

## *Explorations in Sights and Sounds*

meticulously documented by useful bibliographies. By addressing and analyzing the complex social issues that surround the existence of creole languages, these scholars have not only provided an animated intellectual discussion, but they have also greatly strengthened the cause of their speakers.

Anita Herzfeld  
The University of Kansas

**Don L. F. Nilsen. *Humor Scholarship: A Research Bibliography. Bibliographies and Indexes in Popular Culture, Number 1.* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993) 382 pp., \$65.00.**

Too often, the study of humor lacks the very thing it analyzes. That is one of the reasons Don Nilsen's humor bibliography is such a pleasant surprise. In the cataloguing and describing of the seemingly endless number of humor books and articles, Nilsen has managed to capture the tone of the subject while still doing this tedious job impressively.

The structure of the book makes finding a source relatively easy. Chapter titles, such as "Humor and Ethnicity," are clear and directive, and the subheadings within chapters, such as "The Humor of Native American Ethnicity," easily point a researcher in the right direction. The Appendix is especially helpful to those working toward publication, for it lists journals, magazines, publishing houses, individuals, and organizations which deal specifically with humor.

Chapter six is divided into three sections covering ethnic humor in general, Black ethnic humor, and Native American humor. In the third section, Nilsen introduces the bibliography by discussing the major differences in the way Native Americans view the world, including cultural differences in time, wealth, nature, and relationships, thus leading to their different sense of humor. He also identifies the two most common comic symbols: the coyote and the "ritual clown," which also serves "a moral function" by showing the people "how not to behave." Nilsen's specific discussion in the introduction is limited mainly to the Navajo (mentioning Apache and Hopi only once apiece), but his bibliography lists over twenty books and articles useful for more specific study.

It is in these introductions that Nilsen's own appreciation for humor surfaces, making them not only informative but also delightful. Nilsen combines knowledge definitions, distinctions, and scholarly quotations—with examples to illustrate as well as to entertain. For example, in the introduction to "Jokes, Riddles, Hoaxes, and Stand-up Comedy," Nilsen recounts one of Steven Wright's jokes: "He talks about how he found a strange light switch in his house that didn't turn anything on or off.

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So just for fun he kept switching it until he got a call from a lady in Germany telling him to 'Cut it out!'"

The introductions also give valuable information about the characteristics and trends of various forms of humor. True, they are mainly generalizations, but they are generalizations which create a basis from which a researcher can move forward for further study. *Humor Scholarship* is not, of course, a book to be read cover to cover, but it is a valuable reference tool to keep handy on the shelf for anyone interested in reading or writing about humor.

Barbara A. Bennett  
Marian College

**Louis Owens. *Bone Game. American Indian Literature and Critical Studies Series.* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994) 243 pp, \$19.95 cloth.**

Tricksters in Native American thought often include the gambler and skinwalker. Traditionally, the character of the gambler appears in order to test a person, who must play and win a life and death game so that the individual (specifically) and the tribe (generally) will survive. And, according to anthropologist Larry Sunderland, a Navajo skinwalker ostensibly inserts a bone into a victim's body without breaking the skin. This action often results in mental and/or physical injury, illness, and death. The bone can only be removed ceremoniously by a shaman (*hitaali*); both the gambler and skinwalker are shapeshifters. During the Morning Star Ceremony, which is demonstrated in *Bone Game* and was ended by Metalsharo (Pawnee) in 1813, a maiden's body would be painted half black and half white, staked to the ground, and shot full of arrows in a Dionysian ceremony. Owens delicately intertwines these three ceremonies and figures in a story filled with action, mystery, and surprises.

Similar to the traditional gambler, who collects scalps and hands of victims, *Bone Game* opens with the students and faculty at the University of Santa Cruz (where Owens taught Native American Literatures) in a frenzy because the head and hands of students have started to wash up on a nearby shoreline. The plot is further complicated because Dr. Cole McCurtain, who suffers from "ghost sickness" (96), must stop his slow alcohol-induced suicide before he can face his destiny and stop the murders. The protagonist in *Bone Game*, Cole (Choctaw/Irish, middle-aged, survivor's guilt, divorced), is the unwilling and unknowing hero who must confront the gambler/trickster/skinwalker. Although Cole seems aware of the magnitude of what he must do, his traditional family rushes to assist him because, as the medicine man Luther states: "This story's