

additional in-depth discussion of the material presented, it is a worthy overview and introduction to the Jack-in-the-Green.

John H. McDowell. **Poetry and Violence: The Ballad Tradition of Mexico's Costa Chica.** Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000. Pp. xi + 251, index, map, photographs, bibliography, compact disc. \$39.95 cloth.

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Taking the relationship between poetry and violence as his object of study, John McDowell delves into the corrido tradition of Mexico's Costa Chica in his latest book.

He bases his multifaceted analysis of corridos and their performance on several years of extensive ethnographic fieldwork in the region surrounding Acapulco on the Pacific coast. Over the course of the book, McDowell offers a vibrant telling of general corrido history, as well as detailed vignettes of particular ballads, performances, and social contexts.

An underlying question in *Poetry and Violence* concerns the functions of corridos in the social realm of the Costa Chica. McDowell argues from the outset that corridos potentially serve more than one function in any given performance, and that the tradition in general helps communities navigate scenarios of physical violence in multiple ways. Specifically, McDowell draws together three approaches that he has noticed in academic research on the corrido tradition. The first approach or thesis focuses on the celebratory nature of corridos, the ways in which ballads written about particular violent interactions promote such events and inspire other individuals (usually younger males) to follow the paths of the protagonists. McDowell refers to the second approach as the regulatory thesis, and he anchors it in the idea that corridos present a moralizing counterforce in the wake of violent scenes. The final analytic approach to corridos that McDowell offers is the therapeutic thesis. This thesis maintains that corridos serve the public, the relatives of participants, and the participants themselves as a way to deal with violence and its aftermath; while not a cure or a

reparation, corridos become a form of emotional release for community members either directly or indirectly involved in violence.

While McDowell presents the three theses independently of each other and cites previous academic works on corridos that rely exclusively on each, he maintains that none of them tell the whole story on their own. Instead, throughout *Poetry and Violence*, McDowell argues for the integration of these three approaches into a cohesive analytical framework. This framework explains how a given corrido can simultaneously celebrate an infamous violent encounter while warning against such violence and consoling any grieving parties. That is, all of these functions may be part of a particular corrido's context, and may very well shift from performance to performance.

By the end of the book, McDowell has built a strong case for his multifaceted approach to the relationship between poetry and violence as found in the corridos of Costa Chica. Ranging from songs composed a hundred years ago to those that are months old, the performance of corridos comprises a living ballad tradition that continues to reverberate strongly with Costa Chican society. But, as McDowell asks in his last chapter, can his analytical framework serve in attempting to understand other cases of the relationship between poetry (or music) and violence? As he was making final changes to his manuscript, news of the Columbine High School tragedy in Colorado broke and an onslaught of cultural criticism and painful reflection followed. McDowell closes his book wondering how the kinds of work folklorists do can be useful in times of social and emotional crisis, and while he does not claim to offer any solutions, the questions he poses point us—as scholars and as people—in some intriguing directions.

James A. Matisoff. **Blessings, Curses, Hopes, and Fears: Psycho-Ostensive Expressions in Yiddish.** Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000. Reprint ed. (1979). Pp. xxxi + 160, new preface, notes, new bibliography. \$40.00 cloth, \$15.95 paper.

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