

Gillian Bennett and Paul Smith have provided scholars and others who are interested in the phenomenon with a most powerful research tool with their *Contemporary Legend: A Folklore Bibliography*.

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Simon J. Bronner, *Piled Higher and Deeper: The Folklore of Campus Life*. Little Rock, Arkansas, August House, 1990. tpb 256pp. ISBN 0-87-483-154-7.

Simon Bronner is one of the most prolific published scholars among the folklorists of his generation, and there are not many aspects of the discipline on which he has not written, if not a book, at least an article. Although his chief interest has been in the field of material culture, he has also ventured into several other areas of folk-cultural research, among them children's folklore and, as exemplified by the book under review, the folklore of academe, particularly of the world of the student.

North American students and graduates will not have to be told that the title of the book, *Piled Higher and Deeper*, is a cynical extension of the acronym Ph.D., not as one of the mnemonic devices represented by a large number of examples in Bronner's collection but as a facetious devaluation of the highest academic degree to which university students can aspire without, however, always fulfilling their aspirations upon completion of the degree. This irreverent titular look at life on American campuses is an appropriate introduction to the substance of this volume which contains academic lore from a large variety of universities and colleges, both the famous and the lesser known, and the overcrowded state institutions and the more exclusive private ones.

If it is part of the tradition on your campus, it is probably in the book, or there is some variant of it from another campus, or perhaps even both; for one of the notable features of Bronner's collection is the ubiquity of so much that one might regard as peculiar to one's own academic environment. This should not strike a folklorist as strange, but it is nevertheless worth mentioning, especially since this observation does not just apply to the content of the traditions in question but also to their form or genre, be it legend, song, game, custom, joke, or verbal expression. If one thought of the story of the imminent collapse or gradual sinking of the Library Tower on the SUNY-Binghamton campus, where Simon Bronner and this reviewer first came across each other, as unique, one is soon disabused of this notion by a

similar rumor about the Library of the University of Massachusetts (p. 146); or if one was convinced that the Pegasus over the entrance to the Fine Arts Building on the same campus was destined to fly away if a virgin passed by or graduated (p. 12) one finds that comparable predictions are made at, let us say, Cornell and Ohio State, normally with reference to some unexpected movement by a supposedly immovable object, like a statue or clock. Needless to say, the movement has never been observed which is, of course, the point of the whole rumor. (In class discussion it is interesting to note students' reactions to this belief.)

Bronner's examples cover all facets of campus life, from orientation to graduation, and they not surprisingly concentrate on those occasions when students are likely to feel most concerned, apprehensive, threatened or even vulnerable: writing tests or essays, homecoming, Halloween, initiation, pledging, sorority and fraternity life, courtship, sex, drinking, institutional food, etc. Some of the stories, rituals, practices, remedies, jokes or games are exclusively found on academic campuses, especially when they speak to the maturation process and the simultaneous triple challenge or jeopardy of being away from home for the first time, encountering members of the other sex in a fairly circumscribed environment, and having to satisfy demanding academic expectations; others have simply migrated from off-campus to on-campus locations where, after all, life and its hazards are not completely unconnected with the big, wide world beyond their perimeters.

The student of contemporary legends will be amply rewarded by a close scrutiny of Bronner's collection. There are tales of suicidal ghosts, revenants, ghostly residents, dismembered murder victims, cadaverous arms, fatal initiations, legend trips, "The Hook," the "Boyfriend's Death," murder in the library stacks, architects' mistakes, and so on. It is probably no exaggeration to say that campuses, with their highly verbal culture and appeal to the imagination, are good breeding grounds for contemporary legends, whether they be concerned with the campuses themselves or some other location.

Bronner's study is, of course, much more than a collection of contemporary legends, and anybody who has ever had some connection with an American college or university will soon come across something of personal interest, be it familiarly old or surprisingly new, bland or outrageous, sinister or humorous. It is a book one cannot help enjoying, but it should be kept out of reach of parents whose children are about to embark on their academic studies, and of administrators, legislators and all those whose skeptical opinion of campus life might be confirmed in its pages.

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