

EDITORIAL FOREWORD

This issue is concerned, first, with a recent controversy that raises serious questions about the relationship between research, writing, editing and publication, and second, with a re-occurring categorical issue in the field of anthropology and the dance. Glasser's essay on the notion of "primitive dance" takes its place in a line of prominent writers and critics on the subject, starting with Joanne Keali'inohomoku in 1969. Glasser's article serves as a notably appropriate theoretical and ethnographic accompaniment to the first section of the issue, which contests an outrageous editorial treatment of two encyclopedia articles.

For the two authors of the encyclopedia articles, Drid Williams and Gillian Fisher, whose original writing (see pp. 143-151 and 154-158) was edited into the virtually unrecognizable, shortened versions (see pp. 152-153 and 159-160), two questions were of dominant interest.

1. When does editing become plagiarism? and
2. Where is the line between traditionally conceived editorial powers and perquisites and an insidious form of editorial prerogative which casts editors as executioners, and authors as the victims of literary homicide?

Four (now nearly five) years ago, Williams was invited to contribute to an *Encyclopedia of Aboriginal Australia*, whose publishers will remain nameless. She was asked to write a general article; an overview of *traditional* Aboriginal dancing, meant to include the whole of Australia. Roughly two years later, Fisher was invited to write a piece for the same publication, similar with regard to generality to Williams's overview, although not as long, on *contemporary* Aboriginal dancing. Arnold's contribution (for which we could not get hold of an edited version) was meant to be specific: an article about the dances in one area of Aboriginal Australia. He did research on the Carpentaria side of Cape York Peninsula.

In this issue of JASHM, we are publishing the unedited versions of the three articles on Aboriginal dancing in the interests of scholarly research. Readers of the encyclopedia will not be able to benefit from the writers' research because the original articles will not appear in the Encyclopedia. We think the original work should be made available, in part because the literature on

the study of Australian dances is less well-known outside the continent than is literature on the dances of other peoples. We think JASHM's readers will be interested in the wealth of bibliographic references and in the many new insights they stand to gain into Aboriginal dancing and dances which is a direct result of the kind of original research and writing contributed by the authors.

We decided to publish the edited versions of two of the articles in JASHM because of serious general questions they raise with reference to editing in particular, and research and publication in general. The edited versions of Fisher's and Williams's work is to be found immediately following the original versions of their articles. We invite readers to compare the edited versions with the original writing. We hope judgements will be made regarding content, form, substance, quality and intent. We would welcome comments in the form of *Letters to the Editors*, should anyone care to write them -- to share (or perhaps to argue with) our perceptions. We are not, of course, suggesting that *all* editorial control, nor all encyclopedic enterprises, has fallen into this sad state of affairs, but neither do we want to overlook the problems that can, and often do, arise for serious scholars and the results of their research.

The depth of the problem in this case was drawn to our attention when the edited versions of the articles were forwarded to the authors accompanied by a letter from the editors of the encyclopedia *presuming there was nothing wrong with what they had done* to the original writings. The publisher's letter expressed hopes, for example, that Fisher and Williams would find the edited versions of their work "pleasing"; that they would look forward to seeing "their writing" in its final form. They were cautioned, of course, about making any major changes -- only minor changes would be tolerated. The editorial letter was filled with platitudes that, to the authors, did not serve to conceal the *real* editorial message which Fisher and Williams agree goes something like this: "Your article will appear in this form. We want your consent, and we have to let you see what has been done, but don't raise awkward questions because we don't want to be bothered and we are about to go to press".

Both authors were initially shocked, then extremely angry about the butchery of their work. Neither author recognised the edited versions as her own. Both authors agreed that the edited versions read, to them, like the work of plagiarists, who had used their original articles as a basis for something

wholly other. JASHM readers can see what the second set of writers worked from -- but that is about all. Neither edited version bears much resemblance to its original, but that is why we are publishing both. Unfortunately, readers of the forthcoming encyclopedia won't know what happened. They will think that Williams and Fisher actually wrote the impoverished and distorted edited versions.

Further aggravation was caused by the fact that the authors were not given sufficient time to withdraw from the whole enterprise. They were perplexed, too, by the question of money: does the fact they were paid nominal sums for the writing they did give the editors of the encyclopedia a warrant to savage their work in these ways?

The edited versions of Williams and Fishers articles perpetuate some of the worst possible stereotypes about dancing, the status of the dance as an academic subject, and images of Aboriginal dances.

In the authors' opinions, it would have been better to cut the articles entirely, or publish them under the names of those who ultimately wrote them, because Fisher and Williams didn't.

The Editors