

Culture



William COWAN, Michael K. FOSTER, and Konrad KOERNER,
New Perspectives in Language, Culture, and Personality:
Proceedings of the Edward Sapir Centenary Conference
(Ottawa, 1-3 October, 1984). 1986 John Benjamins Publishing
Company, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, 627 pages

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Volume 7, Number 2, 1987

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1078974ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1078974ar>

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Publisher(s)

Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA),
formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne
d'Ethnologie

ISSN

0229-009X (print)

2563-710X (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Ridington, R. (1987). Review of [William COWAN, Michael K. FOSTER, and
Konrad KOERNER, *New Perspectives in Language, Culture, and Personality:*
Proceedings of the Edward Sapir Centenary Conference (Ottawa, 1-3 October,
1984). 1986 John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam/Philadelphia,
627 pages]. *Culture*, 7(2), 73–74. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1078974ar>

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d'Anthropologie (CASCA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society /
Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie, 1987

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by Robin Ridington
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In 1984, scholars who knew Edward Sapir personally and those who know the world of his ideas met together in the Victoria Memorial Museum Building in Ottawa, where Sapir had taken charge of the Anthropological Division of the Geological Survey of Canada in 1910. The occasion was the hundredth anniversary of his birth. As Fred Eggan pointed out in his opening paper, Sapir "is one of those rare scholars whose influence and reputation continue to grow." The result of this conference is a comprehensive portrait of the man, his times and his legacy to anthropology and linguistics. The 22 papers in the collection give us a rich insight into the man and his times. They show clearly how Sapir's work continues to inform our own understandings of fundamental concepts having to do with culture and the individual.

The tone of this collection is set by Fred Eggan's elegant combination of life history and intellectual history in his opening "Overview of Edward Sapir's Career," which provides readers with a real sense of the politics and personalities of the anthropological "greats" who were Sapir's associates. The narrative theme continues on and off throughout the volume. Victor Golla, for instance, traces Sapir's relationship with Kroeber through their correspondence, as Sapir was developing his classification of North American languages based on "wider historical perspectives" than the previous Powell system. William Fenton even gives us a cameo portrait of Alexander Goldenwiser's fieldwork under Sapir's direction. He recalls that Simeon Gibson of Grand River "esteemed [Goldenwiser] the smartest white man next to Sapir from amongst all those who had studied among his people (230)." One chapter in the book is a set of reminiscences by Fenton, Frederica De Laguna, Edgar Siskin, Fred Eggan, Fang-Kuei Li, Mary Haas and Kenneth Pike. Siskin reports that Sapir gave an examination in a course in Culture and Personality consisting of two questions:

1. Discuss either Christianity, or the horse as a domesticated animal, from the standpoint of both:

- a) cultural historical processes.
 - b) shifting psychological connotations at various times and places.
2. Devise a simple situation illustrating various individuals in relation to each other and show how the observed facts must be understood from both a cultural and a psychological point of view. Discuss fairly fully with implications as to both an analysis of culture and an analysis of personality.

The narrative sections of the volume surely constitute the beginnings of an oral history of the Sapir legacy, giving insight into both his culture and the personality through which he brought it into being.

The conference papers also include modern critical approaches to classic problems that Sapir brought to our attention. Michael Silverstein's wide-ranging discussion of Sapir's "Synchronic Linguistic Description," for instance, argues that Sapir's work is actually a form of Boasian "cosmography" rooted in the particularity of time and place. Herbert Handler writes about Sapir's style, Ives Goddard about his comparative method, Michael Kraus about his Athabaskan [sic] linguistics and his troubled relationship with P.E. Goddard, Margaret Langdon revisits his Hoka-Siouan hypothesis, and Robert Allen explains how the theme of the unconscious evolved "as his thinking in anthropology and linguistics as a whole changed (463)."

Richard Preston (who chaired the conference programme committee) suggests that the classic paper, "Culture, Genuine and Spurious," initiates Sapir's "development of a psychological and moral definition of the concept of culture . . . as embodied in persons (533)." Sapir intended, Preston demonstrates by reference to an unpublished outline and to lecture notes taken by Sapir's students, to set out these ideas in a book to have been titled *The Psychology of Culture*. Although the book might have abandoned "the connotatively strong terms" like "genuine," "spurious," and "drift" Preston argues, "their underlying concepts are very much present: decay towards spurious culture, renaissance towards genuine culture, and the cyclic continuity of shifting emphases through history as drift, seeking poise and then falling away to seen new poise (549)."

The volume ends with Regna Darnell's paper on "The Emergence of Edward Sapir's Mature Thought," which brings the life history papers into perspective by her observation that "the whole of Edward Sapir best emerges from a biological perspective." She concludes that, "The concrete events and influences of Sapir's life show the integration of his thought over the span of his career (553)." During the decade 1915-1925, she points out, Sapir developed his own distinctive theoretical perspective on classic questions raised by Boas. Darnell

argues that the experiences of his personal life during this decade contributed to his emergence as a mature thinker and “produced an amalgam of models and methods from a range of sources [which] turned Edward Sapir from a competent Boasian anthropologist into an interdisciplinary theoretician (583).”

This Sapir volume provides invaluable documentation of Sapir’s culture, his personality and his interaction with other thinkers of his time. It is rich in previously unpublished material by Sapir himself, as well as original information about him by people who knew him as a person. The book is about Sapir but it is also about the many people who contributed to the “genuine” cultural understanding to which he dedicated his life. It is essential (and fascinating) reading for anyone with an interest in the history of ideas in anthropology and linguistics.

Emily Ivanoff BROWN, *Tales of Ticasuk*, Eskimo legends and stories, Fairbanks, University of Alaska Press, 1987, xxvi & 134 pages, illustrations.

par Louis-Jacques Dorais
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Ce livre est un recueil de contes et légendes inuit de la région d’Unalakleet, au fond du golfe de Norton (Norton Sound), sur la mer de Béring, à l’ouest de l’Alaska. L’auteure, Ticasuk de son nom inuit, est, nous apprend l’introduction, un personnage célèbre dans la région : infirmière, institutrice, elle décida, à cinquante ans, d’entreprendre des études universitaires. À sa mort, en 1982, à l’âge de 78 ans, elle détenait plusieurs diplômes (dont une maîtrise) en langue et culture inuit, et venait de recevoir un doctorat honorifique de l’Université d’Alaska. Elle laissait des centaines de pages de matériel folklorique et ethnographique, dont le présent ouvrage, publié à titre posthume, illustre une petite partie.

Il ne s’agit pas d’un travail anthropologique au sens strict. Le livre d’Emily Brown a donc peu d’intérêt pour les spécialistes. C’est, en fait, un recueil de contes et légendes destiné aux écoliers autochtones d’Alaska, ainsi qu’au grand public. Le fait qu’il soit rédigé en anglais en dit long sur l’état de la langue inuit (en voie de disparition) chez les jeunes de cette région d’Alaska.

Chacun des 24 courts récits que contient l’ouvrage est précédé d’une explication de l’auteure, qui précise un

certain nombre d’éléments plus difficilement compréhensibles aux enfants contemporains. Les récits sont suivis d’une courte morale, qui leur donne une signification pédagogique américano-chrétienne.

Tous ces contes et légendes ont un contenu purement local. Beaucoup sont étiologiques, relatant l’origine de tel village, telle coutume ou tel accident géographique de la région. Malgré tout cependant, on reconnaît certains thèmes communs à l’ensemble de l’aire inuit : la nature de l’aurore boréale (des esprits jouant au ballon avec une tête humaine) ; la vengeance de l’orphelin, qui détruit ceux qui étaient méchants envers lui ; la fille qui ne voulait pas se marier (et qui est avalée par la terre, plutôt que par la mer, comme dans les mythes de l’Arctique oriental).

Certaines expressions insérées dans les récits ont été laissées dans leur langue d’origine, le parler malimiut, un dialecte inuit qui a déplacé, au début du siècle, les parlers yupik jusqu’alors utilisés dans la région. Malheureusement, malgré certains efforts de la part de l’éditeur, l’orthographe n’est pas toujours standard.

Finalement, le livre offre peu de points intéressants, si ce n’est comme témoignage de la vitalité d’une culture qui, dans ce coin de l’Alaska, remonte à plusieurs millénaires. Le cap Denbigh en effet, haut lieu de la préhistoire esquimaude la plus ancienne, ne se trouve qu’à quelques kilomètres d’Unalakleet, le village natal d’Emily Brown.

Archimandrite Anatolii KAMENSKII, *Tlingit Indians of Alaska*, Translated, with an Introduction and Supplementary Material by Sergei Kan, Fairbanks, The University of Alaska Press, (original 1906), English Translation 1985. pp. 166. \$15.00 US.

by Margaret Seguin
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Sergei Kan has collected materials for this volume from published and unpublished writings by the Russian Orthodox missionary Fr. Anatolii Kamenskii, who worked in Sitka, Alaska from 1895 to 1898. Kan has much done more than simply translate an existing work : he has selected several of Kamenskii’s important short newspaper articles and reports, organized them into a coherent order, and then translated and annotated them in the light of scholarship on the Tlingit, on Orthodox missions, and on the original