

***Morning Dew and Roses: Nuance, Metaphor, and Meaning in Folksongs.* By Barre TOELKEN. Publications of the American Folklore Society, New Series. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995. Pp. xiii + 189.)**

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Linda Dégh has been one of the pioneers in the study of folklore in modern society. She was one of the first scholars to point out the importance of the mass media as a transmitter of folk narratives in the modern world. She did not view the mass media as a destroyer of folklore, as many of her contemporary colleagues did. She pointed out, on the contrary, the mass media helped folklore to travel faster and farther, and creatively transformed story plots, motifs and episodes for new audiences. In the study of modern narratives, Dégh's approach is also on the innovative storyteller, shaping the variants with a personal creativity moulded by society and tradition. In the modern world the individual storyteller can be replaced by an invisible professional entertainer, the TV or newspaper. But the creative storyteller is able to use television as a source for creating new narratives, integrating the plots and motifs of television series into traditional narratives, as she shows in the charming essay, "Two Old World Narrators on the Telephone."

This book is a scholarly biography, as already noted, but in many ways it is also a personal narrative. Linda Dégh is able to communicate to her readers her delight in the wonderful narratives, her admiration for creative storytellers, and her involvement with the people behind the folklore text. Together with her forceful defence of folklore scholarship, this makes her work enjoyable reading.

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*Morning Dew and Roses: Nuance, Metaphor, and Meaning in Folksongs.* By Barre TOELKEN. Publications of the American Folklore Society, New Series. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995. Pp. xiii + 189.)

In the summer of 1972 I read for the first time Barre Toelken's "Riddles Wisely Expounded" essay in a 1966 issue of *Western Folklore* and was entranced with its very satisfying, completely credible interpretation of a folksong's covert meanings. Toelken's insights inspired my own embryonic forays into textual

signification; I wished dearly he would publish more such analyses of Anglo-American folksong. But the lucid, engaging *Dynamics of Folklore* and the subtleties of Native American Indian poetics had evidently superseded folksong in his interests. During the seventies and eighties, he was intellectually otherwise occupied. Younger scholars are cited liberally and generously throughout Toelken's long awaited, at last arrived book on folksong semantics, *Morning Dew and Roses*, but the reader should not be misled by this collegial civility into mistaking the author's true role as a trailblazer.

The book itself examines how folksong "metaphors... make palpable the greatest joys, ambiguities, and ironies of life," qualities that accompany such profound human experiences as "love, death, betrayal, reversals of fortune, and the like" (p. 159). Toelken's "metaphor" is a more protean construct than the term usually designates — indeed, practically any sort of figure, from a homonym (barnyard cock=phallus) to imagery of relative location (inside/outside). Chapter One's task is to lay out such concepts basic to the inquiry; most critical is that, in contrast with more cryptographic notions of what constitutes a signifier (as in classic psychoanalytical decodings, New Criticism, semiotics), Toelken's metaphors signify in multileveled, evocative, resonant, associational, and connotative ways ("vernacular imagery" is the volume's second most-employed term for the same concept).

Chapter Two argues for the value of folklore study in general, folksong meaning in particular. Here Toelken targets readers more intellectually comfortable with canonical, written literature than with quotidian, oral culture: "Vernacular poetry," he writes, "gives voice to the recurrent, traditional, or striking activities and values that continue to animate everyday life. In doing so, the text of a folksong combines recognizable human actions into constellations of foregrounded meaning, into concrete dramatizations of cultural abstractions" (p. 28). Chapter Three, "Some Contexts of Folksong Metaphors," sketches lightly a text/context map most folklorists will feel comfortable enough with; it distinguishes various interfacing levels and domains of context, insisting that full understanding of a folksong text depends on knowledge of its motifs' other appearances in the culture's imaginative art, of what the vocabulary employed and the customs and beliefs referred to look like in their everyday-practice guise, or other versions of the song, and so on. Toelken illustrates how these multiple, interlocking systems of context illuminate song texts with examples both primary, such as a New England family's singing of "Rolling

Home" after each Thanksgiving dinner, and secondary, such as a set of Child ballads on the night visit.

While ethnographically-based examples — this is to say, situated folksong performances the author observed and even participated in himself — are scattered throughout, Chapter Four's subject matter is centred wholly on field research. The place is an Austrian mountain village, the time some twenty-odd years ago, the people the extended family of Hermann and Elisabeth Kossner, the folksong activity yodeling. The semantics of yodeling are very similar to those of the Anglo-American ballad singing treated in the rest of the volume, and the analytical procedures for interrelating texts with various contexts (singing occasion, everyday custom and life experience, world view, values, song aesthetics, native exegesis) are perfectly applicable to ballads, even though ballads carry a heavier information load than the usually non-discursive, non-narrative yodels.

Grounded in a more textual sensibility, Chapter Five ("Multiple Metaphors and Meaning") explores the figurative wealth of mostly plant and bird images, especially those like the rose-briar motif that are so deeply embedded in the folksong tradition's textual storehouse they become part of a song's actual *plot* structure. In Chapter Six we meet a modern version of my old love, the riddle-ballad essay, wonderfully perceptive to the several layers of referentiality in "The Elfin Knight" (Child 2) and its kin. Toelken reveals Child 2, for instance, to be more than a pretty conceit of hyperbolic and topsy-turvy "impossible tasks" a pair of lovers set for each other (find an acre of land in the space where sea and shore meet, plough it with a single ram's horn, reap it with a leather sickle, and so forth): each lover is modeling for the other, in metaphor, the act of coition. In this chapter, I think, the book's central thesis of semantic multivocality, multivalence, nuance, irony, and so forth is not only most strikingly demonstrated but most convincingly argued. Chapter Seven chiefly treats water metaphors and displays especially interesting insights into semantic resonances between "Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight" (Child 4) and "Young Hunting" (Child 68), two ballads in which even the master himself, F. J. Child, did not see similarities worthy of cross-reference. Not only water, but also birds, horses, inside/outside, and up/down all act as powerfully centripetal signifiers linking these two very popular ballads. An Epilogue on two songs in which weaving metaphors feature prominently appositely ties up the investigation's ends.

Given the extreme diversity of interests and ways-of-seeing within folklore study today, it is probably unnecessary to say that many readers will fault *Morning Dew and Roses* for what it is not, particularly, I suspect, for not being of a more poststructuralist persuasion; I guarantee that Toelken will be accused of essentialism, romanticism, and organicism, at the very least. But I think such accusations will be shortsighted, for the quality that stands out for me from all others — and that surely all readers will experience — is the analyses' consistent ability to elicit from me insights that I would doubtfully have had otherwise, a dialogue of the co-operative rather than of the contestative sort that many cultural theorists prefer, but surely an engagement that no sensible person would turn thumbs down on. For example, in Chapter Three, Toelken shows that the night-visit story-type's customary scenario (man's arrival at his love's window, his entry into her bed chamber, the cock's crow, the lover's departure) is an extended metaphor for sexual intercourse. I had always taken night visits to be *euphemistic* songs of sexual liaisons (this type represents sex in such terms as "he slept in her all til day," is nonfigurative, and makes a practical and moral point, for instance, warning girls against sex with partners of higher social status). These euphemistic songs I distinguished from *metaphorical* songs of sexual liaisons ("he mowed her meadow with his scythe"), which exhibit not only a different signifying vocabulary (metaphorical rather than euphemistic) but also a different world view (sexual dalliance is a form of play, with no real-world consequences or moral ramifications). Toelken has allowed me to see that the night visit faithfully fits *both* the euphemistic *and* the metaphorical models, resulting in an aesthetic and semantic coherence that I was never able to discover on my own. Moreover, I now see that the recurring night visit song motif of the girl's begging the cock not to crow too soon, a plea it never grants, matches perfectly a feature common in metaphorical songs of sexual liaisons: the contrast between the girl's sexual stamina and desire for an extended experience (she wants the spent male to continue his lovemaking) and the man's lack of it (his first orgasm achieved, he always wants to leave in haste).

Similarly, thanks to Toelken's analysis of riddle ballads, it is possible to suggest that the lovers' flirting in these songs evokes the same associations. In Child 2, for instance, the man sets the maid seemingly impossible tasks to perform, but they are double entendres for sexual intercourse; if you perform these, he says,

our act of lovemaking will be completed ("you will be a true lover of mine"). But she delays that completion by responding with a set of equally impossible, and just as sexually connotive, tasks for *him*. She is exhibiting a version of stamina by deferring consummation, as it were, extending the encounter to revel in the process (positively valued in the female world view) rather than in the act's accomplishment (the male imperative). The maid in Child 46, "Captain Wedderbuen's Courtship," might very well be doing the same thing by answering the man's sexually suggestive riddles so that he has to keep thinking of *fresh* ones to pose, getting more and more frustrated that she, too, like the Elfin's Knight's partner, is deferring consummation (when she *cannot* answer and "must lie next to the wall").

*Morning Dew* is a most enjoyable and stimulating work, achieving far more than the author modestly claims for it. May I speak for most folksong scholars and say that I hope Barre Toelken will concentrate his efforts on ballads for a while? He has neglected us for too long.

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*Ireland, a Bicycle, and a Tin Whistle.* By David A. WILSON.  
(Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995. Pp. 175.)

David A. Wilson is a Canadian professor of Celtic Studies who was born and spent his early childhood in Northern Ireland. This book is an account of his cycling tour around Ireland together with his "musings and meanderings about Irish music, folklore, fakelore, culture, and history," as the blurb puts it.

His primary interest is music, so his journey is punctuated by the folk festivals he visits and the sessions he seeks out in towns and villages along the way. Folklorists will find his depiction of the Irish music scene to be of interest, from the more "ethnographic" writing about traditional music sessions to his comments on the commercialization of the village of Doolin, famous for its music ("a victim of its own success"), to his dismissal of the role of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, the national organization for