Book review

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Oinas, Felix J.,ed. *Heroic Epic and Saga: An Introduction to the World's Great Folk Epics,* Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1978. Pp. viii, 373.

THE COLLECTION contains fifteen essays which are introductory in nature and which deal with ancient, medieval, and modern epic and saga traditions of Europe, Asia, and Africa, with a preface by the editor, an introduction by Richard M. Dorson, and an index to the heroes and main characters. The areas and contributors are as follows: Homeric: W, F. Hansen; Mesopotamian: J. M. Renger; Sanskrit: B. A. van Nooten; Iranian: W. L. Hanaway, Jr.; *Beowulf:* A. Renoir, *Nibelungenlied:* S. L. Wailes; Icelandic: T. M. Anderson; Irish: S. Ó Coileáin; French: G. J. Brault; Spanish: M. E. Simmons; Russian: F. J. Oinas; Serbo-Croatian: M. P. Coote; Balto-Finnic; F. J. Oinas; Turkic: I. Basgöz; African: D. P. Biebuyck.

The careful preparation involved in producing the collection, which required several years on the part of authors, editor, and outside readers (p. vii), has resulted in concise but at the same time generally thorough treatment throughout. The articles for the most part deal with the following aspects: the age of the tradition and of the extant texts; the relation of the oral tradition to the latter; the performance of the modern phenomena and related questions such as song, dance, and musical instruments; the use of the heroic, history, legend, myth, shamanism, and romance; plot synopses of individual works or cycles as well as discussion of characters and themes; the microstructural and macrostructural aspects of style; and versification. The essays are followed by notes, an annotated bibliography including editions of the texts, translations in English as well as at times in French, German, and Russian, and studies.

The volume concentrates generically on epos or epic proper,[1] although the saga is also included, and epic in the broad sense also appears as is evident in the Serbo-Croatian essay, in which the Moslem epic proper of

'For an explanation of these terms, see the discussion of Schmaus's and Bowra's studies in my sketch of the problem of genre in folk narrative poetry and related forms, in *International Journal of Slavic Linguistics and Poetics,* 21, No. 4 (1975), 51 -69, esp. 51-55.

the Krajina is treated together with such macrostructurally distinct types as the songs of the Vuk collection and the *bugarštica.* Other folk or oral genres are also discussed in their relation to the main genres in question, for example, ballads (Spanish) and riddles (Mesopotamian).

The deliberate imitations of folksong such as the Estonian *Kalevipoeg* and the poems of Andrija Kačić Miošić are clearly distinguished from folksong in individual essays (Balto-Finnic and Serbo-Croatian, respectively). It might have been useful, however, to include such generically distinct types in the subtitle of the collection by adding to it a phrase such as "and Related Forms." This would also have allowed for a more precise general description of a stance such as that described in Gerard J. Brault's essay, in which the extant *chansons de geste* are regarded by most experts as learned reworkings of folk or oral material but not as folk or oral productions themselves. The genetic distinction between folk or oral types and other related forms has been discussed in some detail by the Yugoslav folklorists Maja Bošković-Stulli *(Umjetnost riječi,* 11 [1967], 257-260 and 17[1973], 149-184, 237-260, esp. 184 [including German summary]) and Divna *Zečević (Povijest hrvatske književnosti* [Zagreb, 1978], vol. 1) as well as in my "Oral Literature and 'Pučka Književnost': Toward a Generic Description of Medieval Spanish and Other Narrative Traditions" (forthcoming). The application of a notion such as this to the investigation of the extant texts may require us to view not only the Old French but also the other older material treated in this collection as types that are related to, but at the same time generically distinct from folk or oral productions and hence not folk or oral.

In his introduction Richard Dorson singles out the work of the Chadwicks and of Parry and Lord as revolutionizing epic studies in that they situated such investigation within an oral rather than a purely literary context. He stresses further the importance of oral tradition and its relation to the older extant texts by according it first place as a major question (pp. 1-2). In this light I would like to examine more closely two competent essays devoted to Romance epic, on which I have been asked to concentrate in this review.

Gerard Brault in his annotated reference to Joseph J. Duggan's 1973 study on the *Chanson de Roland* indicates that the latter considers Turoldus's poem as much a product of oral tradition as the other

chansons de geste (p. 215). This brief statement can, however, be interpreted as an attenuation of Duggan's position since, if the uninformed reader views the extant *chansons de geste* as not oral but as orally related as Brault does, then one might conclude that the extant texts in Duggan's view also are not oral. Duggan, however, is clearly an advocate of the Parry-Lord oral theory regarding the composition of the extant texts he discusses. This, of course, is a minor point in a stimulating and well documented essay.

Merle Simmons's introduction to the Spanish epic provides a thorough account of Ramon Menéndez Pidal's theory of neo-traditionalism. To fill out the theoretical framework somewhat, it would have been useful, however, to discuss to some extent within the text the neo-individualist position, which is indicated in the annotated bibliographical references to A. D. Deyermond and Colin Smith, and the oralist stance as well, of which no mention is made at all. Work on the latter in relation to the Spanish epic was available in Edmund de Chasca's book, *El arte juglaresco en el "Cantar de Mío Cid*"(Madrid, 1967, 1972) cited in the notes (pp. 232-33), in such earlier, somewhat unclear formulations as R. Menéndez Pidal's in *Cultura Neolatina,* 21 (1961), 10-19 and in the *Boletín de la Real Academia de Buenos Letras de Barcelona,* 31 (1965-1966), 195-225 and, more recently, in Joseph J. Duggan, *Forum for Modern Language Studies,* 10 (1974), 260-269 and Michael Magnotta, *Hispanic Review,* 43 (1975), 293-309.

Heroic Epic and Saga is, in brief, a highly useful and competent introductory survey, which the student of epic and saga will find indispensable not only as a scholarly reference work for traditions with which he or she is familiar but also as a guide to the enjoyment of literature in translation which up till now may not have been easily accessible.

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