

Folklore: An Emerging Discipline — Selected Essays of Herbert Halpert. By Martin Lovelace, Paul Smith and J. D. A. Widdowson, eds. (St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Publications, 2002. Pp. **xxi + 398**, ISBN 0-88901-335-7)

Cory W. Thorne

Volume 26, numéro 1, 2004

Littérature
Literacy

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/013348ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/013348ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (imprimé)

1708-0401 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Thorne, C. W. (2004). Compte rendu de [*Folklore: An Emerging Discipline — Selected Essays of Herbert Halpert.* By Martin Lovelace, Paul Smith and J. D. A. Widdowson, eds. (St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Publications, 2002. Pp. xxi + 398, ISBN 0-88901-335-7)]. *Ethnologies*, 26(1), 235–238. <https://doi.org/10.7202/013348ar>

REVIEWS / COMPTES-RENDUS

Folklore: An Emerging Discipline — Selected Essays of Herbert Halpert.

By Martin Lovelace, Paul Smith and J. D. A. Widdowson, eds. (St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Publications, 2002. Pp. xxi + 398, ISBN 0-88901-335-7)

Lovelace, Smith, and Widdowson gathered these essays with two goals: 1) to make available a variety of Halpert essays that were previously difficult to acquire; and 2) to exhibit some of Halpert's most important contributions to folkloristics, especially in folksong and narrative scholarship. Together, they demonstrate Halpert's vast influence on the discipline, both for presenting his extensive fieldwork and fieldwork methodology, and for his attention to the emerging issues of context and genre classification. For an autobiographical introduction on his entry into folklore, one can begin with the first essay, "Coming into Folklore More Than Fifty Years Ago" (1992). For further bibliographic details, however, one should turn to Neil Rosenberg's biographical sketch of Halpert in *Folklore Studies in Honour of Herbert Halpert: A Festschrift* (1980). *Folklore: An Emerging Discipline* is divided into six sections: *Issues and Approaches*, *Performers*, *Folksong*, *Cante Fable*, *Legend*, and *Folktale*.

For an overview of Halpert's methodology and goals, one can focus primarily on the *Issues and Approaches* section. These four essays present not only the theoretical and practical issues of folkloristics during Halpert's career, but they also foreshadow questions and concerns that continue to shape the field today. "Aggressive Humor on the East Branch" (1946) is a presentation of early fieldwork issues while working with raftsmen and lumbermen in the Catskills, along the Delaware river. In "American Regional Folklore" (1947), Halpert critiques and calls for increased research, publishing, and definition on regionally based traditions. "Folklore: Breadth Versus Depth" (1958) is about his concern with the lack of contextual detail in many folklore collections. In

“Folklore and Obscenity: Definitions and Problems” (1962), he tackles the question of defining obscenity, and likewise how to collect and publish it. These four essays demonstrate the ongoing concern with fieldwork methodology, genre definition and taxonomy, regional identity, and the role of publishing in supporting the structure and goals of our discipline. Halpert’s reputation as a bibliophile is firmly entrenched here. Likewise, his well-known calls for increased fieldwork, especially via students in their own communities, are sprinkled throughout.

The section titled *Performers* contains three essays on storytellers and folk heroes. Here we are given data and analysis using methodologies introduced in the previous section. “Indiana Storyteller” (1942), a study of storytelling through a single artist, contains a transcription of an interview between Halpert and storyteller Jim Pennington, and several collected stories along with motive and bibliographic references. The reader can gauge Halpert’s rapport with the artist, his ways of soliciting information, and his ability to trace the origins of these stories. “Oregon Smith, An Indiana Folk Hero” (1942) is about a man whom Halpert first encountered through a student’s fieldwork. He subsequently met Smith, and learned about his tall tales of travel between Indiana and Oregon. “John Darling, A New York Munchausen” (1944) is about a folk hero in the western part of the Catskills who started a cycle of stories of himself as hero, drawing on the style of Munchausen and on tales of foreign origin. All three essays demonstrate Halpert’s early emphasis on contextual details.

Under *Folksong*, we can see Halpert’s role in two parts of a disciplinary paradigm shift: the discovery of / definition of “American” folksong as an entity outside of Anglo-European derived variants, and the interest in musicological, as well as social and text-based analysis of folksong. In “Federal Theatre and Folksong” (1938), Halpert discusses the role of the Federal Theater National Service Bureau in collecting and promoting American-based song. He gives special attention to “Negro” songs, and makes special note of George Herzog’s musicological contributions to this project. “Truth in Folk Songs. Some Observations on the Folk-Singer’s Attitude” (1939) is a study of how singers interpret their songs, especially in understanding and interpreting variants of English ballads in the United States. The issue of interpretation and field work is raised with a quote from Phillips Barry: “The way a certain folk singer sings a certain song is, for him, the right way” (116). Halpert argues that folklorists can learn more about song by asking singers about

truth and meaning in their songs — another demonstration of his emerging interest in context. He continues on to emphasize the voice of performers through the transcribed interviews in “The Folksinger Speaks” (1944), where he also notes the importance of collecting personal stories and biographical information to further elaborate on the relation between singers and their songs. In “Vitality of Tradition and Local Songs” (1951), Halpert discusses the classification of local/indigenous songs and challenges the biases of our discipline toward Anglo-European music.

Cante Fable is introduced with an essay, “The *Cante Fable* In Decay” (1941; 1962), on the spread and decline of this genre and the weaknesses of our collectors in soliciting or recognizing this genre, its variants, and/or degenerations. Halpert revised this article in 1962 — commenting on developments of this scholarship and changes in his own positions. In “The *Cante Fable* In New Jersey” (1942), he again draws on George Herzog for musical transcription, and provides notes on how text was transcribed. It is a foreshadowing of his incredibly detailed transcriptions in *Folktales of Newfoundland* (1996), “The Humorous Grace *Cante Fable*” (1974) and “More on the Humorous Grace *Cante Fable*” (1976) are exhibitions of tales with rhymes that may be degenerate forms of *cante fable*. They include variations of several types of unusual graces which comment on either the monotony of certain food items, or which act as passive aggressive attacks on unwanted dinner guests.

The first two essays under the *Legend* section are collections of groups of variants. “The Devil and the Fiddle” (1943) is a group of stories where musicians, primarily fiddlers and flutists, develop their musical skills through the aid of the devil, elves, or fairies. “Legends of the Cursed Child” (1958) is a collection, researched in association with Violetta Halpert, of stories where the sins of the parents are placed on the children. For example, a rich woman mocks a poor crippled man, and subsequently gives birth to a similarly crippled child. Halpert reasserts our discipline’s need for better attention to definitions in “Definition and Variation in Folk Legend” (1971). He also expresses dissatisfaction with the motif-index of folk literature (while giving examples of motifs that he has collected which are missing from the index), and discusses the problem of being coerced into publishing only the “best” variants of legends. Halpert focuses on the social role of legends in “Supernatural Sanctions and the Legend” (1980), while drawing heavily on Seán Ó Súilleabháin’s *Handbook of Irish Folklore* and the “traditional code of right and wrong.”

The *Folktale* section presents Halpert's interest in tall tales and his resilient dedication to fieldwork in a variety of settings. It contains essays on tall tales that he collected in Indiana and in Ohio: "Liars' Club Tales" (1943) and "Folktales and Jests from Delaware, Ohio" (1948). These are intermixed with three essays on material that he collected while in the army and stationed in Alaska and Western Canada: "Tall Tales and Other Yarns from Calgary, Alberta" (1945), "The Cut-Off Head Frozen On: Some International Versions of a Tall Tale" (1979; 1985), and "Mosquitoes on the Runway" (1990). "The Cut-Off Head" is of particular interest because Halpert presents several variants of a motif that was not included in Thompson's type index. "Mosquitoes on the Runway" introduces us to an aspect of occupational folklore: airforce pilots speak of the remarkable similarities of mosquitoes in the north to P-39 Bell Aircobra one-man fighter planes. This is followed by "A Bibliographic Essay on the Folktale in English" (1982).

This collection ends with a bibliography of Halpert's works and his "Genre Classification for Individual Student Collections," a list which many in our discipline have encountered in one form or another through our folklore training. In addition to achieving their goals of publishing hard to find articles and of exhibiting some of Halpert's most influential essays, the editors have created a record of institutional history. This collection demonstrates many of the issues and changes in our discipline over the past sixty years. It presents a definition of folklore by example of what we have achieved, and thus should sit next to other foundational texts on folklore.

Cory W. Thorne
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, PA

Working Out in Japan: Shaping the Female Body in Tokyo Fitness Clubs.

By Laura Spielvogel. (Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2003. Pp. xii + 250, ISBN 0-8223-3049-0)

Adapted from Spielvogel's doctoral dissertation, *Working Out in Japan* is based on thirteen months of fieldwork conducted in two Tokyo health clubs in 1995. Spielvogel asserts, "the dual focus of this book... is the tension between the local and the ideological or, in this case, the grounded practices of the club and the larger constructions of beauty, health and leisure" (6). Indeed, throughout the text, the author manages