

BOOK REVIEWS

□ SOCIAL SCIENCES □

Anthropology & Customs

Gélis, Jacques. **History of Childbirth: Fertility, Pregnancy, and Birth in Early Modern Europe.**

Northeastern Univ. Pr. Aug. 1991. c.342p. illus. bibliog. index. ISBN 1-55553-102-4. \$45; pap. ISBN 1-55553-105-9. \$15.95. ANTHRO

In this meticulously researched book, Gélis examines childbirth in Western continental Europe from the Middle Ages to the 19th century. He explores practices, beliefs, rituals, and customs surrounding fertility, conception, birth, and early childhood. Although his interests are clearly anthropological, this book is of value to women's studies, history of medicine, and social history collections. The role of folklore and magic in the rites of childbirth are central to this work. However, Gélis stops short of examining the transition into 20th century practice. Furthermore, with such heavy emphasis on continental Europe, there are few English references for North American researchers. Still, this is a valuable treatise and is highly recommended for academic libraries.—*Mary Hemmings, Univ. of Calgary Law Lib., Alberta*

Smith, Alexander McCall.

Children of Wax: African Folk Tales.

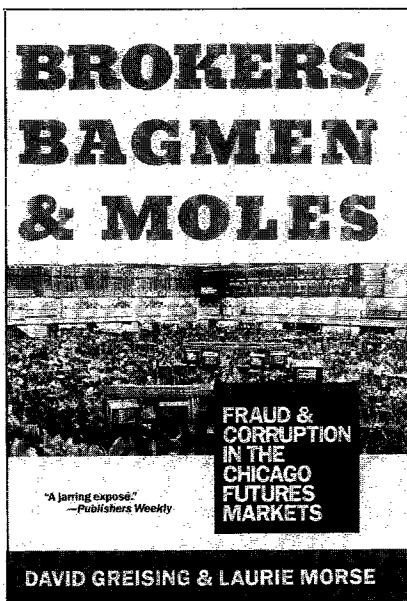
Interlink Bks: Interlink Pub. Group. 1991. 119p. LC 90-47969. ISBN 0-940793-78-4. \$22.95; pap. ISBN 0-940793-73-3. \$9.95. FOLKLORE

These recently collected tales are emphatically not children's pabulum: they are full of danger, violence, and death. There is a near-obsession with food and water, hunger and thirst. Although anthropomorphic animals and other supernatural elements figure here, they are taken for granted. The dominant note is a vivid—even stark—realism. Behaviors most strongly condemned in the narratives are fickleness, foolish trust, greed, and overreaching, but selfish and even treacherous acts sometimes go unpunished. (One story describes a cruel revenge worthy of a 16th-century melodrama.) There is an apparently unironic account of the evolution of baboons from humans. While folktales from West Africa are familiar to many, this collection may give greater currency to the traditional tales of Matabeleland in Zimbabwe.—*Patricia Dooley, Univ. of Washington Lib. Sch., Seattle*

The Sun Maiden and the Crescent Moon: Siberian Folk Tales.

Interlink Bks: Interlink Pub. Group. 1991. 205p. tr. by James Riordan. ISBN 0-940793-66-0. \$24.95; pap. ISBN 0-940793-65-2. \$11.95. FOLKLORE

Another collection of folk tales from In-



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terlink. The two collections of Siberian folktales in *Books in Print* are both scholarly and expensive. In his new collection, Riordan provides an extensive ethnographic introduction, a glossary, and a (half-Russian) bibliography but little discussion of the specific tales included and no data on their collection. The tales themselves are polished without being too "literary." There are familiar types (e.g., hero and etiological tales) and themes (e.g., condemnation of human foolishness, greed, and selfishness). Most striking, though, are the qualities that bring these stories to the border of myth: the vividness of the spirit world, pervasive animism, and interaction with divine beings. The extreme physical setting, especially the frozen tundra, adds to the exotic and memorable atmosphere of the book. Even without the high current interest in the USSR and its peoples, this collection is a fascinating cultural resource.—*Patricia Dooley, Univ. of Washington Lib. Sch., Seattle*

Biography

Bearing Witness: Selections from 150 Years of African-American Autobiography.

Pantheon. 1991. c.494p. ed. by Henry L. Gates Jr. photogs. LC 90-52538. ISBN 0-394-58522-4. \$16. AUTOBIOG
A publishing phenomenon during the 1960s and 1970s, the outpouring of anthologies on the black experience in recent years has dwindled to a trickle, given educational

budgetary limitations and waning interest on the part of academics and white readers in things black. Gates's compendium is therefore a welcome new addition. Classic self-portraits by W.E.B. DuBois, J. Saunders Redding, Langston Hughes, and Richard Wright are anthologized, along with more recent pieces by Malcolm X, James Baldwin, Amiri Baraka, and Eldridge Cleaver. Contemporary authors such as Samuel R. Delaney, John Wideman, and Bell Hooks are also represented. Perhaps the most moving of the autobiographical vignettes is historian John Hope Franklin's account of his struggle to attain his present position as the doyen of historians of the black American experience. The contributions by African American academic superstar Gates might be termed as minimal (his introduction and notes do little to enhance this anthology), although the excerpts that he selected will prove useful and interesting to academic and general reading audiences.—*Norman Lederer, Thaddeus Stevens State Sch. of Technology, Lancaster, Pa.*

Greenberg, Paul. **Resonant Lives: Fifty Figures of Consequence.**

Ethics & Public Policy Ctr. Aug. 1991. c.190p. permanent paper. index. ISBN 0-89633-153-9. \$19.95. BIOG

Pulitzer Prize-winning newspaper columnist Greenberg captures the essence of 50 contributors to politics, literature, and history in these short sketches, some of them obituaries, collected for the first time. Such diverse figures as George Washington, Orville Faubus, Samuel Beckett, and H.L. Mencken appear, treated with a clarity and brevity characteristic of journalism at its best. In one sketch Greenberg defends writer John O'Hara by pointing out how much more dynamic his prose is than that of Henry James, who always puts him to sleep. The conservative political tone, though irksome at times, never descends into bigotry; on the contrary, a strong support of civil rights is evident in several of the sketches. Despite Greenberg's journalistic talents, however, this volume has a limited appeal. The pieces, while enlightening, are too brief to provide any but the most cursory of information.—*Nancy R. Ives, SUNY at Geneseo*

★Hamilton, Charles V. Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.: **The Political Biography of an American Dilemma.**

Atheneum. Sept. 1991. c.448p. photogs. index. ISBN 0-689-12062-1. \$24.95. BIOG
Powell (1908-72) fused a complex mix of temperament and tactics into a discomfiting, loud leadership of racial protest

