

American novel in which a Greek immigrant appears as a hero. Notable in this respect are also such popular works as Dashiell Hammett's novels *The Maltese Falcon* (1929) and *The Thin Man* (1933), Ellery Queen's *The Greek Coffin Mystery* (1932), James Cain's *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (1940). Greek characters appear as well in novels by Robert Penn Warren, Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and Jack Kerouac. Giannaris, whose erudition is admirable, convincingly demonstrates the importance of the Greek immigrant as an archetypal figure in American fiction. His study demonstrates that literary historians and critics must no longer ignore the role played by immigrant writers in the development of modern "national literatures," if indeed the term may still be employed without qualification.

Beck, Brenda E.F., Peter J. Claus, et al, eds.

*FOLKTALES OF INDIA*

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987. Pp. xxxi + 357

Reviewed by Uma Parameswaran

*Folktales of India* is the thirteenth in a series, *Folktales of the World*, issued by the University of Chicago Press under the general editorship of Richard M. Dorson. It consists of 99 tales collected by 18 folklorists from 14 different languages of India. Clearly, the work is designed to be a definitive text book. All the hallmarks and accessories of a scholarly text book are here—full documentation of sources, including the name and background of the folklorist who collected any given story and of the one who narrated it; a useful bibliography of source books and critical volumes on India's folklore; and indices that classify the stories under different systems. In addition to the general alphabetical index of words and titles, there are indices that categorize the tales according to motifs, tale types, and tale type motif in each story. The sequence within the volume is based on a classification of relationships (familial or in societal values) and each of the eight major sections contains between eight and twenty stories. Each section has an introduction to the role which that relationship plays in regional or Indic folklore and culture, and each story has an introduction that explains the significance of the action that takes place.

These classifications and introductions seem impressive in scholarship and sensitivity and are so for the most part. However, one cannot be as laudatory about the choice, narration, and editing of the folktales themselves. One does not get much reading pleasure from the collection.

A.K. Ramanujan, in the Foreword, speaks of the inappropriateness of embroidering old folktales with such Westernized concepts or translations as "honeymoon," "breakfast" or "Prince Lionheart." But translating a tale without idiomatic adjustments is not the answer either.

The prose style of most of the narratives is inadequate. Often there is earthiness and hyperbolic poetry in the original dialect version; there can be sophistication of narrative techniques and structural flow in modernized ver-

sions. These stories have regrettably missed out on both. The narratives are often bald and bland. It is unfortunate that the editors did not sort out the denotative and connotative components of diction. For example, though the editorial preface and endnotes mention "speech impediment" as the central pivot of "Seven Dumb Daughters," the tale itself uses only the word "dumb" instead of "stuttering" or "stammer" that would have led to an easier comprehension and greater impact of the humor.

In Tale No. 88, "The Sparrow and the Sweet Pudding" which is one of the most popular bedtime stories in my native region of TamilNadu, a sparrow finds a rice grain and contrives to get a handful more from an old woman whom it asks to cook the grains into payasam (pudding). It cleverly collects the firewood, pot, and sugar that she needs to make the payasam, and hops around her, asking every other second, "Granma, granma is the payasam ready?" and when at last it is ready, the sparrow scalds its tongue in its haste to taste it, then angrily throws the pot into a well and later drinks up the water in the well on finding out it is now sweet. Just about everyone who has grown up with that story would say that the refrain, so catchy in diction, so familiar in a child's daily interaction with parents and grandparents, is the core of the tale, and that the moralistic aspect lies in its implicit comment on impatience. But comes the folklorist and categorizes the sparrow as a trickster "who causes others to suffer undeservedly" and the tale itself as a "straightforward sequence of ludicrous events" or a story on "Hindu notions of purity and pollution." I find both interpretations to be gouging out the very vitals of this tale and leaving a pseudo archetypal cultural skeleton in place of a full-bodied scene of a child's world that circles around an obliging (and reprimanding) parent figure and where disaster and suffering are not associated with the magic of old woman and hut and cow and (the additional options are endless) all floating in the flood caused by the cow pulling out the hay with which the gluttonous sparrow had corked its rear end.

In the version included there is no grandmother and no refrain; the diction is not only prosy (as it is in most of the tales), but occasionally quite lamentable. To say the sparrow stuffed hay into "its rear end" or "you know where" may be colloquialism or euphemism, but it is certainly preferable to "insert it into his anus."

To be certain, my version is different from this collector's and differences are natural to folktales. But let not the reader assume that the book's version is somehow more "authentic" even if not more literary or more enjoyable. The collector seems to be of the same background and age as myself, and the narrator, too, is as urban and modern as both of us.

Those who have grown up with any of the other 98 stories just might have the same reaction to this volume as I have, namely, all the scholarly appurtenances seem to be in place, but if this is what folklorists are up to, let us go back to the equally unvarnished and unliterary but editorially unmangled translations of such collectors as A.S.P. Ayyar and Natesa Sastri. It would be ideal if magic and poetry could be kept in and stereotyping and folkloristic interpretations kept out, but then it would not be considered a text book for the halls of higher learning but a reader for children.