

Review

Lovelace, Martin, Paul Smith and J.D.A. Widdowson, eds. *Folklore: An Emerging Discipline. Selected Essays of Herbert Halpert*. St. John's: Folklore and Language Publications, 2002.

This monograph is a collection of articles written by the late folklorist Herbert Halpert, former Chair of Folklore Studies at Memorial University in St. John's, Newfoundland (MUN) and developer of MUN's Folklore program, its Folklore Library and Archives, and the Folklore Studies Association of Canada. He was important as a folklore and folksong collector, as well as for his role in defining the discipline over the course of over 50 years. Halpert was a significant figure in the discipline of folklore, a significance that is evident not only in his essays, as contained in this monograph, but also in the variety of collections, reflections and the scholarly articles that he published.

After a number of service and academic positions throughout the United States, Halpert came to Canada in 1962 as an Associate Professor of English at Memorial, bringing parts of his collection of folksongs and folktales from parts of the U.S., his enthusiasm for collecting folk materials, and his passion for teaching students. His convictions about the value of student researchers and local folklore permeate his writings and show his practice of having students collect and contextualize folk materials from their own community. For example, drawing from an article published earlier in *Tennessee Folklore Society Bulletin*, Halpert states: "The folklore teacher's chief job is to encourage the student to draw on this [fieldwork] experience that to him is merely commonplace" (59). This perspective was very forward-looking. Similarly, his beliefs in the importance of transcribing verbatim and empowering the informant about the use of their names were also ahead of their time. Throughout his writings, it is clear that he truly appreciated and enjoyed his informants and believed in the importance of learning and establishing the social/cultural context of all materials that he collected.

Following an introduction by the editors and a retrospective written by Halpert himself in 1992, *Folklore: An Emerging Discipline* is arranged according to the themes "Issues and Approaches," "Performers," "Folksong," "Legend," and "Folktale." This sampling of topics, represented by articles from each decade since the 1930s showing Halpert's various writing styles, give the reader a sense of the issues with which he was confronted as a pioneer collector and educator. For example, in "Folklore: Breadth versus Depth," an address given at the American Folklore Society (AFS) in 1956, Halpert argues that both breadth and depth are important for folklore studies, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative research. Here he also highlights many of the other issues that remained central in his research and teaching, including the training and recognition of student collectors, the naming of all informants, and the importance of establishing the context of the research and collecting.

The recognition of informants is an issue that Halpert stresses in other writings as well, demonstrating his respectful approach to his research. He was critical about the less respectful approaches of his contemporaries: "I suspect that the names of informants were omitted, not to spare them, but because the collectors thought the names were unnecessary. To the gentleman collector, his lower class informants were unimportant: they were only the accidental preservers of a rich tradition that they could not appreciate. At least the collectors show little interest in the informant and why they had preserved the songs" (53). Addressing the audience at the AFS in

1956, this is a strong criticism, very much ahead of its time. Contemporary students of folklore would benefit from reading Halpert's comments as they show the respect and decency that is desired in all ethnographic fieldwork.

The variety of topics that Halpert addressed during his career is adequately reflected in this collection, highlighting his awareness of many challenges in folklore studies. In "Folklore and Obscenity: Definitions and Problems," he is able to take a specific problem in folklore, such as dealing with obscenities, and turn it into a valuable consideration of a larger issue (such as editing practices) while highlighting the practical concern of informant "comfort" and appropriateness to different audiences (e.g. children).

In addition to presenting writings by Halpert that address issues in collecting, analyzing and publishing folklore, the selection of his written work also demonstrates his writing styles and his concern for and interest in presenting verbatim transcriptions of folk tales. For example, in the entry "Oregon Smith, an Indiana Folk Hero," Halpert describes a local storyteller named Oregon Smith based on recollections and field collections by students and other informants in Bloomington, Indiana. Halpert also includes five short tales of Oregon Smith to demonstrate the type of lore for which he was renowned and to show the questionable identity of this local folk "hero." In this article, Halpert also demonstrates his awareness of the folklore "canon" by indicating that some of the stories that are attributed to Oregon Smith are variants of stories that have been found elsewhere.

Overall *Folklore* is a very interesting and thought-provoking collection of articles by a true folklore studies pioneer. The breadth of the articles, which span the course of Halpert's career, do justice to his development as a scholar and his influence on the discipline of folklore studies. One criticism of the monograph, however, is its title. To give a monograph published in 2002 the title *An Emerging Discipline* suggests that folklore is still merely emerging. Although it becomes clear to the reader why this subtitle is given to the book (reflecting the fact that much of Halpert's writings were forward-looking at the time), the title is deceiving; for the monograph is primarily a document highlighting Halpert's "emerging" ideas about folklore that paralleled the emergence of the discipline itself. This meaning is clarified by the editors themselves as they write: "[This publication] presents a selection of Herbert Halpert's essays which reveals how influential they were, or *should* have been, in shaping the emerging discipline of folklore studies in North America" (ix, original italics).

Despite the fact that some articles are somewhat outdated, they are interesting and informative for their historical value. The editors are careful to rationalize their practices, such as the updating of language and terminology originally used by Halpert. For the most part, Halpert's original texts are reproduced verbatim, despite changes in conventions about terminology pertaining to racial and social groups and the use of inclusive language. These are not weaknesses in the volume, as long as readers are aware of the historicity of each entry.

The anthology is useful for mentoring to junior folklorists, for presenting a style of scholarship that is both academic and personal, and for sampling Halpert's publications (analytical, theoretical and "catalogue"-style). Over the course of his career, Halpert addressed many of the issues that confront fieldworkers, and he remained careful in respecting his role as a researcher and the politics involved in the relationships he had with informants. Although numerous articles, books and addresses by Halpert have been published and are available, this collection of articles previously unpublished or published in less accessible sources is an

excellent sampling of his writings, ideas, and appendices of guides and bibliographies that will be useful to folklorists and folklore students alike.

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References

Rosenberg, Neil V. 1980. "Herbert Halpert: A Biographical Sketch," *Folklore Studies in Honour of Herbert Halpert: A Festschrift*. (Ed. Kenneth S. Goldstein and Neil V. Rosenberg). St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1-13.