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Book Review. Crafting Tradition

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is a question Anderson must constantly answer. Like those who have traveled such roads before, Anderson must explain himself and his discipline of choice to a range of characters (including his girlfriend) and sometimes chooses to characterize himself as an oral historian in order to prevent confusion among potential informants.

In the beautiful rural Tennessee setting where Anderson pursues fieldwork, he stumbles onto the story of Boyd Jenkins, whom he learns was troubled Korean war veteran, itinerant preacher, fiddle player, and, according to some informants, a folk artist. He was gunned down after a lengthy evasion from the law following his killing of a local grocer's son, who was jealous of the attention his ex-girlfriend paid Boyd. One informant claimed that "Some fashioned him [Boyd] a regular Robin Hood, say he stole stuff from rich folks and gave poor ones money or jewelry for food or whiskey," and he had a "mess of kinfolk who lived way out in the woods [who] hid him from time to time, giving him food and clothes" (p. 20).

What makes the novel captivating is its exploration of the paintings Boyd created while a fugitive. Belanus uses these paintings as a centerpiece for a discussion of folk art. After discovering some of Boyd's cave drawings, Ruthie, a local lifeguard who guided Anderson to the cave, asked whether he thought Boyd was a good artist. Anderson responds by characterizing Boyd as a "good folk artist," but further ponders his dilemma: "Were these people actually working from a folk aesthetic or from their own vision? Boyd's paintings were not folk art in the same sense as his fiddle tunes, which he had undoubtedly learned from his relatives and other older fiddlers. Chances are Boyd had never seen another folk painter, and certainly didn't learn from one" (p. 88). Even a fellow fieldworker is unsure how to categorize the paintings, declaring "'I'd categorize him as damn good'" (p. 64), reminding us that such concerns do not matter much among the folks themselves.

Folklorists and folklore students will find this book engaging, but it may not be as appealing to a general audience. For anyone interested in local history, oral history, or material culture (especially in the southern United States), *Sea-*

sonal offers considerable insight into the pros and cons of fieldwork, and folklorists may even recognize a few character types who appear.

Crafting Tradition: The Making and Marketing of Oaxacan Wood Carvings. By Michael Chibnik. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003. Pp. xv + 247, bibliography, index, 14 pp. of color plates, black-and-white illustrations, maps, tables.)

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Animals, angels, "monsters," and devils are typical examples of fanciful and brightly painted wood carvings from the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca that have become popular over the past two to three decades. Sold in museum stores, galleries, and gift shops in college towns and "artsy" or gentrified urban areas throughout the United States, these inexpensive but appealing carvings are often incorrectly characterized as representative of a proud and long-term village tradition. Michael Chibnik carefully and systematically debunks this ascribed heritage as a cultural misrepresentation propounded by dealers who believe that romanticizing the craft and the artisans who produce it—i.e., lengthening the cultural distance between carvers, portrayed as poor, exotic, isolated, and Indian, and buyers, portrayed as culturally sophisticated, sensitive, upper middle-class American cognoscenti—is good for business. These inaccuracies, however, do not necessarily detract from the interest that this recent artistic phenomenon holds. Exploring the history, production, and marketing of Oaxacan wood carvings, *Crafting Tradition* provides a detailed socioeconomic examination of some of the complex issues surrounding the commercialization of craft and the effect of a globalized economy on these predominantly small, rural, family businesses.

Chibnik begins by discussing how the academic and economic realities of his life as a professor of anthropology forced him to modify the classic, long-term fieldwork experience, replacing it with more numerous, intermittent, and shorter periods of research spread

over many years. This research style enabled him to track certain changes that ultimately contributed to a more comprehensive appreciation of the carvings within a broader socioeconomic context and triggered his realization that any in-depth study of this artistic phenomenon could not be undertaken solely in the family compounds and small villages where the wood carving takes place. Instead, his fieldwork needed to be conducted in a multilocal, transnational manner, mirroring the cross-border movement of the objects themselves.

Crafting Tradition follows the money, starting with the birth of this trade circa 1940 with artist Manuel Jiménez, and examines the entrepreneurial workshops that quickly developed to capitalize on the growing market, as well as the trading links of the middlemen, exporters, and importers north of the border. Chibnik discusses individual artists, extended-family workshops, as well as those that are more “industrial,” and the wood carving communities as a whole, using brief case histories to illuminate alternative responses to the complex economic web of this trade. The seven chapters devoted to this examination far outnumber the remaining four on the history and creative/production processes of the craft. There is little discussion about the intrinsic artistic merit or expressive qualities of the work or about changes manifested over time. Although the color plates of objects and the black and white images of the artists provide a general visual sense of the material, they lack data, such as object dimensions, media, and production date, important to researchers concentrating on the objects and the artists themselves.

Consequently, although the admirable specificity defining the links in the commodity chain would be of great interest to economic anthropologists, *Crafting Tradition* may be of somewhat less interest to folklorists and art historians. Tantalizing questions about the extent to which invented traditions can still incubate folkloristic qualities and behaviors are suggested but never explored; similarly, although certain comparisons are made between the economic path of the carvings and more “traditional” Oaxaqueño crafts, there is little discussion about how such different history and heritage might resonate in similar or divergent ways among the artists and their communities.

Connections between this craft and earlier carving traditions (masks, dance regalia, and so forth) are mentioned only in passing, without discussion, and the artists are rarely allowed to speak for themselves (even in translation). Instead, Chibnik quotes widely from the first published popular book on the carvings—*Oaxacan Wood Carving: The Magic in the Trees* by Shepard Barbash (Chronicle Books, 1993)—as well as from various Web sites, catalogues, and store labels, whose interpretation of these works and their context is prejudiced by their focus on sales. Although interesting, they support Chibnik’s rather narrow socioeconomic analysis without deepening the reader’s understanding of other aspects of the compound roles of this craft. Therefore, *Crafting Tradition’s* value for folklorists may lie more in the tangential—and unanswered—questions that are raised.

Chicana Traditions: Continuity and Change.

Edited by Norma E. Cantú and Olga Nájera-Ramírez. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002. Pp. x + 269, bibliographies, photographs, index.)

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Chicana Traditions: Continuity and Change is the first book devoted exclusively to studies of Chicana folklore written by Chicana scholars. Most of the thirteen articles found here draw on feminist theory and recent Chicana/o cultural theory, examining genres as diverse as visual arts, music, rituals, beliefs, games, legends, and festivals. The authors come from fields as varied as their subject matter: literature, cultural studies, ethnomusicology, anthropology, education, sociology, and museum studies are all represented.

Editors Norma E. Cantú and Olga Nájera-Ramírez have divided the studies into three sections reflecting different levels of maintenance and change within the traditions discussed: enduring traditions, practicing traditions, and transforming traditions. The five essays that make up “Enduring Traditions” examine longstanding practices: *quinceañera* rituals, *santos*-carving, *indita* songs, traditional children’s songs and games, and the legend of *La Llorona*.