

BOOK REVIEWS

GENERAL

DUNDES, ALAN and CARL R. PAGTER. *Never Try to Teach a Pig to Sing: Still More Urban Folklore from the Paperwork Empire*. Humor in Life and Letters Series. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991. 433 pages. 231 illustrations. Cloth US\$39.95; ISBN 0-8143-2357-X. Paper US \$15.95; ISBN 0-8143-2358-8.

Recently in a Japanese university faculty building, next to the elevator and above the ashtray stand, was a hand-colored photocopy enlargement of a Gary Larson "Far Side" cartoon showing several dinosaurs sneaking a cigarette break. The caption, "The real reason why dinosaurs became extinct," was translated into Japanese beneath the original English caption. A hand-drawn garland of flowers formed the border. Later a more macabre margin of skulls and crossbones replaced the flowers. Not satisfied with this first-floor display, the perpetrator left a simple enlarged copy of the cartoon in each department's common room, no doubt with the hope that it would be posted either as was or with some additional flourishes.

The above incident came to mind as I read *Never Try to Teach a Pig to Sing*, a collection of office-produced paper messages accompanied by brief commentaries. Alan Dundes and Carl R. Pagter have a good point when they say that there is a need to collect these ephemeral items (431). Although there are few professional doubts about the importance of preserving the stories and customs of people living in areas that are presently undergoing change, some may wonder whether the commonplace items of urban office culture are worthy of notice. Speaking in favor of collecting these items is the fact that, as the population of many countries becomes more urbanized, such "office copier folklore" (17) serves as an indicator of people's interests and opinions. The present book is the third collection by Dundes and Pagter, who mention the existence of similar collections in Denmark, England, Germany, and Switzerland.

The book primarily concerns American society, but Asian folklore specialists may want to see how this office-copier lens on culture applies to their own work. The examples in *Never Try to Teach a Pig to Sing* reflect the social concerns of contemporary America, serious concerns that, as the authors point out, are hidden behind humor (432). Although these items could be subjected to further analysis, as Dundes and Pagter themselves suggest (433), the authors' commentaries on the individual items adequately elucidate the physical situation, the problems involved, and the language used. Through the humor of the cartoons, one learns much about American society and language, particularly in the areas of office bureaucracy, race relations, male and female dynamics (both ordinary and those heightened by the feminist movement), sexuality, old age, and personal development.

Never Try to Teach a Pig to Sing should prove just as valuable to readers of

American literature as to those interested in folklore and American studies. In reading current American fiction one often comes across language and situations that go unexplained since everyone in the culture understands them. *Never Try to Teach a Pig to Sing* provides the necessary background for many of these situations and translates the slang into understandable English. I recommend the book for its humor, for its picture of American culture, and for the inducement it may give to Asian folklore specialists to compile a similar collection for Japan, China, Korea, and elsewhere in Asia.

P.S. If you have no intention of reading this book, then it might be said that in this review I have "tried to teach a pig to sing," i.e., wasted time on a useless project. The complete phrase in the cartoon is: "Never try to teach a pig to sing, it wastes your time and it annoys the pig" (71).

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HEINZE, RUTH-INGE, with others. *Shamans in the 20th Century*. Frontiers of Consciousness Series, general editor Stanley Krippner. New York: Irvington Publishers, Inc., 1991. xx + 101 pages. Photographs, bibliography, index. Paper US\$14.95; ISBN 0-8290-2459-X.

Ruth-Inge Heinze, a scholar who has studied shamanism throughout the world for the past five decades, directs this book to the reader who wishes to know what shamanism is today. She deals not only with tribal shamans whose activities remain embedded in more or less intact traditions, but also with urban shamans who lack any direct connections of this type. She also points out how shamans continue to play a vital role in answering the specific needs of their community, adding that the twentieth-century "community" is not necessarily limited to a group of people living together in the same place. People tend to approach those shamans whom they believe best answer their personal needs. Heinze substantiates her claims in part 2 of the book by presenting reports from twelve shamans from various parts of the world.

Heinze criticizes Mircea ELIADE's approach to the study of shamanism (1964) on several grounds, saying that he was primarily a philosopher and historian of religion who did no actual fieldwork on shamanism, relying instead on secondary sources from various parts of the world compiled with the help of his graduate students. She also takes him to task for his lack of belief in "spirits" (144).

Heinze presents three criteria for judging whether an individual may be considered a true shaman. According to her definition, a shaman is one who

- 1) can access alternate states of consciousness at will (this is an important criterion because medicine men and women, for example, do not enter trance);
- 2) fulfills needs in his or her community that are not otherwise met (through, for example, the use of holistic approaches, in contrast to physicians and psychologists who are constrained by the rules of their respective disciplines);
- 3) is, in fact, a mediator between the sacred and profane (i.e., who uses symbols and rituals to encode the otherwise ineffable messages from the spiritual world). (13)

She compares these with the three criteria established by Eliade, who says that shamans

- 1) are masters of fire;