



# NEIL ROSENBERG: "THE ENIGMATIC SYMBOL"

FOLK 211 – Atlantic Canadian Folklore

2011-01-10



# Context

- Rosenberg was contributing to a 1976 Colloquium on Atlantic Provinces literature: hence the references to literature in the opening and final paragraphs
- Memorial's Folklore programme had been running for just over ten years: he had taught at Memorial since 1970



# The issue

- What does folklore “represent” to Atlantic Canadians? Rather, what is represented through folklore?
- Who is interpreting the folklore? To what use?

# Examples:

- Newfoundland's "wonderful" "racist" folklore
- MacLeod's "The Boat"
- Gwyn and the "strip-mining" of folklore by folklorists
  
- The opinions of the "distanced insider" (distanced through education, outmigration, etc.)



# The problem defined


- Collection without analysis is fruitless
  - Mere collection – by outsiders, by insiders with nationalistic concerns – is a process of selectively presenting/representing

# Quote from page 81

- “Such scholarship is bound to neglect important facets of the material, especially those aspects which indicate that certain kinds of folklore can be found in all groups, regions and classes. Likewise, such studies rarely make the point that regardless of differences in the content of the folklore from group to group, the social and creative processes which underlie it are often similar. And [...] unaesthetic and derogatory forms are avoided. Instead we have collections which parade the unique and colorful folklore of various “have-not” groups and regions.”



So...

- Study by outsiders viewed with suspicion
    - a) Local control of economic life is taken
    - b) Pride in cultural heritage is given
    - c) But “cultural heritage” is essentially a stereotype
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# Esoteric and Exoteric

- 1<sup>st</sup> level (direct)
  - Esoteric: how we understand ourselves
  - Exoteric: how we understand others
- 2nd level (reflexive)
  - Esoteric: how we understand their understanding of us – what we think they think about us
  - Exoteric: how we understand their understanding of our understanding of them – what we think they think we think about them