REVIEWS

Placide-Eustache: Sources et paralleles du Conte-type 938, by Germain Lemieux.
216 pp., illustration, appendices, bibliography.
Quebec: Lew Presses de l'Université Laval, 1970. $8.00

Reviewed by Andrea Greenberg

As a result of its comparative youth, the Folklore Archives of Laval University face several problems which older, more established folklore institutes have already solved. Two of these, which are mentioned in the preface, are the establishment of a bibliography for French tales in North America and of a catalogue (in the manner of Delarue's Conte populaire français) which would include them all. Another goal is the production of monographs which would conduct historic-geographic studies for Aarne-Thompson tale types found in French Canada. This volume (number 10 in the series published by the Folklore Archives) represents the first study in that particular field of scholarship.

Although historic-geographic studies are no longer quite as fashionable as they were previously, they are a necessary part of folklore scholarship, and in a way represent a rite of passage to more sophisticated types of analysis. This particular study seems to be influenced by three main factors: the modern low opinion of the value of amassing as many texts as possible to form an archetype, the original historic-geographic method, in which the establishment of an archetype was a prime goal, and the theories of Albert Wesselski concerning the relationships between folklore and literature.

This unlikely combination of influences may be explained by the legend itself, which is Aarne-Thompson's type 938, "Placidus (Eustacius)." Lemieux notes that this saint's legend exists in several countries in Europe and the Near East, as well as in such literary works as the Gesta Romanorum, the Decameron, and the Panchatantra. However, Delarue (the late French folklorist) poses the question as to how this legend could achieve such popularity in French Canada when it is defunct in France! It is to this problem which Lemieux addresses himself: has this legend survived in French Canada as a result of the influence of religious literature, or, if not, can it be traced to an ancient oral tradition which has disappeared in all its intermediary locales?

In search of an answer to this question, Lemieux begins with the traditional historic-geographic method; however, his use of only eight oral variants imposes limits on the thoroughness of the study (this also shows, though, that Lemieux recognizes that a collection of all variants would not further his goals). After summarizing each variant, Lemieux reduces the text to a "common denominator" -- a series of episodes which occur in each variant -- and proceeds to compare each oral text to this hypothetical one. The aim of this exercise is to establish "points of divergence" ("les points divergents"); however, the acknowledgement of diversity from an imagined text does not necessarily increase the value of a study when

applied incorrectly to other variants. Lemieux then shifts to literary texts, summarizing the legend as it appears in Buddhist, Greek, Latin, medieval, and later works. It is at this point that Lemieux errs the most: by relating each divergence in the oral texts to a literary text, he concludes that certain particular writings influence each variant to a greater or lesser degree. As an example, Lemieux claims that one oral variant containing the anachronistic term "engueuler un enfant" must have been influenced, either through oral or literary tradition, by a medieval text containing the same phrase. Not once does he consider that perhaps this term has a formulaic or idiomatic quality in tales, such as "once upon a time," and therefore may appear in several variants (its appearance in only one of eight is not conclusive) while it has disappeared from daily speech.

Perhaps the most surprising statement occurs in the conclusion, in which Lemieux states that although a definite influence has existed between the oral and the literary variants, this influence is indirect -- the formation of the French Canadian variants is due mostly to oral tradition. Although that does appear to be the most logical solution to the problem, it seems audacious for Lemieux to assert that, since he has not considered oral tradition at all in his book. Rather, oral tradition seems to win by default -- since no direct literary link can be established, that must be the answer. However, Lemieux's belief in the inferiority of oral tradition appears in the following quote (my translation): "The people conserve, without understanding, the debris of ancient traditions ... at the same time, the natural incomprehension of the masses is a sufficient guarantee that whatever possess an esoteric character will not be abandoned for that, but will remain only as a kind of witness of the past for those who, in another time, will be able to understand it."

This assumption that the folk preserve the past without understanding its deeper meaning (Lemieux himself offers no such revelation), combined with hasty assumptions about oral-literary relationships and with an inconclusive use of the historic-geographic method all attest to the unfamiliarity of the Folklore Archives with this type of study. Hopefully, this first monograph will serve as an experimental study, and as a point from which other studies may improve. The sincere desire for quality scholarship on the part of the Archives will surely lead to more thorough and concrete studies in the future.

The Foxfire Book, edited with an Introduction by Eliot Wigginton.
384 pp. Illustrations, index of people.
Garden City, New York: Doubleday (Anchor Paperback), 1972. $3.95.

Reviewed by William M. Clements

In 1966 Eliot Wigginton, freshly graduated from Cornell, went to the Georgia Appalachians to teach English at the Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School. His attempts to teach ninth- and tenth-graders to appreciate Shakespeare were markedly fruitless, and the students' boredom culminated in their loss of respect for the teacher. In desperation Wigginton began searching for an effective way of helping his students become interested in developing communications skills. The answer was Foxfire, a magazine put together by the students as a part of their classwork. The magazine