

## REVIEWS

*The Singer of Tales*. By Albert B. Lord. Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature, vol. 24. 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000. Pp. xxxvii + 307, CD including audio and video recordings, introduction by Stephen Mitchell and Gregory Nagy)

In 1949 Albert Bates Lord defended a dissertation entitled “The Singer of Tales” before the Department of Comparative Literature at Harvard University. The title came from the few surviving pages of a study planned by his mentor Milman Parry before the latter’s untimely death in 1935, but the result was a significant extension of that blueprint. Although it would still be eleven years before the thesis saw print in 1960, it sparked the introduction of the so-called “Oral Theory” of Parry and steered Lord to Old English poetry via a 1953 article entitled “The Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry” authored by one of Lord’s dissertation advisors, Francis P. Magoun, Jr.

This is but one example (as far as I know the earliest) of the prodigious influence exerted on world literature studies by *The Singer of Tales*, which by any measure must be recognized as one of the twentieth century’s most enduring works of research and scholarship in the humanities. The initiative began with Parry’s groundbreaking analyses of the texts of Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and with his deduction that their repetitive, formulaic phraseology was symptomatic of their traditional heritage and their transmission by a long series of bards over many centuries. His hypothesis of traditional heritage soon evolved into a double hypothesis of tradition linked with oral performance, as Parry began to re-create what he believed to be not just the character but the actual presentational medium of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

Not content with these bold but textually derived hypotheses, Parry then sought to prove them by analogy in the living laboratory of South Slavic oral epic, to which his own mentor Antoine Meillet and the Slavic philologist Matija Murko had alerted him. The next step entailed a fieldwork project in the former Yugoslavia, undertaken with the assistance of Lord and Nikola Vujnovic in the mid-1930’s, during which they recorded acoustically and by dictation dozens of mostly preliterate *guslari* (bards) who sang epics that often reached thousands of lines in length. Parry and Lord returned from the former Yugoslavia in 1935 with a “half-ton of epic” on large aluminum disks and in notebooks, an invaluable and unmatched cache of oral epic that became the basis of the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature (MPCOL) at Harvard as well as the *prima materia* for the comparative development of the Oral Theory. Lord was to return to the field in the 1950’s and 1960’s to augment that already rich archive of living oral epic. Before the end of the century, Lord’s masterwork, *Singer*, was to stimulate activity in more than 150 separate language areas as well as across a wide spectrum of disciplines – anthropology, folklore, history, linguistics, literary studies, music, philosophy, psychology, and religious studies, to name only the most prominent ones.

Now *Singer* enters the new millennium in a modernized edition complete with a superb, focused introduction by Stephen Mitchell and Gregory Nagy and an audio-video CD that opens a window to the excitement and immediacy of Lord’s comparative method. The new edition promises to broaden and deepen

the already remarkable interdisciplinary effect of this book among scholars, as well as to make its contents even more intriguing for both undergraduate and graduate students. I do not make this assessment of its pedagogical value lightly. One of the major contributions of *Singer* has been its long reign as a mainstay of folklore, literature, and numerous other courses across the United States and abroad. A national survey of college and university offerings on oral tradition, completed in 1997, established its centrality in widely divergent curricula (see Lynn C. Lewis and Lori Peterson, "The National Curriculum and the Teaching of Oral Traditions" and "Course Descriptions and Syllabi," in *Teaching Oral Traditions*, ed. John Miles Foley [New York: Modern Language Association, 1998], pp. 403-22, 445-64). Now scholars, instructors, and students alike can actually listen to the *guslari* sing the selections of South Slavic epic quoted in *Singer*, and even watch Avdo Medjedovic, the most Homeric of *guslari*, perform. It should be emphasized that the CD included with the new edition will play on any audio CD device, and the video sections are similarly easy to access (Windows/PC or PowerMac, in either case with 32 MB RAM and 600 x 480 video resolution). The overall presentation is both creative and genuinely thoughtful.

The Introduction to the Second Edition by Mitchell and Nagy is likewise a *tour de force* that will enormously benefit the many different sectors of *Singer's* audience, again no mean feat. The editors succinctly frame the core issues from the initial discoveries onward, with particular attention to the discussion that has ensued since Lord's first edition of 1960. Especially helpful in understanding the genesis and early stages of the Oral Theory are their quotations from heretofore unpublished documents, such as Parry's project reports on the fieldwork (pages ix-x, x-xi, xxii) and Lord's typewritten manuscript preserved in the MPCOL (xii-xiii). They cite a judicious sample of the voluminous related research and scholarship on dozens of traditions, work that builds on *Singer* and the Oral Theory. Indeed, it is perhaps Lord's most important and durable legacy that this book has inspired pathbreaking studies in French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, Hebrew, Irish, Welsh, Chinese, Japanese, and literally dozens more traditions, not to mention religious studies and a plethora of African and Indian languages. From the ancient world through the medieval period and on into modern traditions, with a deep and lasting effect on verbal art from six continents, *Singer* has had a truly revolutionary effect. If this reviewer has one regret about the Introduction, it is only that widely available writings on the origin and development of the Parry-Lord theory (Foley, *The Theory of Oral Composition: History and Methodology* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988, rpt. 1992]) and on the South Slavic oral tradition itself (Foley, *Traditional Oral Epic: The Odyssey, Beowulf, and the Serbo-Croatian Return Song* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990, rpt. 1993]; *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991]; *The Singer of Tales in Performance* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995]; and *Homer's Traditional Art* [University Park: Penn State University Press, 1999]) go unmentioned.

Thanks are thus due to Stephen Mitchell and Gregory Nagy, and to the producers and programmers of the CD – Matthew Kay, Thomas Jenkins, Ivan Andouin, and Alexander Parker – for a heroic new performance of a well known and much-cherished scholarly song. *Singer* 2000 makes it ever more evident that Lord's book lies at the epicenter of the still-expanding field of studies in oral tradition. We may, and we should, continue to evolve newer and better methods for such studies, and inevitably such progress will lead to revision or perhaps outright dismissal of earlier theories and practices. That is the nature of a healthy

field of intellectual inquiry. Indeed, we see some of this evolution in Lord's own later books: *Epic Singers and Oral Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991) and *The Singer Resumes the Tale*, edited by Mary Louise Lord (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); for a listing of all his writings through 1990, see "Albert Bates Lord (1912-1991)," *Journal of American Folklore*, 105 (1992):61-5. But *Singer* will always remain a cornerstone of whatever edifice we seek to erect. As the *guslari* whom Albert Lord knew so well and respected so deeply said of another hero so accomplished that we couldn't just do without him, "Tamo bez njeg' hoda neimade," "There's just no journey there without him."

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*The Cultural Life of Intellectual Properties: Authorship, Appropriation, and the Law.* By Rosemary J. Coombe. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998. Pp. xi + 462, introduction, notes, bibliography, index)

Rosemary Coombe begins this important study with an extended description of a walk she takes down Toronto's Queen Street. It is a walk during which she encounters a panoply of corporate symbols and other proprietary insignia of global capital, whether in their "pure" forms or subverted by the interventionist practice of *bricoleurs*. She also sees products that are intended to be read as designating specific cultural identities, both those she treats with ambivalence (generic Canadian-ness, for example) and ones she implicitly lauds as authentic (such as products in a First Nations crafts outlet). The material seen on the walk echoes the major themes of the book, which Coombe neatly summarizes as: "[the] constitutive role of intellectual properties in commercial and popular culture; the forms of cultural power the law affords holders of copyright, trademark, and publicity rights; the significance of celebrity images in alternative imaginations of gender; the commodification of citizenship and the negotiation of national belonging on commercial terrain; the appropriations, reappropriations, and rumors that continually reactivate and reanimate commodity/signs to make them speak to local needs; the colonial categorical cartographies that underlie our legal regimes; and the postcolonial struggles of indigenous peoples to eliminate commodified representations of their alterity" (5).

It will be clear from this that Coombe analyses a wide range of materials in support of her central thesis. I take this to be the fundamental clash between the active engagement with and production of meaning in contemporary culture through the shifting and creative opportunities of intertextuality and the competing use of intellectual property law as a means both of regulating "infringing" use and generating a potentially dominating intellectual paradigm that creates an environment hostile to the transgressive possibilities of quotation and appropriation. In broad terms this involves a rehearsal of one of the central tensions of Anglo-American intellectual property rights – the demand for an incentive-based regime that encourages production by offering authors and owners protection of their proprietary interests in intellectual property – and one that does not unnecessarily curtail freedom of expression for everyone else.

In positioning herself within this debate, Coombe advocates an open and discursive approach to "transformative" or "free creative" use that clearly supports basic principles of intertextuality and meanings altered through appropria-

tion. Moreover, she presents a protectionist intellectual property regime as necessarily defending the interests of property owners to control aspects of knowledge and communication as such, not just the use of images, symbols or signs they claim to own. She sees this as particularly affecting those communities that occupy more marginal positions within society. Coombe situates their uses of sometimes protected material as charting an effective and important form of resistance to a dominant hegemonic order that repeatedly seeks to constrain unauthorized use so as to maintain control not only over symbols but also over modes of generating new intellectual and cultural material. She presents this as anathema to the development of cultural expression and argues that restrictions on the use of trademarks, celebrity identities, character merchandising or other copyrighted material represent an undesirable restraint on the human ability both to generate new meanings for pre-existing texts and create new texts by appropriate use.

The content of the text is very broad and the inclusion of a truly extensive bibliography (47 pages in small point size) serves to reinforce this apprehension. An unexpected result, though, is that absentees seem all the more inexplicable. For example, in a book concerned in no small part with alterity the absence of any mention of Emmanuel Levinas' writing is surprising. Of course, it may be a moot point as to whether his focus on the primacy of "Otherness" may assist strategies of resistance to the hegemonic control of intellectual property, but there is at least an intuitive connection that might have warranted comment. It might have been useful, too, to have raised Roland Barthes' analysis of images in the section dealing with Sikh Mounties and the nationalistic/racist response to their Canadian-ness. Barthes' discussion of the black soldier saluting the "tricolore" seems to me a useful example of a *punctum* in photographic imagery in relation to desires of nationalist uniformity that might have generated interesting discussion in this book. Of course, such absentees would not be disguised were it not for the extent of the bibliography, which, when scrutinized closely, risks becoming a rod for the author's back.

Similarly, there are times where discussions seem curtailed (an apprehension militated by the length of the buttonholing footnotes). For example, Coombe notes how indigenous peoples' responses to corporate trademarking of indigenous insignia, celebrity or language is "complex, multifaceted, and far from unanimous" (187) but doesn't afford ambivalent or positive stances the same level of analytical scrutiny as she grants to a generic hostility to such use. While I agree with her conclusions that such use has serious ramifications for indigenous peoples and their self-determination, the text would, nevertheless, have benefited from more in-depth discussion of the contrary view. There is more to this question than a split identification of signs of indigeneity (business use as both offensive and complimentary), as the activity of indigenous entrepreneurs working with and without community backing suggests. Why is it, for example, that indigenous peoples enter into negotiations with business for the licensing of indigenous signifiers? What is gained by such a relationship, what is threatened by it? How does business respond to this shift in demand?

Cultural quotation in art and business operates on a plane where two axes intersect: an authorized-unauthorized use axis and a commercial-creative use axis. In part, such quotation reflects a tension in the fundamental premise of greater intellectual freedom offered by intertextuality. For indigenous peoples this can provide new avenues of their own cultural expression but can just as often be a cunning ruse by which culturally significant material is made available for

continued appropriation by non-indigenous people or companies, sometimes justified by flash theoretical arguments that cloak the residual capital and imperial imperatives in operation. The text refuses a position of unfettered access to or absolute prohibition of the use of signifiers (298) but this runs a little hollow when, for example, the indigenous case for free use of indigenous material is not fully made out. In the same way that Coombe repeats Annie Coombes' argument that hybridity is no guarantee of postcolonial self-determination (215), discussion of an emergent political-cultural-legal narrative such as the ambivalence of some indigenous responses to the law/culture interface would serve the text well.

I suspect my reading of the arguments involving indigenous cultural material is haunted by a moment in Coombe's Queen Street walk when "exquisite [Native] beadwork sits abandoned on dusty sheets of pegboard" (4). I have no doubt that this is factually true but in its retelling it ambivalently re-positions the author. On one hand she is both connoisseur ("exquisite") and sensitive observer ("abandoned") but there are shades of a nostalgic lament here that are a little discomfiting (silk-screened tee-shirts are unlikely to be "exquisite"; a commercial product of another maker more likely to be "unsold" than "abandoned"). This discomfort reveals for me the risk with a study of this type that it comes across as being overly procrustean – venal commerce set beside creative intertextual appropriation. Nevertheless, Coombe counters this very argument when, for example, she points to the failure of both the demonized capital-based and Rabelaisian consumer carnivalesque schools of cultural studies to address the logic of the commodity as applied to cultural forms (134).

It remains her contention that intellectual property law enables such commodification because it is revealed not as an objective determiner of dispute but as an active force in the generation of signs and symbols with which the power-relationships of difference are constituted and given meaning. This is a contention argued forcefully and with considerable insight and subtlety throughout. Coombe makes an effective and provocative case against the assumed monologism of the normative positions of intellectual property regulation. At the same time, there is the implication that her commitment to dialogism is strong; strong enough to invite the sorts of questioning interventions such as those noted above – interventions that in no way diminish the text but are more like questions provoked in the reader's mind by it. This, it seems to me, makes this book an active player in discussions of intertextuality not simply a passive commentary. These qualities mark the text as a significant, indeed, groundbreaking contribution to revisionist and inter-disciplinary studies of intellectual property.

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*Kinderculture: The Corporate Construction of Childhood.* Edited by Shirley R. Steinberg and Joe L. Kincheloe. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998. Pp. xi + 270)

Shirley R. Steinberg and Joe L. Kincheloe have brought together a strong collection of essays detailing the ways in which "kinderculture," that is, popular culture materials created by corporate America for consumption by children, impact the

everyday lives of kids. Fundamental to the project of this book is the need to understand kinderculture, to take it and its impact on society seriously, and the corresponding desire to use that understanding to rethink childhood education at many different sites of cultural pedagogy. The authors, who are sociology, education, and cultural studies scholars, make this collection even stronger by addressing, not just the top-down forces of kinderculture, but also the complex set of social and cultural interactions with that culture, engaged in by children and adults.

In their introduction, the editors note that:

“(s)uch an effort (as this book) falls under the umbrella term *cultural pedagogy*, which refers to the idea that education takes place in a variety of social sites including but not limited to schooling. Pedagogical sites are those places where power is organized and deployed, including libraries, TV, movies, newspapers, magazines, toys, advertisements, video games, books, sports, and so on. Our work as education scholars, we believe, demands that we examine both in-school and cultural pedagogy if we are to make sense of the educational process in the late twentieth century (3-4).”

Kinderculture is made not by children, but for children. Notions of just what a child is, and what an ideal childhood should be, are embedded in the products and processes of kinderculture. The distinction between kinderculture and children’s culture is structurally and conceptually similar to that made by Peter and Iona Opie in differentiating nursery rhymes from children’s rhymes (*Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*, Oxford University Press, 1967, 1). The former are created and passed on by adults for children, while the latter are the products of kids’ interactions with one another, often subversive in their take on the adult world that surrounds them. In *Kinderculture*, the authors note the presence of children’s culture within kinderculture, pointing out that corporations can and do use antithetical aspects of kids’ play as a part of their marketing strategies. Corporations appropriate at least the form, if not always the content, of children’s culture in their attempts to make their kinderculture constructions, and the products they are trying to sell through those constructions, more attractive to their target customers.

Because the editors take social and cultural construction of traditional childhood as a starting point, they see discussions of the contemporary “crisis of childhood” not as an attack on a natural state, but as a transformation through social and cultural forces (including political and economic ones) of a social construct not much more than 150-years old. Several of the authors in this collection also consider the class and racial inequities that informed traditional notions of childhood (i.e., a privileged and protected state of being held primarily by white, upper- and middle-class children in Western Europe and North America), and which continue to inform corporate-produced kinderculture.

The collection of essays is bookended by two from Kincheloe. He leads with his essay analyzing the (thinly veiled) subtexts of the “Home Alone” movie series, and the “central but unspoken theme [that] involves the hurt and pain that accompany children and their families in postmodern America (31).” The book concludes with his discussion of Ray Kroc’s McDonald’s empire, with a particular focus on its public relations campaign, and the extent to which that presentation of McDonald’s public face affects American culture, and kinderculture. Henry A. Giroux takes on Disney once again, asking “Are Disney Movies Good for your Kids?” He calls for taking all of Disney’s corporate productions, including, but not

limited to, movies, very seriously. Giroux's call is not to censor or ignore Disney, but to enable analysis, not just by academics, but also by consumers, including kids. Eleanor Blair Hilty similarly questions just how educational is Educational TV, as epitomized by "Sesame Street" and "Barney and Friends." Douglas Kellner's nuanced and complex analysis of Mike Judge's "Beavis and Butthead" series (and, of course, merchandise); Eugene F. Provenzo, Jr.'s discussion of contemporary interactive (and increasingly tied in to other forms of media, such as TV and movies) video games; Peter McLaren and Janet Morris's consideration of the "Mighty Morphin Power Rangers;" Aaron David Gresson III's confrontation of the images and messages in professional wrestling (past and present); Murry R. Nelson and Shirley R. Steinberg's history and discussion of trading cards; Steinberg's thoughtful catalog of Barbie, "The Bitch who has Everything;" and Jeanne Brady's analysis of the kinds of history presented by the American Girl doll collection, are all excellent case studies of various forms and impacts of kinderculture.

Some of the essays take a slightly different angle on kinderculture, in that they see the agency that is available in children's consumption as well as the potential for top-down socialization. In "Mom, It's Not Real!," Linda K. Christian-Smith and Jean I. Erdman begin by laying out the corporate forces behind the *Goosebumps* series of books. They go on to address parental anxieties about horror fiction and the "dumbing down" of literacy (including the elitist notions inherent in the latter), and, importantly, include the voices of at least two boys who see a real use for the *Goosebumps* books. For example, the son of one of the authors uses the books to find a comfort zone in the often uncomfortable manifestations of masculinity found on American primary school grounds. Alan A. Block, in "Reading Children's Magazines" sounds a cautionary note, expressing his concern that too much adult coaching in critical media literacy will destroy the pleasure that kids find in pop culture (including kinderculture). Adults allow themselves to enjoy "trashy" pop culture; why shouldn't kids have the same opportunity? How does one balance wanting to raise media-savvy kids with the risk of making them completely jaded and unable to connect in any constructive way with the culture around them? And in "Anything You Want: Women and Children in Popular Culture," Jan Jipson and Ursi Reynolds give an ethnographic portrait of what it is like to educate teachers in media literacy, a case study in what kinds of strategies educators can take to make sure that kids are being taught by people who recognize the seriousness of kinderculture, and who will engage with it in the classroom.

The central message of all of these essays is that the constructions of childhood, and depictions of gender, age, racial, ethnic, and class roles found in corporate productions such as movies, television, and advertising, need to be taken seriously. It is not enough to write such entities off as "only" popular culture, not enough to disparage popular books like those in the *Goosebumps* series as "not real literature," thereby implying that the only impact they can have on children's lives is either negative, or fleeting. Elitist approaches (or lack of approach) to popular, corporate productions do not allow for the importance of these materials in the everyday lives of people, do not permit any increase in understanding why and how they can impact not just current but future generations' notions of self and other. In attempting to understand popular materials, in making the processes that produce them more (if never completely) transparent, we can begin to see how kids accept, reject, and otherwise manipulate the notions given to them in kinderculture. Thus Beavis and Butthead are not simply

the endpoint of the “downward spiral of the living white male” (*Newsweek* as quoted by Kellner, 86), but also have the potential to be seen as satirical characters reflecting very real problems in contemporary American society.

The subtle (and not-so-subtle) manipulations of corporate constructions of childhood are themselves manipulated, and in recognizing this two-way street, the authors in *Kinderculture* do the study of children and childhood a great service. They avoid the pitfall of constructing kids as empty vessels waiting to be filled. They acknowledge kids as people, with responses, needs, and desires that are their own, and may or may not correspond to preconceived notions held by advertisers, educators, or researchers. The interventionist approach advocated throughout this volume adds to the impression that one can do more than merely identify these processes of manipulation. Teachers, parents and other concerned adults can interact with kinderculture alongside kids in ways that can reveal alternate modes of thinking about the world. But to do so one must take kinderculture seriously, not just hope that if ignored, it will go away.

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*Of Men and Monsters: Jeffrey Dahmer and the Construction of the Serial Killer.* By Richard Tithecott. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997. Pp. xiii + 192, foreword by James Kincaid, bibliography, index)

*Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture.* By Mark Seltzer. (New York and London: Routledge, 1998. Pp. ix + 302, 16 figures/illustrations, notes, index)

The trope of the rapacious, murderous, cannibalistic ogre holds a long-standing place in both folklore and popular imagination. Its contemporary incarnation, the serial killer – the white, middle-class, sexual predator who roams *at large* and whose victims are young, white and female – can claim a lineage that includes Bluebeard, the vigilante gunslinger of the Western, and, more recently, the murderer of the “slasher” film and urban legends such as “The Hook” and “The Roommate’s Death.” With each instance of actual serial murder, heavily and disproportionately covered by the press, fiction and reality meet and blur, and the narratives build and constitute each other.

Today’s stereotypical serial killer – the white everyman – has become fully integrated into popular culture. Daytime talk shows are devoted to such killers, as are comic books, trading cards, fan clubs, crime novels, news specials (often employing “dramatic re-enactments” in an obvious, yet confused, display of fact and fiction), and main-stream movies such as the Oscar-winning *Silence of the Lambs* (1991, dir. Jonathan Demme). With the phenomenon of serial killers so heavily evoked in various forms of popular culture, it follows that research and analysis on the subject would most obviously be located in Cultural Studies, as indeed are the two books that are the subject of the present review.

The questions raised by the critical analyses of the nominal subjects of the books under review – serial killers and the serial killer/cannibal/necrophiliac par excellence – are reminiscent of those posed by William Arens in his controversial work *The Man Eating Myth* (1979, N.Y.: Oxford). That is, what are the interwoven discourses that connect anthropology and anthropophagy; cannibalism and



colonialism? For folklorists, by extension, why is the subject of folklore so often the monstrous, and why is the object of folkloristics and folklorists so often the “Other,” whose markedness as other is determined by our own notions of monstrosity? These books provide some possible answers, illustrating the fascinating relays between both folklore and popular culture, and folklore and forces in contemporary political and social life in the United States.

Tithecott’s *Of Men and Monsters*, a social constructionist approach to the case of Jeffrey Dahmer, perhaps the most sensational and widely-covered serial killer of the 1990s, locates our social construction of the serial killer at the intersection of contemporary ideologies of gender, race, and class. The “celebrity” of contemporary serial killers, seen as motivated by both fear and fascination, is mapped by Tithecott along the dual axes of denial and desire in the two parts of his book – “Policing the Serial Killer,” and “Dreaming the Serial Killer” – offering first a social constructionist, and then a psychoanalytical perspective on the Dahmer story.

Social constructionist analyses of moral panics illustrate not only how a symbolic reality that is increasingly mediated and standardized through news, infotainment, and popular culture tends to unite a very wide sector of the general population, but also how the fears generated by such a reality are almost completely based on events not witnessed or experienced but believed to be true based on input from media. These mediated perceptions are shaped by claims makers (both liberal and conservative) in order to advance particular agendas and effect policy decisions. The social construction of the category of “deviant” hinges on a pervasive fear of the threat of random and “meaningless” harm. The generalized fear of random violence now made incarnate in the persona of the serial killer is a powerful rhetorical image, and the commonly held fears and perceptions that are the result of such a construction have led to specific policies that focus on serial killing as a growing “epidemic.” Tithecott’s study reveals how the mythologizing of the individual, intelligent, and “sane” serial killer was accompanied by a parallel mystification of the serial killer’s nemesis – the FBI profiler (from the FBI National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crimes [NCAVC], est. 1984) – the lone hero who fights such evils using nearly super-human intuition. These FBI agents have been elevated to a special, extra-legal, elite status in popular perception, and, as “mind hunters,” employ both psychology and intuition to understand and thus apprehend the killer. Engaging in intense one-on-one psychological battles, both hero and anti-hero have been “mystified” (29) and incorporated into popular consciousness as types. Both figures are also shown to have emerged as social phenomena in an intensely conservative political period during which the serial killer became the most extreme example of a class of “deviants” who were held responsible for the breakdown of social order. According to this logic, restoration of social order was to be achieved not only by a series of punitive laws (“Three-Strikes”), but through the efforts of super-human, heroic individuals. Official discourse on the serial killer expanded to include such varied “types” as drug abusers, pornographers, abusive parents, and even single, working mothers as social ills to be contained by policy, reform, and incarceration. Lesser ills were made more urgent by their association with spectacular violence, and all were linked in their socially corrosive potential. In a closed circle of select information heavily laden with ideological overtones and clearly positioned on the side of “family values,” FBI profilers became “experts” for breaking news stories of contemporary murder sprees as well as expert witnesses for Congressional Hearings on serial killers, and helped to make

the connection between serial killing and “abnormal” families explicit. Take, for example, the following quote from an FBI officer in answer to questioning from the House Commission, “In our research with serial murderers, we found that, for example, the backgrounds, without exception, everyone had a chaotic early childhood, a lot of mobility, a lot of transientness in their family, abusive parents, absent parents...” (42).

The FBI Behavioral Unit at Quantico, however, contrary to the Hollywood depiction and popularization, has never solved a case of serial murder, but has, rather, composed a typology of profiles from data amassed after the fact, often through interviews with incarcerated serial killers. In addition, serial killings represent only a tiny percentage of the number of homicides yearly in the United States. Tithecott repeatedly draws out such inconsistencies between perception/construction and reality and in so doing illustrates the important relays between popular media, the portrayal of symbolic reality, individual perceptions, and policy. Clearly, the public engagement with the serial killer is disproportionate to his social menace, and Dahmer’s spectacular and spectacularized case – with allegations of cannibalism, body parts in the refrigerator, necrophilia, and the fact that his victims were mostly both gay and non-white – leads Tithecott to suggest a “correspondence between the meanings we give to serial killing and the meaning of masculinity and of whiteness in modern America” (4), which serves to illuminate the serial killer’s social presence. The analysis of the Jeffrey Dahmer case attempts to expose that which the rhetoric effaces – not only that the focus on such rare (but sensational) phenomena directs concern away from other forms of more widespread violence which are anything but “random” and which have social origins that perhaps more problematically suggest social responsibility and action, but also that the insistent claims of random, motiveless violence “indicate a refusal to make sense of such violence in a way which would associate serial killing with some of society’s dominant values” (5). Tithecott thus suggests that the constructed serial killer ironically both destroys and derives from middle America, simultaneously threatening and upholding the space that middle America has defined as its own and has rigidly defined in terms of family, race, gender, sexuality, class, and domesticity.

In part II, “Dreaming the Serial Killer,” Tithecott tries to come to grips with what he sees as an increasing “surfacing” of the “underground” value of violence into the public sphere (91), represented by our fascination with our construction of the serial killer. Here Tithecott relies less on the constructionist framework used so effectively in the first part, and ventures into the realm of pop-psychology, suggesting that the fascination we find in the serial killer is a fascination with ourselves, or at least with our darker, unexplored fantasies. Echoing Freud’s interpretation of the “uncanny,” Tithecott claims that “the *idea* of the serial killer seems to be increasingly important to the way we perceive our world” (3), and suggests that if we look too long at the serial killer’s image, “[i]t is ourselves we see” (6) looking back. This cliché of vernacularized Freudian psychology has entered into mainstream acceptance, and has now become a rather unquestioned premise, effacing the radical split between fantasy and enactment. It also misses the point that we are fascinated by the representation of Dahmer and others, and that representation is a mediated presentation of events that may be aligned with fantasy.

In *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America’s Wound Culture*, Mark Seltzer explores the themes of representation, reproduction, and their technologies as key elements in a social addiction to seriality itself, providing subtle and complex

insights into the importance of the serial killer in the public imagination. Serial killing, for Seltzer, “has its place in a public culture in which addictive violence has become not merely a collective spectacle but one of the crucial sites where private desire and public fantasy cross” (1). Seltzer situates the serial killer at the intersection of what he refers to as America’s “wound culture” (“the public fascination with torn and open bodies and torn and open persons, a collective gathering around shock, trauma, and the wound” [1]), and machine culture (the technologizing of the body, and the “naturalizing” of the machine). Seltzer traces the relays between “murder and machine culture; the intersecting logics of seriality, prosthesis, and primary mediation (dense materializations and corporealizations of writing, reproduction, representation, and symbolization [fn. 17, 176]) that structure cases of addictive violence” (105), seeking to understand the processes by which the serial killer has emerged as a “species of person,” and why this particular individual has become a “flashpoint in contemporary society” (2).

Seltzer only partially relies on a constructionist view to investigate the cultural and social relationship between the serial killer and his audience. For Seltzer, the serial killer’s construction is multi-directional; the media information technologies, the FBI who utilize them and who structure profiles of serial killers “more along the lines of crime fiction rather than crime fact” (159), and the serial killer who fashions himself according to FBI profiles (“how-to-manuals”) and whose own authority is based on the fact that it “reflects the commonplaces of the culture” (126), all ramify each other. But Seltzer sees this as empty and endless circularity (115), which, in detouring around analysis, explains nothing at all (127). “The point is not then that the serial killer problem is a ‘social construction,’ nor that the malady called the serial killer is ‘socially constructed,’ nor quite that the serial killer is a terminal instance of the self-made or self-constructed man. All these are elements in serial killing. But these intricately notions of construction – social construction and self-construction and the relations between them – indicate something more” (115).

One of Seltzer’s main focuses is the meaning of “seriality” itself, playing with the notion that the “serial” of serial murder refers both to the redundancy and reduplication of victims as well as to the typological, reduplicatable murderers themselves, all of which, in their representations and media duplications have become statistical, substitutable persons and types generated in the mass-mediated public consumer sphere. Thus, for Seltzer, serial killing “cannot be separated from the general forms of seriality, collection, and counting conspicuous in consumer society (Stewart), and the forms of fetishism – the collecting of things and representations, persons and person-things like bodies – that traverse it (Baudrillard)” (64).

Seltzer clearly makes the claim that seriality is an underlying motivation, in fact an addiction, in the machine age, and links serial consumption with serial violence (cf. Marx’s metaphor of the capitalist as vampire). The compulsion for seriality is compelling and enlightening. Social addiction to seriality enjoins the serial killer and the serial viewer in the cycle of reproduction, substitution, collection, categorizing, representation and repetition. The redundancy itself fractures the reality of the terror, spectacularizing as it distances and anesthetizes it, co-joining us through mechanical and technological reproduction in the spectacle of wounded bodies and wounded psyches. Here, obviously, is my intentional linking of the sociocultural underpinnings of such phenomena with the enterprise of folkloristics. One of Seltzer’s contentions is that there is, now, a rupture

of the private into the public in the spectacle of the publicized pornography of serial killing and in the literalness of mutilation which exteriorizes that which had been interior. Is this not the folklore collection, which not only makes the private public, but which makes it generic and de-personalized?

One of the effects of reading both *Of Men and Monsters* and *Serial Killers* together is that the widely invoked and seldom questioned fear/fantasy complex is productively uncoupled. This expands their individual meanings and allows us to investigate the particular functions and consequences of both fear and fascination as separate phenomena. In our fear of the threat of violence, we ourselves are the hypothetical victims, the objects of violence. Fascination with the serial killer, on the other hand, can be seen as related not to the potential for danger, but to the effect of violence, and it is in this context that Seltzer's articulation of "America's wound culture" is the most persuasive. Our voyeuristic involvement with the effects of the crimes themselves depersonalizes the victims, highlighting instead the particular, and in many cases increasingly macabre, details of the crime, repeating and recounting the tally, distancing and anesthetizing the gore in its mechanical reproduction. In this way the crimes of serial killers are linked not only to the spectacle of mass murder (cf. coverage of the Columbine High School shootings), but to the spectacle of death, dishonor, and disgrace of public figures (linking the coverage and reaction to the deaths of Princess Diana and of John F. Kennedy, Jr., and the "exposition" of the details of the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal). The perverse distancing that such replicated exteriorizing of interiors effects allows us to engage in a cathartic "public grieving" for public figures whom we have never met, to vicariously participate in intimate contact with interior states of strangers in an alienated, post-industrial consumer society.

Both of these books are provocative and somewhat fresh in their approaches and at the very least are valuable in their demonstration of the entangled web of consumer, industrial, institutional, social, and personal information that is continuously playing before us in an endlessly mediated loop. Tithecott's most compelling statement is that the serial killer construction is a fantasy of American dominant culture and that his construction is dependent on the relays, linkages, and slippage between various forms of popular culture and the killers' imaging and presentation of themselves, institutional agencies, and public perception. Seltzer reads repetitive male violence as evidence of a tendency to translate the difference between self and other into the basic difference between male and female (67), and suggests that these crimes are not unrelated to the tension between "possessive individualism and market culture, on the one side, and disciplinary individualism and machine culture, on the other" (72). Here, perhaps, we can begin to see cultural and ideological linkages between the anti-female mechanical reproduction of the "self-made man" (who is both general and individual) and the anti-female violence of the serial killer – linkages that may provide some insight in to this figure's resonance in contemporary society. Both books, in focusing on the serial killer, interrogate the clearly bounded categories of "self" and "other," "normality" and "perversion," which find expression in the figure of the serial killer himself: outwardly ordinary, inwardly monstrous. As with many studies in folklore today, these analyses of the serial killer probe the instability of identity in late-capitalist society and provide fresh insights for all in the field.

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