

**John Leavitt (ed.),** *Poetry and Prophecy: The Anthropology of Inspiration*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997.

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This very rich book presents a series of soundings at the intersection of poetry and prophecy and invites us to examine how each may enhance the understanding of the other. The argument is marked by a lively tension between a Platonic view which locates poetry with inspiration, the mantic and a type of dangerous and, for Plato, unwelcome confusion and the Aristotelian tradition which understands poesis as a kind of making and sees poetry as a craft or art. While the Aristotelian model underpins the conjunction of poetics and linguistics, especially as developed by Jakobson, from which the book departs, the authors are also inspired by poetry and by their encounters with diviners, mediums, shamans, oracles, composers and bards. Leavitt endeavours with considerable energy and erudition to theorize the relationship of inspiration to craft that both poetry and prophecy invite.

The papers demonstrate that the sharper forms of dissociation correlate with neither the more elaborately crafted nor the more “inspired” forms of poetry. Trawick shows the South Indian goddess Mariamman speaking more curtly than her medium would in ordinary conversation. Balzer displays a range of broadly shamanistic Sakha (Siberian) genres across which the degree to which consciousness is altered does not correspond in any obvious way with the manner in which the utterance is crafted. In Leavitt’s North Indian case, oracular medium and poetic bard are complementary figures; elaborated poetic utterances directed to the gods are distinguished from the narrower utterances emanating from the gods. Thus, whereas “the ability to provoke enthusiasm and delight” (p. 149) is used to entice the oracle to appear, the oracle itself does not use poetry to the same extent. The prevalence of poetry in prayers, hymns and formulaic utterances in many societies is surely also to be remarked. In fact, priestly invocations from inscribed texts are often as poetic as the compositions of the prophet. Thus, rather than simply conjoining poetry with prophecy, it might be more useful to examine poetry across a range of types (or ends or functions) of religious communication. Instead, Leavitt identifies himself with a whole series of “head-scratchers” from Plutarch onwards who are perplexed at the thin quality of oracular (prophetic) language.

Leavitt interestingly recoups by defining an “infralinguistic” form of language marked by a flattening of reflexivity—in contrast to poetry defined, following Jakobson, by a heightened reflexivity (“metalinguistic”)—that may be characteristic of oracular language. It is important to recognize that reflexivity refers here not to the psychological state of speakers but to the degree utterances draw attention to themselves as linguistically crafted.

Most poetry in the West, distinguished as “art,” has little political impact. Yet in many societies poetry is all too readily

interpreted as prophecy and the inspired may need to exercise caution. Hence one reason for recourse to infralinguistic codes may be that insofar as the oracles’ words carry weight, speakers are relieved of responsibility for deliberate or unruly significance. Thus they cannot be so easily attributed as committing the sorts of acts that Tedlock ruefully discovers his divination provoked. (Of course, poetry may produce the same ambiguating effect, as Bill McKellin has demonstrated, by opposite means, namely, through what Friedrich here calls “intentional obscurity.”) Moreover, in the case of the Kumaon the oracles’ words are largely restricted to performative utterances of self-identification, blessing and the like (p. 146). Such illocutionary acts do not require the tropological flourishes we associate with perlocutionary exhortations. Indeed, performativeness in the Austinian sense may be impeded by excessive performance in Bauman’s sense of display by an expert and evaluation by an audience, a meta-linguistic playfulness that in drawing attention to itself provokes recognition of the role of language in creating effects that illocutionary performance attempts to naturalize. By contrast, poet-prophets of the more courageous sort, whether Jeremiah or Baudelaire, Adrienne Rich or Robert Bly (to draw from Friedrich’s sly compilation), attempt to create new circumstances rather than reproduce conventional effects.

The larger point here is that in addition to craft and inspiration (and playfulness), the production of poetry or prophecy surely requires the assurance, right or obligation to make certain kinds of public utterances, not simply to compose a song or mutter an epithet under the breath. In certain contexts dissociation may be insufficient to lift social barriers or provide the confidence to attempt to smash them. Hence the “inspirational” effects of dissociation will always be mediated by the political. Put another way, the poetics of speech ought to be understood with respect to the larger system of communicative acts.

This technical argument is quibbling compared to the main contributions of this volume: to turn our attention squarely to the poetry in religious utterances and to beautifully evoke and display it. Tedlock conveys the embodied poesis of Mayan divination. Trawick shows “language which does an emotional job that ordinary language can’t do” (p. 64) in her dialogue with a possessed medium in South India. Balzer reviews a range of shamanistic genres and occasions, situating them with respect to present-day political concerns and pointing to connections between older and more recent forms of creative production, from seances to Sakha rock music. Leavitt, in two separate pieces that together amount to nearly half the book, introduces us respectively to the history of thought about the relations between poetry and prophecy in general, and to the interplay between bards and oracles in the central Himalayas. His skillful hand provides the volume a sure sense of direction that culminates in Friedrich’s unfolding of a series of linguistic and anthropological features of poetry-prophecy through analysis of Pushkin’s poem “The Prophet,” leading inevitably to the conclusion

that Russian and American poets should be considered within the same overarching framework as Greek and Himalayan bards, Siberian shamans and Old Testament prophets. Each author provides skillful translations of significant excerpts of poetic material.

If poet and prophet sometimes fold into each other, several contributors also blur the distinction between themselves and their subjects. Craft suggests apprenticeship and inspiration invites mimesis. Tedlock displays his virtuosity as diviner no less than writer; Balzer portrays herself as client and eager participant; Trawick writes as an ambivalent subject and object of transference. Interestingly variable, these recourses to (romantic) subjectivity stand as sources of the ethnographer's authority—"Having been moved by this poetry/prophesy I can claim to understand it!" Yet understanding is served by a judicious balance of distancing craft and appropriative inspiration; as any literary critic could advise, the best interpretation of a poem is not necessarily the most personal.

If anthropologists have only recently discovered that they have been writing in prose all along, so, Leavitt and his contributors tell us, their subjects have been speaking in poetry. Of course, this very distinction may not be sharply marked in cultural contexts that lack a field of poetics (much like the gift/commodity distinction in societies without economics), but that makes the material all the more interesting. This engaging, elegant book is a welcome call to attend to the poetic elements of religious language, thereby expanding linguistics, poetics and anthropological accounts of religion.

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**Les musées de la Ville de Paris, Palais Galliera, Musée de la Mode et du Costume, *Japonisme et mode*** (catalogue d'exposition), Paris : Paris-Musées, 1996, 208 pages. 112,40 \$, relié.

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Le catalogue d'exposition, lorsqu'une attention suffisante est portée à son élaboration, constitue non seulement un complément à la mise en espace, mais un mode d'accès à part entière au thème exploité. C'est le cas avec cette édition soignée et richement illustrée, réalisée à l'occasion de l'exposition «Japonisme et mode», tenue au Palais Galliera (Musée de la Mode et du Costume), à Paris, du 17 avril au 4 août 1996.

La qualité du contenu de l'exposition et de son catalogue sont redevables en bonne partie à la mise en commun de l'expertise des spécialistes du Palais Galliera à Paris et de ceux du Kyôto Costume Institute au Japon. L'événement a visiblement bénéficié de l'expérience du Kyôto Costume Institute, qui avait organisé une première exposition sur le même thème, en 1994, en collaboration avec le musée national d'art moderne de Kyôto. De plus, le conservateur en chef de l'institut de Kyôto, Akiko Fukai, qui signe un article

substantiel du catalogue de l'exposition parisienne de 1996 («Le japonisme dans la mode», p. 29-54), est également l'auteur d'une monographie sur la question (*Japonisme dans la mode*, Heibonsha, 1994).

Tout en concentrant leurs propos sur l'influence du vêtement japonais dans la mode, les diverses contributions des auteurs du catalogue débouchent plus largement sur la question des échanges culturels entre le Japon et l'Occident, surtout à partir de la deuxième moitié du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. On rappelle ainsi que l'esthétique japonaise a exercé une influence non négligeable sur l'évolution de l'art moderne en Occident, à travers des peintres comme Monet, Manet, Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec, Van Gogh et Bonnard. L'engouement d'une avant-garde artistique pour le Japon, et les répercussions qui s'en suivirent sur les usages et les pratiques culturelles d'une frange des populations européennes, s'explique en partie par l'ouverture du Japon, après 1853, au développement d'échanges commerciaux multilatéraux. Après une période de fermeture quasi totale qui avait duré deux siècles, sous le shôgunat d'Edo, le rétablissement des ponts commerciaux eut pour effet de favoriser, sinon de provoquer, la multiplication des échanges. Ce ne seront pas alors seulement les objets, ni seulement les savoirs et les techniques du Japon, qui feront irruption dans la culture européenne, mais bien une certaine manière de voir japonaise. Un des effets les plus durables de cette irruption, comme le souligne Shûji Takashina (p. 27), sera de réhabiliter, au moins en partie, les arts dits «décoratifs» ou «mineurs», que les canons de l'art moderne avaient tendance à reléguer au second plan, au profit des arts dissociés de toute connotation pratique. Au Japon, en effet, l'objet d'art demeure inscrit dans le quotidien, de telle sorte que les premiers étalages systématiques d'art japonais à l'étranger, dans le cadre des expositions universelles de la deuxième moitié du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, seront disposés dans un environnement domestique reconstitué. On comprendra dès lors que le kimono puisse être considéré par les Japonais comme une oeuvre d'art, au plein sens du terme.

Dans son article, Akiko Fukai affirme que «le japonisme a été l'un des facteurs les plus puissants de l'évolution de la mode» (p. 29). L'influence du vêtement japonais se serait déployée selon elle en quatre étapes : (1) l'introduction du kimono comme élément exotique; (2) l'imitation des motifs japonais et de leurs méthodes d'impression; (3) la prise de conscience de la plastique du kimono; et (4) l'intégration de caractères de l'esthétique japonaise parmi les sources de la création en mode contemporaine. Dès la fin du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, les Hollandais (seuls Européens avec qui le Japon conserva des liens commerciaux sous le shôgunat d'Edo) faisaient fabriquer en Inde des robes de chambre inspirées du kimono. À la fin des années 1880, le fondateur de la haute couture, Charles Frédéric Worth, intégrait à ses créations des broderies à motifs japonais et des compositions asymétriques, utilisant entre autres les tissus lyonnais «à la japonaise». À partir de 1903, Paul Poiret commença à créer des vêtements inspirés du kimono. Après 1918, Madeleine Vionnet faisait