

Susan STEINFIRST, *Folklore and Folklife: A Guide to English-Language Reference Sources* (New York, Garland Publishing Inc., 1992 (Garland Folklore Bibliographies, vol. 16; Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, vol. 1429), ISBN 0-8153-0068-9)

Michael Taft

Volume 15, numéro 2, 1993

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1083214ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1083214ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (imprimé)

1708-0401 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Taft, M. (1993). Compte rendu de [Susan STEINFIRST, *Folklore and Folklife: A Guide to English-Language Reference Sources* (New York, Garland Publishing Inc., 1992 (Garland Folklore Bibliographies, vol. 16; Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, vol. 1429), ISBN 0-8153-0068-9)]. *Ethnologies*, 15(2), 200–201. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1083214ar>

Susan STEINFIRST, *Folklore and Folklife: A Guide to English-Language Reference Sources* (New York, Garland Publishing Inc., 1992 (Garland Folklore Bibliographies, vol. 16; Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, vol. 1429), ISBN 0-8153-0068-9)

When this book landed on my desk for review, I began to sharpen my fangs. According to Alan Dundes's brief editor's preface, Susan Steinfirst is not a folklorist; rather, she is a librarian and professor of library science. Here's audacity! What effrontery! What chutzpah! Not even a folklorist, you say! I not only sharpened my fangs, I ruffled my feathers.

Yet I doubt that any professional folklorist could have done as good a job as has Steinfirst, considering the unwieldy and elusive parameters of our discipline. She has not only covered the field in a most comprehensive way, but she has done so with wit and humanity, as well as with an innate understanding of folklore which few outside our discipline have mastered. Her understanding is not based so much on a philosophical or theoretical grasp of folklore as on a learned and detailed reading of how folklorists themselves have defined their discipline; the folklore handbooks of Dorson, Brunvand, Dundes, Oring and Toelken have guided her towards the kind of understanding of folklore which is simple (but not simplistic) — which is firmly grounded, in the same way that an excellent undergraduate student's understanding, though sometimes naive, can often reflect the essentials of the study of folklore.

This essential understanding is what makes this bibliography so interesting. As I read through its many sections, I kept thinking, "Well, she's not going to get the nuance of this genre, or she's going to miss that important work", but in almost every case, Steinfirst pleasantly surprised me by addressing the issues which I would expect a non-folklorist either to overlook or bungle. Of course, she does miss some important works, and as I implied above, she is sometimes a bit naive in her approach (relying too often, for example, on some of Brunvand's outdated folklore definitions), but I will forebear to pick away at this work in a fit of bibliographer's one-up-personship (!). Except, perhaps, to point out that the only genre which Steinfirst entirely forgets is pranks and practical jokes.

This bibliography is not meant to be comprehensive; rather, it is a large compendium of reference works and important studies of which the researcher in folklore should be aware. The core of the bibliography is a fairly comprehensive listing of bibliographies, dictionaries, guides, catalogues, classifications, directories, handbooks and indexes pertaining to folklore. Secondarily, Steinfirst lists many annotated collections, defining studies, and basic, seminal works in folklore, although as she readily admits, this part of the bibliography is quite

selective. The result is a reference work which is pleasantly sloppy — tending to be fuzzy at its outer edges in terms of which non-reference works it cites, while being quite rigorous in its core material.

Essential to Steinfir's approach are good bibliographical essays which preface every section of the work. These essays outline important studies which supplement the actual list of bibliographical references. Thus, there are many more works mentioned than the 2,554 items numbered in the bibliography. In addition, Steinfir annotates each bibliographical citation as extensively as necessary, giving the reader a good idea of the essentials of each citation. Reading through the volumes, then (and this is an excellent browser's reference book), is like reading an extended essay on folklore scholarship.

In constructing her bibliography, Steinfir follows the genre classification of the Folklore Section of the MLA International Bibliography, although she wisely diverges from this system when it suits the specific demands of her work. Almost all of her citations are works written in English, but she adds works in other languages, when she thinks they are important in understanding a genre or sub-genre; she directs the reader, for the most part, to books, but will include even very small journal articles where appropriate; her cut-off date is 1987, but she includes works written as recently as 1991, when she has learned of them. This is why I see this bibliography as pleasantly sloppy — as humanistic, in fact.

Fangs blunted and feathers smoothed, I can do no more than recommend this book to every folklorist's reference collection. For both the folklore graduate student and the seasoned professional, this bibliography should be a first source before embarking upon any new folkloristic endeavour.

Michael TAFT
Saskatoon

Harriet NE, with Gloria L. CRONIN, illustrations by Terry REFFELL, *Tales of Molokai: The Voice of Harriet Ne*, (La'ie, Hawai'i, Institute for Polynesian Studies, 1992, 171 p., preface, introduction, map, glossary, and index, ISBN 0-939154-50-1)

The 44 stories in this collection are rich in literary, historical, and mythological content. They were gathered between the years of 1981 and 1988 by Gloria Cronin, folklore collector from Brigham Young University (Provo). The storyteller, Harriet Ayau Ne, was a Chinese-Hawaiian who managed to maintain traditions of her ethnic heritage as well as her Christian upbringing. In