

Magnus EINARSSON (collector, compiler, translator and editor), *Icelandic-Canadian. Oral Narratives* (Hull, Quebec, Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1991, [Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies, Mercury Series Paper No. 63] xii + 456 pp., ISBN 0-660-12921-3)

Robert B. Klymasz

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book is the repetition of material, although used in somewhat different contexts. The author also repeats needlessly discussions of the various conceptual frameworks and theories. The scholarly reader does not need this repetition and will be annoyed by it, and the non-scholarly reader may become so confused that he or she will give up. That would be a shame, because this book has a great deal to offer. Not too many of us appreciate the social and cultural history of the technology that has become such an essential feature of our everyday lives.

The photographs in the center of the book, all from the Bell Canada Telephone Historical Collection, are well chosen. It is a shame, however, that there are no pictures of harried working-class housewives spending money they can't afford to make calls to doctors for sick children on pay phones far from their homes, or of early female telephone operators repairing equipment on central switchboards. In the representation of company archival photographs, we are once again made aware of the gender and class biases in the recording of technological history. The author's captions provide some corrective, just as her analysis of archival materials provides fresh insight into the importance of class and gender in technological development.

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One of the founding trends in Euro-American Folktale scholarship is a marked philological concern with text in print. The transfer of verbal matter from a living oral/aural medium to a fixed visual format poses a problem ignored by some and addressed by others. Continuing efforts to reduce attendant distortions and preserve the original *in situ* presentation are reflected, for example, in Germain Lemieux's important volumes of French Canadian folktales and in

Magnus Einarsson's collection reviewed here. The latter's compulsion "to have in print a collection of electronically recorded, 'un-doctored', transcribed-as-heard selection" [1] of Icelandic-Canadian narrative material is carried over to include his English translations where the reader gets a sampling of the kind of inconsistencies that characterize human speech (such as, "I had to hop out on a rock, sank the pail and turned around, then I see..."[314]). Aside from demonstrating the nature of orality, this kind of "faithfulness to the original rendition" has had a minimal impact on folktale theory. And the question remains: Why submit everything to the agonizing scrutiny of such a detailed translation process? Would not one or two well-chosen examples suffice?

This collection of narratives recorded in the field in the mid-1960's is divided into two parts: "stories from the old country" (narrative nos. 1 to 51) and "the new world tradition" (narrative nos. 52 to 175). The largest category (item nos. 70 to 94) bears an ambiguous if not dubious heading, "odd expressions", but the most striking, overall feature is certainly the rich legacy of ghostlore with its assorted elves, fetches and doppelgangers. Supported by informant-statements like "I was superstitious too, you see, just like any other Icelander" [317], one is tempted to stereotype the entire folk culture accordingly. However, it is prudent to withhold further speculation pending the publication of two additional volumes promised by Einarsson in his "Introduction" (one volume containing nursery lore, songs and proverbs, and another containing occasional poetry).

In general, the volume is a serious work of scholarship, a meticulous compendium that includes a map, copious notes, tale and motif indexes, a not-to-be-missed introduction, and other appropriate, supporting apparatus. It places certain demands on the reader who should read these stories slowly and preferably aloud to help decode/enact the original moment of recording. As such, the work lives up to the avowed, scientific purpose of the Mercury Series. Folklorists acquainted with the drab covers of earlier issues in the Mercury Series will appreciate the striking cover showing a traditional Icelandic silver filigree belt from the collections of the Canadian Centre of Folk Culture Studies (unfortunately, the artifact is not identified). For Canadian folklore studies this volume enriches the vista in an important way and whets jaded appetites for more information on legendary figures like "Bible-Siggi" and Einarsson's star-narrators, Bjorn Bjamason and Albert Kristjansson. Comparativists here and abroad are sure to find this collection especially useful and future collectors of narrative material will want to emulate the work and methodologies represented in this landmark publication.

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