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BOOK REVIEW

IN THE SHADOW OF LAURI HONKO

Frog

KAMPPINEN, MATTI & HAKAMIES, PEKKA 2012: The Theory of Culture of Folklorist Lauri Honko 1932–2002: The Ecology of Tradition. Lewiston: Mellen Press. xiii + 115 pages.

I was quite looking forward to reading this book, as my own work has been richly informed by the theories of Lauri Honko. The authors were two of the organizers of the recent conference in honour of Honko's work, *The Role of Theory in Folkloristics and Comparative Religion* (August 21st–23rd, 2013, Turku, Finland). This book seems to have been strategically published to appear in conjunction with that event, along with the collection *Theoretical Milestones: Selected Writings of Lauri Honko* (ed. Pekka Hakamies & Anneli Honko, FF Communications 304, Helsinki, 2013). I guessed this book was intended as some sort of companion to the conference. I therefore expected a leisurely survey of Honko's theories and theoretical tools discussed in relation to their backgrounds, uses, alternatives, and their degree of relevance today – perhaps a work with good introductory readings for students. The reality was not only disappointing, but even somewhat discomfiting.

AIMS IN A TWO-AUTHOR UNDERTAKING

The book is organized in nine chapters with a preface by Armin W. Geertz as well as having an introduction, conclusion, and a good index. According to the introduction, the aim of the work is “at singling out and crystallizing those ideas from Honko’s work that [the authors] think will prove useful for the future generations of students and researchers in religious studies and folkloristics” (p. 7). This aim is only truly met in Hakamies’s “Issues in Folkloristics”, which I found a pleasure to read. This chapter is lucid and well-organized. It incorporates a valuable discussion of the debate surrounding genre and genre theory in which Honko engaged, including an objective assessment of the controversy with Dan Ben-Amos. It has a very nice background and overview of Honko’s theories of ‘mental text’ and oral-poetic production, looking especially at relationships to Oral-Formulaic Theory from Milman Parry through John Miles Foley. The chapter goes on to address Honko’s approaches to textualization and performance in relation to those of Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs, as well as Honko’s views on the relationship between the individual and collective tradition. This chapter both offers an approachable synthesis of Honko’s theoretical views and situates them in the history of theoretical discussions. The perspectives are nuanced by consideration of differences in the aims of individual scholars and differences in materials with which they worked. This nuancing leads to insights into what set Honko’s views apart from those of other scholars.

The chapter “Safeguarding Folklore and the Folklore Process” is less successful. A large portion of the chapter is constituted of Hakamies’s interesting study on failed actions to revive traditional Karelian village culture and practices, and to interface them with tourism. The case study’s quality is mitigated by the fact that it is not clearly connected to Honko’s theories and activities. The case is presented to illustrate a discussion of UNESCO’s strategies and policies for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, although it was an initiative of the parliament of Finland (p. 87). The discussion of intangible heritage is itself a departure from Honko’s activities with UNESCO and not strongly linked to Honko in the text. In addition, the chapter as presented in a somewhat clumsy frame that is ostensibly concerned with applied folklore. The opening section, “Applied Folklore”, is constituted of only two paragraphs: the first briefly addresses Honko’s Siri epic project as “a theory-driven enterprise” and “client-oriented product development” (p. 80) without elaboration; the second is a single sentence: “Honko’s interest in applied cultural research was already evident in his study of folk medicine (cf. chapters 2 and 3): scientific study of culture could be used in making a better world [...]” (pp. 80–81). This pleasant sentiment is not directly elucidated by referring to the preceding chapters, nor will ‘applied cultural research’ become clear for someone unfamiliar with the concept. A short closing section returns to the Siri epic project as “[a]ppplied research and product development” (p. 92), suggesting its relation to the discussion of UNESCO and heritage protection, but “applied research” remains undefined. The chapter includes an interesting case and some useful information, yet Hakamies’s case study seems to be at a remove from the topic in a book on Lauri Honko, and the further the chapter gets

from Hakamies's case study, the weaker the text becomes.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

In Matti Kamppinen's chapters, ideas are not necessarily clearly linked or interconnected and examples tend to be presented as self-explanatory and can be juxtaposed with one another and with discussion in confusing ways. Topics announced in section headings (e.g. "Applied Folklore" above) are frequently misleading insofar as the proposed theme is not explicated or even discussed as such. In general, much of Kamppinen's text on Honko's theories looks like it will only be more or less accurately interpretable to someone already familiar with Honko's relevant works. These chapters are presented with emphasis on Kamppinen's own preferred terminology and interest in cognitive theory. His chapters one through four and chapter eight are concerned with Honko's ideas, but chapter 5, "Tradition and the Theory of Memes", reflects Kamppinen's interests and only very superficially connects with Honko's theories, whereas chapter 7, "Cognitive Paradigm in the Study of Religion and Folklore", is better in this regard. These two chapters both end on an intriguing note: "Some of the most salient future possibilities of tradition ecology will be in the study of memes" (p. 44); "the evolutionary process thinking embedded in Honko's tradition ecology will probably contribute to cognitive sciences" (p. 73). Unfortunately, it is never clarified how or why either proposal should be the case. An explication would have produced an interesting, accessible and potentially useful contribution to scientific discussions of Honko's work.

The use of "theory" in the singular in the title of this book reflects an overarching goal to identify and explicate the ultimate unifying theory that Honko worked with: "that the fundamental assumptions in Honko's theory of culture are functionalism, systems thinking and the process view of the world[,] most clearly articulated [...] in Honko's tradition ecology" (p. 93). The one-theory hypothesis leads to confusion already in the first chapter where Honko is characterized as having multiple theories from the outset. The relationship between this plurality of theories and a single theory of culture is gradually left behind without being unambiguously resolved. Chapter 2, "Functionalism, Systems and Processes", which presents the three fundamental concepts, becomes increasingly difficult for a reader to follow. In addition to the prominence of letter-codes (like "FI" for "functional individuation", p. 15) that are not used elsewhere in the text, the key analytical term 'system', for example, is not sufficiently introduced or defined while examples are brought forward without indicating or explicating what precisely should be regarded as the 'system' in the particular case.

Chapter 3, "Pool of Tradition and Systems of Culture", presents a distinction between systems and the resources through which they are realized. The author foregrounds this distinction as central in Honko's theory and the three and a half page overview would have benefitted from illustrative discussion. Chapter 8, "Genre Analysis and Folklore Process in the Study of Religion" presents an interesting discussion of mediatisation and an example of a new religion surrounding an obscure classical goddess. The relationship to

Honko's 'folklore process', could, however, have been better articulated, and the chapter would have been stronger if the observation that genres are important to distinguish had been complemented by a discussion of how genres can be distinguished and analyzed.

I expected the substantial heart of this work to be Chapter 4, "Tradition Ecology", proposed to be Honko's unifying theory of culture. Honko's approach of using 'ecology' as a metaphor for a cultural environment and the traditions of which it is constituted is situated in the history of research by contrasting it with scholars who had looked at traditions in relation to ecology in terms of a literal, physical ecological environment. I would have liked to see mention of the background of the biological metaphor applied to traditions, for example, in Carl von Sydow's work, with which Honko contrasts his own. Honko's list of ten factors needed for describing traditions in a tradition ecology is quoted (p. 33), but only the theme of variation is discussed rather than organizing a more developed picture of 'tradition ecology' as a whole or addressing its theoretical significance. More specifically, focus is on Honko's 'four forms of adaptation', but the presentation is organized as a curiously pointed argument which seeks to show that one of Honko's four forms of adaptation is redundant.

Kamppinen's use of terms and concepts does not always coincide with Honko's own. This can be illustrated here in two examples. Kamppinen uses the term 'mental text' to refer to a socially shared phenomenon (pp. 71–72), leading him to the statement: "Honko's mental text resembles another multipurpose tool in tradition, namely, the narrative [...]" (72). Honko uses the term 'mental text' to refer to "a kind of 'prenarrative', a pre-textual frame, i.e., an organized structure of relevant conscious and unconscious material present in the singer's mind" (Honko 1998, 94), and he stresses that "the term 'mental text' has grown out of empirical observations on the verbal behaviour of one singer. It is in this individual sense that it is and should be used." (*Ibid.*, 99.) Similarly, Kamppinen's description of 'multiforms' as "the content units that possessed the linguistic markers recognized by the singer" (p. 10) has the opposite emphasis of Honko's use although in this case Honko formalized a definition of multiforms: "repeatable and artistic expressions of variable length which are constitutive for narration and function as generic markers" (e.g. Honko 1998, 100 and elsewhere), and he explicitly avoided identifying multiforms as content units: "Tentatively, it seems wise to separate multiforms from pure content units, such as motifs and episodes, and maintain the connection with texture, i.e. the linguistic level" (*ibid.*, 101). It should be mentioned that Hakamies presents and discusses these and other terms clearly and consistent with Honko's own use.

DISCOMFITING PERSPECTIVES

A peculiar feature of this work is the occasional intrusion of Kamppinen's personal impressions of Honko into the text. These views are both unexpected and troubling for a reader. On the one hand, the comments construct a negative image of Honko as a person and may even seem quite pointed. On the other hand, they have no clear relevance to the explication of Honko's theories and their potential for use today. Such impressions therefore appear to a reader as inappropriate and even ugly in the context of an objective

analytical assessment of a late scholar's academic contribution. In the first chapter, for example, the section "Testing Hypotheses" opens with a paragraph devoted exclusively to Kamppinen's personal impressions of Honko, such as that at conferences and seminars – but not in citable publications – Honko "was willing to defend [his theoretical constructs] even when they were not worth of it [sic]" (p. 11). This is accompanied by neither examples nor explanation nor is it clearly connected to the theme of 'testing hypotheses' in any way. The purpose of the paragraph seems to be the construction of a negative image of Honko as a person. This paragraph does not connect to other text in the section nor is the issue of theories 'not being worth defending' returned to in later chapters (unless implicit in e.g. the argument concerning the four forms of adaptation). Rhetorically, the intrusion of these perspectives invites a reader to sympathize with the late Lauri Honko being honoured by the work, and also to question not only their relevance to the discussion, but also the objectivity of the authorial voice and the motivations behind it.

CLOSING REMARKS

I would like to stress that the attribution of this work to two authors does not reflect collaborative writing *per se*. The majority of the book is attributable to Matti Kamppinen. Pekka Hakamies is responsible for chapter 6, "Issues in Folkloristics", which truly emerges as a rose among the brambles. Hakamies is also responsible for parts of chapter 9, "Safeguarding Folklore and the Folklore Process". I have a very positive view of Hakamies's contributions, and I hope that he makes a form of "Issues in Folkloristics" available in another venue in the future. However, I remain quite critical of this book as a whole. I am also surprised that Honko's works are not better referenced in discussion (in number and with page numbers). In addition, the printing is of extremely low quality (it looks like a poor photocopy on cheap paper). At the time of writing this review, the book is listed on the publisher's website for 109.95 USD / 79.95 GBP, although I am informed by the publisher that a soft-cover version would be 49.95 USD. Both prices remain disproportionate to book's quality.

LITERATURE

- HAKAMIES, PEKKA & HONKO, ANNELI (EDS.) 2013: *Theoretical Milestones: Selected Writings of Lauri Honko*. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.
HONKO, LAURI 1998: *Textualising the Siri Epic*. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.

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