



Deadly Words: Witchcraft in the Bocage

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the season also serving as *etxekandere* over him.

The replication of housewifery by men in the *olha* is accentuated symbolically by their production there of cheeses, for the process of curdling milk to form cheese is believed to be analogous to the formation of a fetus in the womb, where a woman's blood is curdled by semen. (Ott explores the incidence of the analogy outside Basque culture and in antiquity here and in a 1979 paper in *Man*.) In Ste.-Engrâce, the full set of analogies Ott discovers is (p. 208) rennet/semen, milk/red blood, cheese/infant, *olha*/house, male procreativity/female procreativity. Ott is indeed the first anthropologist in Europe to document "an attempt by men, in an institutionalized framework to . . . reenact symbolically the physical creation of children in a male domain from which women are excluded" (p. 212). This comes from a region where the *couvade* is often supposed to have existed in antiquity.

The cheese/conception analogy is a neat and relatively self-contained contribution and a small part of the book. Most is devoted to first-neighborship and related institutions of exchange and mutual aid. These are embedded in the larger economy and social organization, but the thematic focus inhibits good explication of their contexts. Description of the seasonal cycle, for example, is obscured by a simultaneous attempt to classify activities by the principles according to which their workforces are constituted. Neighborship is kept analytically separate from kinship when internal evidence suggests that they must often intersect, and Ott keeps a promise not to look closely at kinship. The introductory overview could better have established context as well as orienting specialists to how data from Ste.-Engrâce compare with those collected in Spain by William Douglass; two obvious points for comparison missing here are the concept of the kindred and the complex of mortuary offerings.

The symbolic connection of blessed bread with the special relations of specific neighbors merits, but does not get, the kind of exploration given to house/*olha* and conception/cheese. Is neighborship, through giving blessed bread, raised—like godparenthood or blood friendship—to a level of sanctity that helps combat an endemic atomism? Similarly, fuller exploration of upper-lower, right-left oppositions might be made, for these and certain asymmetries visible locally are apparently replicated on a regional level (e.g., p. 8).

Ott's focus on detail eclipses systemic considerations in other ways. Emphasis on asymmetry of a few prestations diverts attention from the fact that the system as a whole strains toward balance rather than asymmetry. This is revealed in the total inventory of acts of mutual aid or in such stipulations as that any two *olha* members play inferior and superior roles *vis-à-vis* each other. Only the general strain toward balance explains how Ott can describe $1^{st}N$ relationships, as she frequently does, as both asymmetrical and dyadically reciprocal! While often myopic in this way, and occasionally pressing unnecessarily abstract distinctions (as between serial replace-

ment and rotation, p. 216), Ott makes an important contribution that will stimulate research in new directions.

Deadly Words: Witchcraft in the Bocage. JEANNE FAVRET-SAADA. Catherine Cullen, transl. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980 (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1977). ix + 273 pp., appendixes, references. \$45.00 (cloth), \$12.95 (paper).

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There are no references to Castaneda in this book. But, if there is any theoretical or ethnographic value to his work, Favret-Saada's study of western French witchcraft as a kind of language may be just what is needed to highlight it. For Favret-Saada, research in witchcraft should focus on the experience of those who are involved in the witchcraft world. In the Bocage, this is a historical process that goes from a series of misfortunes, to a statement by a friend or neighbor (the "annunciator") that witchcraft must be involved ("since such misfortunes cannot have natural causes"), to a search for an unwitcher either "for good" (one who will try to build defenses around the bewitched) or "for evil" (one who will directly struggle with the witch and may kill him in the process, or be killed), to the final ritual that will, hopefully, cancel the spell. For Favret-Saada, it is this historical process that must be understood. The details of the rites that are performed, the exact elements from the natural world (plants or animals) that appear in them, or the outlines of the mythological system that frame all this, are of secondary interest and she does not spend any time on them. She makes a strong case that she would have missed the core of the phenomenon if she had insisted on this type of task. The peasants who are "caught" are people who say they do not have the authority to expand on belief systems. They affirm their ignorance and refer the investigator to the "experts" (school teachers, priests). The unwitchers take the same stance. Their knowledge is "other" to the knowledge of the experts from the dominant culture. Its otherness lies precisely in the fact that it is *not* specifiable in propositional form.

This is the center of Favret-Saada's arguments: traditional accounts of witchcraft are made, in published reports, from the point of view of an all-knowing outsider writing down in propositional and declarative form what "they" (the informants, as third persons) know, do, or say. This corresponds to a form of intellectual understanding of the world that is meaningful within the world of the social scientist (because it has been, for centuries, the world of intellectual knowledge). In the Bocage, people never deal with their own knowledge in this fashion. As an "it," it is

foreign to them. It may in fact not quite exist. The only thing that exists is the historical process of having been bewitched and going through the process of the unwitching. This process itself is first and foremost a dialogic process in the sense that it accomplishes itself through a long series of conversations. There are the conversations that make one notice that one's misfortunes cannot be of natural origin, the conversations that establish that witchcraft is indeed involved, and then all the conversations one has with the unwitcher. This is not simply speech that acts, it is speech that kills—"deadly words."

Insofar as this speech, as it is situated within witchcraft episodes, is all there is to witchcraft in the Bocage, Favret-Saada argues that its situated form must be preserved. This is particularly necessary while doing the fieldwork. Witchcraft talk can only be uttered in *actual witchcraft situations*. One cannot collect it unless one satisfies one's audience that one is actually "caught." This requires a different kind of entry into the field and presentation of self from the usual one adopted by ethnographers. Favret-Saada discovered this as she realized that she was learning what there was to learn only after her "informants" treated her as either a powerful unwitcher (since she was not afraid of witchcraft talk) or one that had become bewitched (because of her carelessness). Favret-Saada makes much of her naivety which, at first, made her miss the fact that her speech was not taken at what she thought was its face value, but rather as the speech of one who is caught. At first she only noticed that she was suddenly being told things that had remained unsaid to her. It is only as the conversations proceeded, when it reached the point that she was asked point blank whether she would "return evil for evil," that she saw where she had been led.

At this point Favret-Saada disengaged herself. She wrote a book. In it she does try to reconstitute her experience by recounting in detail the history of the family who revealed witchcraft to her by placing her in the position of the unwitcher. This story makes her point very well. What is missing is a deeper discussion of the ethnographer's dilemma. Favret-Saada had to get caught "as a subject." She cannot present her analysis except through a look at the implication of her subjectivity in the fieldwork process. But the book itself is written in the third person. Favret-Saada did not become an unwitcher. She places her work in contradistinction to the poststructuralist denial of the subject. But what she demonstrates, in fact, is the fragility of the subject. At various times in the book we see Jeanne-as-native, Jeanne-as-naive-ethnographer, Jeanne-as-unwilling-unwitcher. Above all we hear Jeanne-as-critical-author. Where Jeanne "is" is not altogether clear. What is certain is that, chameleonlike, she can participate in many conversations in such a convincing way that her audience can answer her "as if" she were the role the conversation has assigned to her.

But these are questions that go beyond the

book. It is not one of the least of the merits of this excellent book that it allows us to raise them with particular sharpness. It is at least arguable that Jeanne is less interesting than the set of conversations, with their various coherence principles, within which Favret-Saada can be observed competently to perform.

Public Life in Renaissance Florence. RICHARD C. TREXLER. *New York: Academic Press, 1980. xxvi + 591 pp., plates, bibliography, index. \$45.00 (cloth).*

The Laboring Classes in Renaissance Florence. SAMUEL KLINE COHN, JR. *New York: Academic Press, 1980. xii + 296 pp., figures, tables, appendixes, sources, index. \$29.50 (cloth).*

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The publication of these two volumes in the Studies in Social Discontinuity series, together with Ronald F. E. Weissman's forthcoming *Ritual Brotherhood in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Academic Press, 1981), makes this a good year for anthropologists who would like to see a closer collaboration with history in Italian studies. Social history has not yet had as great an impact on the study of Italy as on a number of other European countries, notably France and England; writings on the Renaissance, in particular, have been dominated by its spectacular "high culture." Works with titles announcing them to be about "society," "culture," or "politics" in medieval or early modern Italy frequently prove disappointing to the anthropological reader, who discovers them to be too often confined to artistic products or affairs of state and who looks in vain for the structure of everyday life. A new generation of Renaissance historians, however, is increasingly concerned with social relations as well as ideology, with the silent participants in history as well as those who speak in the documents.

These two books differ in problem, theory, and method, and consequently they relate to anthropological interests in quite different ways. Trexler chronicles the political significance of public ritual in Florence over the two and one-half centuries from 1280 until 1530, using an analytic framework of exchange theory and speaking to the study of ritual as action and communication. Cohn, coming to his topic with an interest in comparative labor history and inspired by the models of such social historians as George Rudé, Charles Tilly, E. P. Thompson, and Eric Hobsbawm, develops systematic analyses of notarial and criminal archives to bring to light the associational patterns underlying the political actions of the Florentine working classes in the 14th and