

que leur composition et leur circulation ne leur ont pas conféré un caractère de "propriété collective", et leur exécution demeure l'apanage de personnes ou de groupes marginaux.

Acquérir cette nature impersonnelle peut être affaire de hasard; c'est aussi, souvent, affaire d'universalité des thèmes. Dans ce recueil, plusieurs des pièces composées sur des airs connus font référence à un événement trop spécifique ou trop ponctuel pour assurer leur postérité. Les contenus passent, mais les airs resteront et seront réutilisées encore et encore, dans des circonstances semblables aux différentes. Et c'est là que réside la magie du processus folklorique: au delà des contenus, des messages, des thèmes, des idéologies, ce processus demeure en permanence, malgré le renouvellement de la culture et de l'histoire.

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## REVIEW

TAFT, Michael • *Discovering Saskatchewan Folklore: Three Case Studies.*

Edmonton, NeWest Press, n.d. (1983). pp. 150. Available from: NeWest Publishers, Ltd., Suite 204, 8631 109th Street, Edmonton, AB T6G 1E8. Price not given.

The format of this recent work by Michael Taft is that of an extended scholarly paper, but its style clearly aims beyond academe to embrace the serious reader and intrigue the scanner. Taft opens with two brief chapters; the first develops his broad and lively working definition of folklore ("...customs, traditions, and heritage...right under our own noses...the kind of creativity shared by members of a group.") alongside a basic outline of folklore genres, their forms and functions. The second chapter tackles the problem of identifying Saskatchewan folklore by developing, through detailed examples from regional song tradition, the concept and process of the oikotype, aptly illustrating the breadth of universal sources and the depth of local and personal adaptation.

In the body of the book, Taft presents three aspects of tradition: a

story-telling session, a religious ritual, and a traditional craft, thus covering the analytic realms of the verbal, semi-verbal and non-verbal. He adapts his techniques of presentation (not always with the same success) to the task in hand. Thus the discussion of storytelling is presented in italicised text as tape-transcript excerpts separated by discussion of content, form, context, and process. The St. Laurent Pilgrimage is presented, through historical commentary, direct observation, site and event photographs, and transcripts of interviews with devotees and officiants. Lace-making in one family is presented through interview transcripts, photographs (only two, I am afraid, showing technique, and these are unhelpful) and a rich discussion illuminating the role of a craft in expediting the development and transmission of aesthetic principles as a harmonizing mechanism in family interaction. An unannounced bonus for the critical reader is the transcripts' demonstration of skillful interview and editing techniques.

Taft's conclusion reaffirms both the uniqueness and universality (old lively paradox!) of the traditions that concern himself and his informants, thereby rendering homage to the creativity of individuals and the human unity from which they draw their special strengths. Thus he illuminates the essential powers and purposes of folklore: an aspect of humanity that encounters external reality, creating what did not heretofore exist, transforming continually what always existed. No small part of Taft's success in his avoidance of scholarly jargon, and the ensuing focus upon lively content, perpetually obliging the reader to approach tradition directly and personally, as do the folk.

Some scholars will complain, with justification, at weaknesses in the presentation. The accepted level of scholarly apparatus does not at all appear: few cross-references are supplied, and tales and songs are presented as if the familiar type and song indexes did not exist. Again, following an obsolete approach, song texts are presented devoid of their tune texts, and in Chapter IV there is a sad lack of detailed texts and procedures of ritual performance. Photograph captions are minimal rather than descriptive, leaving too much to the imagination.

These are legitimate objections, but I hold them less significant than Taft's achievement. In spite of its universality, in spite of more than a century of brilliant scholarly labours, the elitist views of the past still obscure and discount the immediacy, extent, vitality, and essence of folklore, a human phenomenon that is the foundation of creative life in all societies. Within limits of his presentation, Taft deliberately obliges us once again to encounter tradition through living mouths, hands, minds and hearts.

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