Black Cats, Hoot Owls & Water Witches by Kenneth W. Davis & Everett Gillis, and: *The Oral Tradition of the American West* by Keith Cunningham (review)

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marriage, childbirth and childrearing, daily work, recreation, business, and social organizations. She describes these widows as having the ability to move beyond narrow nineteenth-century expectations of a woman's "place" to create new roles that combine the masculine and feminine worlds of their day.

As an introductory summary of the roles and activities of women in the Llano Estacado of the day, the work is successful, but none of the women become unique personalities, largely because they are described solely in the context of their various roles. The reader searches for a deeper sense of their determination, stamina, and self-sufficiency and for a more complete understanding of the significance of their trailblazing efforts.

Both books describe pioneer women, Young's mother in a fairly traditional role of wife and mother, even though she successfully buys her own homestead, and Burnett's women in roles that extend into nontraditional fields of business and management, even though they are also successful in domestic roles as well. However, Burnett's work tends to tread familiar territory, while Young's book creates a place for itself by the freshness and vigor of the narrative.

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Black Cats, Hoot Owls & Water Witches. By Kenneth W. Davis & Everett Gillis. (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 1989. 102 pages, $8.95.)

The Oral Tradition of the American West. By Keith Cunningham. (Little Rock: August House Publishers, Inc., 1990. 264 pages, $11.95.)

Here are two very good books for folklorists and for anyone interested in a good laugh or two from the Southwest. *Black Cats, Hoot Owls & Water Witches* is a collection of beliefs, superstitions and sayings from Texas. Although it contains much more, *The Oral Tradition of the American West* is a collection of 153 recitations mainly from sources in Arizona.

Kenneth Davis and Everett Gillis, who passed away before the book reached print, have put together traditional expressions from across Texas. Mostly these are in the form of one or two sentences that represent folk belief on a variety of subjects. Divided into three major sections, the book includes folk wisdom on such subjects as the weather, stars, health, love and death.

Here are some samples from the "Superstitions" section of the book:

> "Bringing a hoe in the house is bad luck." "Never sweep dirt out the door after sundown; this is inviting the dead to be your guest." "A butterfly in the house means a lady will visit you wearing a dress the same color as the butterfly." "If you sing before breakfast, you will cry

before supper." "When you sing after you go to bed, you will wake up crying."

Both Davis and Gillis are past presidents of the Texas Folklore Society, the oldest state folklore society in America, and they appropriately dedicate *Black Cats* to the "Paisanos" in the society, just one of the many groups that may be interested in this collection.

Keith Cunningham's book, which contains an informative introduction by W. K. McNeil, is a much longer work that examines traditional recitations as a folklore genre. McNeil writes that folklorists have in the past neglected recitations, concentrating more on other narrative forms like the ballad.

Cunningham has put together an impressive study. In addition to the introductory essay, the book is divided into ten chapters, each containing introductory comments and several recitations, some of them poems, some prose narratives. The author has numbered each performance and has extensive comments on each at the end of the book in a "Collection Notes" section. The notes will be especially helpful to folklorists, but I found the section fun and interesting reading just because I was curious about the poem or story being told.

The last two sections, an index of authors and performances and an index of titles and first lines, make Cunningham's book a valuable resource for audiences that may include everyone from local historians, to friends of the performers, to scholars of popular culture.

One of my favorite poems in the collection is called "Trapper Bill." Bill is a good-hearted fellow who decides he will take in some orphaned baby skunks and let them sleep with him so they won't freeze to death. Here are the last two stanzas:

> Says I to Bill
> "I think your notion's swell.
> But tell me please, what will you do about
> That awful smell?"
>
> You think that worried him?
> Not a dog-gone bit.
> "That baby skunk," said Trapper Bill,
> "Will soon get used to it."

Twenty-eight individuals give traditional recitations in *The Oral Tradition.* Cunningham points out that these people are doing something that may not be part of folk culture in the future. This book may be valuable not only for the insights into a neglected folklore genre, but also as a collection of folk narratives that will not be around for future generations.

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