños* gather. Thus Limón reasons:

If the corrido was the major signifier of the critical politics of Américo Paredes' heroic world, then I take the polkas as that of my own world—the polka not so much as a musical form, but as a dance. (p. 165)

The first part of the book presents insightful and largely sympathetic portraits of a set of precursors, men and women who observed and wrote about the folklore of south Texas Mexican-Americans: John Gregory Burke, J. Frank Dobie, Jovita González, and Américo Paredes. The author's feel for life's complexity surfaces as he locates each precursor in a web of social and political contradiction. In Limón's view, each

of them nourished a genuine appreciation for aspects of the folk they described, but in each case the scholarly agenda is necessarily shaped—and partly subverted—by blind spots or prejudices stemming from class and ethnic affiliation.

The section on Paredes is the most delicate one. Limón dedicates this book as follows: “For Mr. Paredes, and better times, 1967–1987.” The work and life of Paredes receive genuine tribute in these pages. For instance, in reference to the classic portrait of Gregorio Cortez, *With His Pistol in His Hand*, Limón writes:

Mr. Paredes and his book become like a *corrido* and its hero for a new generation of Chicano social activists of the sixties, who recognized the legendary fighting qualities of the two men, Cortez and Paredes. (p. 82)

Still, it is evident that Limón requires a separate space for his own life and work, and in this cause he invokes conflict between the established class of Mexican-American border families and the newly-arrived and upstart *fuereños*. This proposition gives Limón a strong base of operations even if it seems forced in application to the wide-ranging scholarship of Paredes.

The second part of the book is, for me at least, the most tasty. Here Limón enters the world of the *fuereños* and conveys to the reader portraits and vignettes that are at times stunning in their verisimilitude. He joins the *fuereños* and *fuereñas* at casual gatherings for barbecue, at evenings of drink and polka in the lounges and dance halls, at the shrine of the folk saint, don Pedro Jaramillo. His accounts of the people he meets and runs with at these places are delightful, and touching. He manages to present them as sensible human beings making use of humor, dance, and folk religious belief to establish and maintain a viable local identity in the context of what he calls “a late capitalism with no human face” (p. 140). Limón credits his *fuereño* associates with the invention of a “an emergent postmodernist culture” and he refers to his drinking companions as “Bakhtinian *batos*,” spurred to cosmic laughter at the prospect of the transforming south Texas scene (p. 110).

In spite of what seems at times a rigid political stance, Limón exhibits plenty of good sense about working-class Mexican-Americans. His work displays the advantages of a committed folkloristics, providing ample insights into patterns of attitude and action marking the texture of vernacular lives. Limón finds a common thread of cultural resistance in the verbal and gestural play of male companions, in the polka as enacted at the dance halls, in the promises made to don Pedro Jaramillo. In the sightings of a handsome “white” devil by women at the night scenes, he finds a fantasy of escape on the part of the women of Mexican-America.

The observations and arguments put forward in this book, whether or not we accept the interpretations offered, revitalize the field of Mexican-American folklore studies. At the same time, Limón’s work here makes a case for the continuing mission of the folklorist as cultural critic. At the outset, Limón writes of the need for “integrated works addressing folkloric popular forms, scholarly discursive practices, mass media, and written literary forms in one interpretive universe always with a close attention to political economy” (p. 12). In tracing the dance of several devils across the south Texas cultural landscape, Limón has in large measure delivered the goods.

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