

## BOOK REVIEWS

### GENERAL

*Oral Tradition*,<sup>1</sup> Volume 1, Number 1, January 1986. John Miles Foley, editor. Columbus, OH 43214: Slavica Publishers, P.O. Box 14388.

When I read through the inaugural issue of *Oral Tradition*, various sorts of impressions and feelings, affirmative, sympathetic or negative, unsympathetic, passed through my mind.

Besides the usual introductory parts (introduction, acknowledgment and editorial board), this inaugural issue contains not only generally informative papers such as R. Culley, 'Oral Tradition and Biblical Studies' and R. Beaton's 'Oral Tradition of Modern Greece: a Survey,' but also a state of the art essay: 'Performed Being: Word Art as a Human Inheritance' by F. Turner. I found all the papers interesting and productive. At the same time I cannot ignore the impression that the general orientation of the volume as well as of the content of the articles is Indo-European excluding Asia, especially the Far East. Particularly I as a Japanese am puzzled by such a bias.

Of course I understand that difficulties exist, but I ask is it desirable for a journal of oral tradition to exclude areas including Japan where hundreds of papers on oral tradition are published every year?

Half of the responsibility falls on the shoulders of Oriental (mainly Japanese) scholars who seldom write in English, but the other half should be borne by Occidental scholarship. When we aim at a consummate and complete study of oral tradition, participation of Oriental scholars and specialists in Asian folklore is indispensable. We are not without a clue to solve this problem. In 1967 Richard M. Dorson organized the Society for Asian Folklore which ended in failure. Later the Asian Folklore Studies Group was established in Berkeley, now integrated into Independent Scholars of Asia. And we have *Asian Folklore Studies* in Nagoya, Japan. Probably we can search for a solution by combining these forces more effectively.

To return to the issue, I found Frederick Turner's "Performed Being: Word art as a Human Inheritance" quite stimulating. It raised many questions, however. Is the physio-chemical mechanism of the trance state already a self-evident phenomenon to the scientists of the world? Is it scientifically established that *all* human poetry possesses regular lines that take roughly three seconds to recite? We are very much interested, but most of us are insufficiently grounded in such cerebral physiological studies. So I will have to wait and see to give a comment, affirmative or negative, on Turner's argument.

Concerned with the problem of communication between cultures, I was especially drawn to the papers of Raffel and Havelock. Burton Raffel's 'The Manner of Boyan: Translating Oral Literature' is generally persuasive. He says that in translating oral or oral-connected poems we have to be very careful to pay full attention to genre and structure. So in order to translate a classic Indonesian *pantun*, he uses

a metrical pattern of English balladry to evoke more or less the same genre-feeling in the host language.

I quite agree with Raffel that this ballad-like form could be the nearest to the original in its feeling. Nevertheless, oral or not, in translating from non-Indo-European languages we are confronted with a more fundamental semantic difficulty which, I believe, seldom occurs when dealing only with Indo-European languages.

In Japan we have a great number of folksongs which are sung with *hayashi* (cries of response from the audience) interposed at each segment, such as 'Dokkoi-sho,' 'Yoi-sho' and 'Kora-sho.' The word *hayashi* is the noun form of the transitive verb *hayasu* (grow). Originally such cries were shouted at a rice planting festival. Accompanied by musical instruments such as drums, small cymbals and bamboo flutes they were believed to support the growth of the rice seedlings.

What do these cries mean? The suffix, *-sho* carries no particular meaning, so all we have to do is to seek for the meanings of 'Dokkoi,' 'Yoi' and 'Kora.' 'Dokkoi' originally means 'where to?' 'Yoi' and 'Kora' are exclamations used to call someone back who is leaving. Most probably these were magical injunctions to hold back a grain spirit from leaving the community and let it help the rice seedlings to grow. For similar reasons these same cries are used very often by Japanese when they are going to lift something heavy in order to collect sufficient power. They are deeply rooted in ancient beliefs and far from being meaningless.

The moment I first glimpsed at Raffel's Indonesian *pantun*, I had an impression that the song expresses the same kind of feeling. Is not the 'you' being accosted in the *pantun* a grain spirit invited by rice growing people? This may not be the case but I am sure that the Indonesian song cannot be without meaning. Under the guise of meaninglessness it wants to communicate something ancient. However, this is lost unless we use a semantic approach to translate an oral original, or from a non-Indo-European to an Indo-European language.

One more essay which drew my special attention is Eric Havelock's 'The Alphabetic Mind: A Gift of Greece to the Modern World.' His demarcation between a conceptual and a non-conceptual language is suggestive. For Havelock, the latter is, for instance, the language of the Homeric epics and the former is that of Aristotle. He asserts that the language of the Homeric epic served as an instrument to preserve oral speech through memorization while Aristotelean language was and still is a literate instrument designed primarily for readers. Havelock's use of the terms 'concept' or 'abstraction' is a bit unique. If we were to transpose Homeric language into simple prose, he says, the result would be a text where directness is replaced by abstraction. He comes to the conclusion that there are two types of cultures. One represented by abstract concepts, he calls 'alphabetic culture.' This is Western and European culture. The opposite type, the 'counter-culture,' he calls 'non-alphabetic.' Alphabetic communication permits conceptual analysis and so creates the power to reason about or control what happens. Without it no modern life-style, no physical science and no industrial revolution could exist. He admits the greater directness of the oral (non-alphabetic) medium and its historical importance. Nevertheless, he is of the opinion that it is a mistake to romanticize it as though it were the language of a Lost Eden.

In a recent book (Araki 1986) I have contrasted English as a logical and concept-oriented language with Japanese which, I assert, is sensuous and emotion-oriented. According to Havelock's binary division Japanese, I am sure, can be ranked as non-alphabetic. I, therefore, quite agree with Havelock, but I insist that, alphabetic or non-alphabetic, each type of culture has its respective merits and demerits. I believe

that Japan's non-alphabetic language could have been the base for a different type of civilization, less mechanized, more humane and more cooperative with nature if we could have been completely isolated from the West.

A relevant point here is the use of onomatopoeia which as a matter of fact is very frequent in Japanese. In Western languages, e.g., the way someone walks is highly conceptualized. A duck 'waddles,' an old man 'toddles,' and so on.

Just to name a few of the unbelievable number of Japanese onomatopoeic expressions equivalent to 'waddle,' we find the following: *yochi yochi, yota yota, yotchi yotchi, yotari yotari, etchira otchira, yokkora yokkora, hyoko hyoko* and so on. They all express the way of duck-like walking and yet each one differs slightly and delicately from the others. More of them can easily be concocted and be understandable to anyone. With onomatopoeic expressions Japanese perceive the given world in very delicately differentiated ways. When such onomatopoeias have to be conceptualized in an instant, e.g., when rendering Japanese into English this linguistic characteristic makes itself felt strongly.

Another linguistic characteristic is the appeal to the senses which together with onomatopoeia gives rise to a special poetic form, the *Haiku*.

<i>Daibutsu no</i>	The great Buddha,
<i>Utsura Utsura to</i>	Dozing, dozing
<i>Haruhi kana</i>	All the spring day

Shiki

According to R. H. Blyth who translated this *haiku*, the ponderous figure, impassive and with almost shut eyes, seems as if half asleep, only half alive. It thus expresses in its own way something of a calm day of spring, its length and quietness, its immobility and benignancy. Two images, 'Daibutsu' (the Great Buddha) and *haruki* (spring day), and the onomatopoeia *utsura utsura* expressing the state of 'half asleep' is all that is needed to formulate these sensations. There is no use for conceptual or abstract expressions.

I believe that these linguistic characteristics are closely related to the prevalence of oral tradition in Japan. More than a thousand collections of folktales have been published since the end of World War II. Excellent informants are being reported who sometimes have told hundreds of stories. Still today, many story-tellers equal to these are being found. I think this phenomenon is quite exceptional in the world and, I am sure, it is not unrelated to the non-alphabetic character of the Japanese language. Therefore, I cannot agree with Havelock's contention that non-alphabetic language only played a historical role contributing only to the great directness of the oral medium.

Augustin Berque argues that the characteristics of a language are a matter of choice of its users and not a question of degree in primitiveness (Berque 1982: 36-37). I quite agree with this and think that a non-alphabetic language is, far from being a mere historical relic, still plays an important role in showing people with an alphabetic language a different angle or phase of the Universe.

Lastly I would like to make a practical proposal. Since non-alphabetic languages are not largely conceptualized and abstract, it is a very hard task for non-alphabetic peoples to verbalize abstract conceptions. That leads to their inadequacy in using alphabetic languages. The opposite, namely translation from an alphabetic into a non-alphabetic language is not so difficult, because conceptualization is already done. All which has to be done is to transfer such conceptualizations into the other language's concepts which are provided but not largely used in perceiving the given world.

In this scholarly world where English is used as a sort of international language,

non-alphabetic scholars are confronted with difficult situations. They have to learn English which for them is much more difficult to master than it is for the Indo-European peoples.

So, I ask all English speaking scholars to use a kind of English understandable to non-alphabetic people. Not the English of 'Time' or 'Newsweek,' but the English of the 'Reader's Digest.' With the natural sciences the situation is less severe than in the social sciences. In fact, most Japanese scholars find it nearly impossible to participate in the study of folklore on an international level because of the language difficulty. If 'Oral Tradition' seeks to be an international journal by attempting to reach non-alphabetic as well as alphabetic societies, I am sure it will become an epoch-making periodical.

NOTE:

1. For more details concerning the submission of contributions and the journal's subscription policy please refer to the communications section in this issue, page 287.

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BABCOCK, BARBARA A., GUY and DORIS MONTHAN. *The Pueblo Storyteller. Development of a Figurative Ceramic Tradition*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1986. Xix+201 pages. Map, figures, color plates, glossary, bibliography and index. Cloth US\$40.00; ISBN 0-8165-0870-4.

*The Pueblo Storyteller* displays ceramic figures of storytellers (the grandmother, grandfather, aunts, and uncles of the potters) which are used in retelling the tales of the storytellers they portray. Retold stories and their reconfigured tellers thus become models for refashioned figures, molded—open-mouthed—in clay, and fired in the imagination of each new generation. In their turn, the new images spark new stories, including this book. The process thickens with refractions and reflections into which the reader is privileged to peer.

Helen Cordero of Cochiti Pueblo, New Mexico began her art in her late forties, after raising six children. In 1964 Helen shaped the first ceramic Storyteller doll, a portrait of her grandfather, Santiago Quintana, who was not only a teller of tales to his local Pueblo community but an authoritative raconteur of the Pueblo life-story to such notable ethnographers as Ruth Benedict, Edward S. Curtis, Charles F. Saunders, Frederick Starr, and Adolph Bandelier. To produce the portrait, Cordero altered the traditional "Singing Mother" figure of Pueblo pottery by making the primary figure