

strong national self-knowledge is the best antidote to that. (It is not by chance that Christopher Murray subtitled his book *Mirror up to Nation*.) Mária Kurdi's book clearly points out how much the Irish can thank their dramatists for teaching them this lesson.

Contemporary (Anglo)-Irish drama, however important it may be for readers and theatre-goers in English-speaking countries, is still very little known in Hungary. This fact can only increase the importance of this book, devoted as it is to a significant subject, providing a mass of information, conveying a message useful to be delivered to our part of the world, and written in clear, plain, readable Hungarian.

Renwick, Roger deV. *Recentering Anglo-American Folksong: Sea Crabs and Wicked Youths*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2001. 183 pp.

Andrew C. Rouse

In the "Introduction" to this long-awaited volume, Roger Renwick provides us with what might be described as a definitive list of the important collectors and scholars of Anglo/American folk songs, beginning with D. K. Wilgus, whose "intellectual history of *Anglo-American Folksong Scholarship Since 1898*" (ix) was published in 1959, and continuing with Bronson, Coffin and Laws, all of them followers of the great nineteenth-century collector of Harvard University Francis James Child. Renwick's own book is not intended to follow suit with these names, all of them so familiar to the ballad scholar, but rather to examine why the study of folksong has lost the influence it once had, and why "increasingly it seems that the same fate may very well be in store for the supra-discipline, folklore itself" (xii).

I should perhaps point out from the very beginning that although the title of Renwick's book refers to "Anglo/American Folksong," many of his non-American—or rather, "pre-American" examples include songs that have variants all over the British Isles. Hence on page 62: "anglophone folksong: marriage between a young girl and an old man. The first is probably of Irish origin . . ." The adjective "British," though it may prove anathematic to other authors in this volume, is used freely and with some justice by Renwick to songs which have spread throughout all the geographical areas of the British Isles and later beyond, to America, Canada, Australia . . . , unintentionally but validly raising a question mark about the exclusive characters of different ethnic groups with what should be seen as a long common past within the British Isles. It is certain that the vernacular traditions of these peoples—English, Scots, Irish etc.—transgressed and trespassed the borders set up by administration and officialdom.

Renwick's opening premise is that the "raw and organized data, gathered under the pre-1970 way of thinking, [is] going to waste because it's incompatible with the post-1970 way of thinking" (xii). The following chapters of the book, originally written as individual essays, employ a variety of methods: "I draw upon any epistemological, theoretical, or methodological principles that can aid me in this task of gestalt-building [. . .] idealist or realist, pre-postmodern or postmodern, text-centered or performance-centered" (xv).

In the first of these, "On Theorizing Folksong: Child Ballads in the West Indies," Renwick refutes earlier ideas that Caribbean variants of British folk songs—specific-

cally “The Maid Freed From the Gallows,” “Bonny Barbara Allen,” “Our Goodman,” and “Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard”—are the results of Creolization, and in doing so raises question marks about the usefulness of analyses that “beg the question.” He shows that while initially it appears that new variants have been created out of moulding together older British content with newer Creole experience, eventually it would appear that these variants are not only *not* new, but in fact sometimes even seem to pre-date the British song, having arrived in England (Scotland, Ireland—he does not mention Wales) from the European mainland.

The second chapter “accepts the premise that a song’s whole tradition—its life history, so to speak—is an important context within which one must see any single version.” It uses textual analysis to trace the journey of “The Wild and Wicked Youth,” an eighteenth-century British broadside ballad about a young man condemned to death after turning to highway robbery to satisfy the expensive tastes of his wife, into the oral tradition and across the Atlantic, where it not only takes on one, but (at least) two identifiable and separate American identities. These Northern-states and Southern-states transmogrifications appear not only formally, in the text and the music (turning the broadside ballad into a blues ballad), but also ideologically, where the southern versions appear to echo the southerners’ dislike of any kind of social philosophy, so that, as the author states citing David Hackett Fischer, “in the first decades of the twentieth century southerners tended to distrust and even hate capitalists and communists with equal intensity” (56-57). In the best tradition of ballad—as in drama—criticism, Renwick always keeps an eye for performance, and those parts of performance that are not contained upon the paper. Of the various instances that he mentions, perhaps the most astonishing is that collected by Maude Sutton and sung by a Mrs. Ann Coffey of Caldwell County, North Carolina, at a time when “one of her two sons was condemned to death for murder and the other was a deserter from the army” (53). Altogether, the ever-punctilious Renwick has collected 24 broadside versions of the ballad, as well as a number of oral variants from both sides of the Atlantic and all over the USA.

Chapter Three concerns itself with the Anglo/American catalogue song, and begins by bemoaning the fact that while the ballad has virtually become “a self-perpetuating activity,” this has led to “other traditional song types [being] neglected, with the result that we have nothing else approaching a seminal work on any other genre” (59, 60), although a second type is sometimes referred as the lyric. Renwick then states that he wishes to do something to rectify the situation, and to “make here a stab at identifying the textual conventions of a third Anglo/American traditional song genre,” to which he gives the name of *catalogue song* (60). He starts by producing a Venn diagram of three mutually interlinking circles, each representing the ballad, the lyric and the catalogue, showing that while there are songs that can be classed as ballads, lyrics or catalogues, there are also those which are a combination of any two or all three of the above genres. Renwick sets out by providing two examples of songs with the same story line, demonstrating that the seemingly near-identical texts in fact belong to two disparate types, the ballad and—to use his own terminology—the catalogue song, a genre often characterized by what in folklore is referred to as “incremental repetition” (64).

The catalogue concept has already appeared in dictionaries of literary terms as a “trope in formal rhetoric” (64). What Renwick has done is to apply it to folksong scholarship. He proceeds by identifying five cataloguing patterns, for—as he states—the

problem is not in recognition, for the genre is common and widespread in Anglo/American song, but in identifying it, showing that the formal patterns constitute a set, often the “juxtaposing of [. . .] vignettes” (67). The simplest form he identifies as *enumeration*. However, this is only one kind of catalogue. Another pattern, more complex than a mere list, is that of *iteration*. The iteration that he refers to is in poetic structure, not in vocabulary—in other words, new vocabulary in subsequent verses appears in a pattern recognizable from the first. This is a technique common both in oral and written literature. Renwick points out the difference between this kind of iteration, which is “cognitive and artistic,” and that of a refrain or burden, which is “behavioral” (69).

Renwick’s third type of catalogue song pattern is that of *incrementation*, which is similar to iteration, but varies in that while the verses of the latter may be sung in any order “with no loss to the song’s poetic, aesthetic or semantic values,” the former must be performed in one particular stanza order to make maximum (or any) sense. Critically at this point, the author switches from humorous examples (so far he has presented five) to two religious ballads, demonstrating that the cataloguing technique can be used to serious effect as well.

The fourth and, Renwick states, “perhaps the most distinctive syntactical pattern in Anglo/American catalogue songs [. . .] is a cumulative one, which [. . .] we could call *cumulation*” (72). It might also be called the “pure” catalogue song, for Renwick displays that it uses the technique throughout, and “never to my knowledge combines [. . .] with noncatalogue ways of articulating images” (72). Perhaps the most widely-known of all cumulative songs is “The Twelve Days of Christmas,” for it has transcended the folk community.

Renwick’s fifth and last type of catalogue song is *dialogue*, which he differentiates from “just dramatic speech; a folksong dialogue is analogous to a literary flyting (poetic turn-taking between two ‘contestants,’ often adversaries who are abusive of each other) or *débat*” (74).

After listing, describing and providing examples of his four identified categories, the author proceeds to look at their properties: boundedness, stasis, redundancy, atomism and determinacy. Altogether he convincingly shows that catalogue topics are restricted in time, space and evolution (i.e. they do not evolve). This may be a critical characteristic of the genre, significantly setting it apart from either the lyrical or the balladic form. Redundancy refers to textual repetition, while atomism, Renwick’s fourth defining feature of catalogue semiotic, attracts one’s attention to the equal or “significant semantic weight” (83) of each stanza. Determinacy, Renwick’s fifth category, concerns the predictability of the catalogue, so that “a competent listener probably knows not only where the song is going after hearing two or three stanzas but, even if he or she comes in at the middle or end of the song’s performance, where it’s come from” (85).

Finally in this middle chapter, Renwick examines the uses and preferences for performing catalogue songs, which range from group singing, sacred songs, where, the author suggests, its repetitive character is “particularly compatible with [. . .] litany and incantation” (88), ritualistic songs and pure “good company” songs—here Renwick employs the British collector Peter Kennedy’s phrase.

Chapter Four changes tack again, as Renwick investigates an “unrecognized Anglo/American ballad” to which he has given the name “Oh, Willie” (93). This bal-

lad, he claims, has been passed over as a variant of other songs. With Renwick's unfailingly painstaking thoroughness, not only Renwick's "Oh, Willy" itself, but the similar songs which hitherto have been taken as sources or alternative "original" titles for "Oh, Willy," are investigated to show the essential differences among them and to provide proof that "Oh, Willy" is a distinguishable, separate song—"its own ballad: even though—as folklore will do—it dialogues with other songs in the Anglo/American traditional repertoire [. . .] it enjoys its own ancestry, inheriting its dominant genes from a song surviving in at least one form, John Pittst's early-nineteenth-century London broadside," having "at some point in its history [. . .] interfaced directly with a British song of oral circulation, "The Isle of Cloy" (114-15). From the chapter exudes a triumphant joy that can probably only be compared with the naturalist's identification of a new species of flora or fauna.

I must confess to some involvement with the fifth chapter, for I was present when Roger Renwick presented his plenary paper on "The Crabfish" (the title of this final chapter) at the conference celebrating the one-hundredth anniversary of the English Folk Dance and Song Society, held in 1998 at Sheffield University. The delivery of that paper—not the first time that the author had chosen the topic for such an occasion—was an hilarious, roaring success, and its written form, while not putting one quite so entirely into stitches as the verbally delivered version, still had me as a reader chuckling aloud as I read it. It is the perfect example of how academic work can be transferred in a manner that is as vastly entertaining as it is trustworthily informative.

Of course, it helps if your subject-matter happens to be a five-hundred-year-old obscene folk song. "The Crabfish" can be traced that far back; moreover, it can be traced not only as a song but also as a folk tale, and not merely within the confines of the English-speaking world—England, Scotland, Canada, the United States, and Australia (124) but also in India, Vietnam, France, Turkey, and elsewhere.

The tone of the story will be familiar to anyone who has read Chaucer. A man (husband or lover, often a cleric) brings home a crab for lunch, but having nowhere else to store it, puts it in the chamberpot. Not noticing, his wife/lover sits to relieve herself and is caught by the pudendum. The man rushes to her aid, but is grabbed on the nose by the crab's free pincer. (Chaucer would have loved it—it has definite echoes of Absolon.)

But the story, we are reminded by Renwick, also has roots in folklore, in the form of the tale of the Princess who would not laugh until she saw a long line of people who had been stuck together as the result of a maid trying to pluck the feather of a magic goose.

Reminding us that the song is performed almost—yet not quite, as we shall see—by men, Renwick proceeds to analyze the tale in the best Freudian tradition to discover precisely why it has maintained its popularity over at least half a millennium. He suggests that while its essential story line possesses a "global or 'transnational' culture" (133), different parts of the world create variants that seem to be culture-specific. Page 134 provides a long list of the different characters who are attached to each other through the crabfish. He follows this up by investigating the reason for the crab's presence at all, the parts of the anatomy to which it attaches itself, the way in which attempts are made to dislodge it, and the animal's eventual fate.

The final pages of the chapter are devoted to how, at the beginning of the twentieth century, a certain Mrs. Emma Overd of Langport, Somerset decided to break all the taboos regarding female performance of the song when she was approached by the folksong collector Cecil Sharp, using the song to examine motivation for performance. The book concludes with an Afterword, in which the author reminisces his own studenthood in the late 1960s, at a time when new methods were being introduced to folklore research. As a young man “like everyone else, I was attracted, for they helped me expand my understanding [. . .] What *didn't* attract me was that [. . .] these “new perspectives” were too often explained within the terms of Thomas Kuhn’s *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, which [. . .] stressed [. . .] you could only embrace the new if you rejected the old” (151). This is the core issue of Roger deV. Renwick’s present book, and as one reads through it one is primarily impressed by the way in which he is able to employ whatever theory is most appropriate for his subject matter. Indeed, he goes further, reminding those of us that study because we take delight in what we examine that “theoretical loyalty had to be secondary, had to emerge from subject loyalty: if a theory didn’t make folksong interesting; if, however elegant and compelling, it didn’t fit the obvious facts of the data; if it directed attention away from song and toward explanatory construct, then it wasn’t for me” (151-52).

Substitute the word “folksong” for whatever your own area of study may happen to be.

Bolger, Dermot. *The Passion of Jerome*. London: Methuen, 1999. 89 pp.

Mária Kurdi

Dermot Bolger’s career as playwright started with the works later published in a volume titled *A Dublin Quartet* (1992), which can best be described in terms of variations on the theme of quest, offering a sense of home, home country and identity as fluid and protean. Following the measurable success of this debut, *April Bright* (1995) broke a new path by channeling the search into a more personal direction. *The Passion of Jerome* (1999), written by Bolger during his writer-in-residence period at the Abbey Theatre, continues along largely the same line, having its protagonist encounter the ghosts of the past impinging on the present of contemporary Celtic Tiger Dublin life fractured by significant social differences. It stages the unfolding crisis and subsequent transformation of forty-year-old Jerome, a faithless Catholic who at first cynically labels himself as “an honest hypocrite” (8), and is shown involved in a vehement extramarital love affair with a much younger colleague his wife trusts as friend. Moreover, married to a rich Protestant woman he imagines himself happy without kids, referring to them as mere “appendages” (20), and appears to feel comfortable enough amid his entangled relationships. The play depicts how this complacent enough mask gets fiercely punctured, revealing inner hollowness behind a web of delusions and lies.

On the level of theatrical space *April Bright* changes the broader environment as setting in the earlier plays for a haunted house, well known from the Irish dramatic tradition, where a couple move in and strive to embark on a new life epitomized by the baby they expect. Likewise, the flat that the protagonist in *Jerome* tries to make into a kind of home (for clandestine meetings in this case) turns out to be haunted: the ghost