**Folklore and Nation in Britain and Ireland**, edited by Matthew Cheeseman and Carina Hart, Abingdon, Routledge, 2022, 336 pp., £39.99 (paperback), ISBN 9781032071824

How people construct, recognise, appropriate and shape identity is the central thread of this collection, which demonstrates how folklore is integral to understanding contemporary society and politics in Britain and Ireland. The rich introduction points to different perspectives in folkloristics but each of the authors highlight, in a variety of ways, the importance of rigorous academic engagement with folklore. The presence of authors from different disciplines in the collection is a strength that contributes to broadening the readership and the potential to expand the discourse on common areas of interest beyond narrow disciplinary perspectives.

With an identification of place foregrounded in the book’s title, it is necessary to develop distinctions between England and Britain (as acknowledged by the editors), and while the contributions that refer to Irish examples are valuable, there is limited integration of the Irish context. The title also explicitly references “nation” and the collection both reflects the heightened interest in nationalism and the paradox of how “regional folklore comes to represent and even speak for the nation” (7). Throughout the book, the changing sense of Englishness and use or co-option of folk culture to promote the views of particular groups is a thread, from considerations of the history of English music and dance by Derek Schofield and Matt Simons, to Kate Smith’s call to resist ‘the co-option of Norse and Anglo-Saxon Studies by white supremacists’ (262) and Andrew Fergus Wilson’s examination of Far-Right political groups. Of note, particularly for ethnographers, is Smith’s development of ethical questions in relation to digital ethnography, presenting a clear stance in relation to hate speech.

Several chapters, notably those by Terry Gunnell and Wilson, demonstrate how sharing knowledge about different practices and beliefs can lead to a more holistic understanding of the society in which we live, as there is a need “to understand the religio-cultural resources that provide a sense of belonging and identity to individuals and groups across the far right” (254). Gunnell provides a well-written foundation for the collection, returning to the Brothers Grimm and providing a wider international context for the chapters that follow. He compares activities across several countries, emphasising commonality rather than difference and identifying two parallel approaches to identifying collections as either national or local (28, 29). To this end, recurring references to the figure of Robin Hood as both a national and local figure across a number of chapters is interesting. Engaging with the character of Hood, Carina Hart extends the emphatically local paradigm (233) to action on a national scale by drawing comparison with former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and the eco-protest movement including Extinction Rebellion. Tabitha Peterken’s chapter on a fishing community and attitudes to Europe/the EU also draws on recent political history and highlights how groups continue to construct narratives and identities at a local level that become part of a national narrative. There is a danger that folklore will be tainted by its association with particular movements and, while this is not new, as demonstrated by Ciarán Walsh and Katie Meheux amongst others, this book sets out to challenge readers to think more critically with how folklore is created, represented and experienced in contemporary society.

The crux of this collection is its questioning of the appropriation of folkloric ideas or the construction of the folkloresque in an effort to communicate and justify political viewpoints. Felix Taylor’s chapter reflects the cautioning by Anglo-Welsh writer Arthur Machen (1863–1947) against the use of Celtic material for nationalist purposes. Schofield’s chapter on English music and dance notes the privileging of certain aspects of culture, such as what might be termed “gendered nationalism” in the work of Cecil Sharpe. His evocation of a “Shakespeare-land” provides an interesting example of how we construct imaginaries of identity based on selected cultural tropes or examples. In her chapter on the Scottish Anthropological Society, Meheux demonstrates how the use of folklore for nationalism is undermined by the obvious disconnect with people on the ground. Providing a useful potted history of the British Movement (BM), Wilson demonstrates “the role of quasi-religious symbols, rituals and vernacular beliefs in sustaining its cultural frames” (248). He highlights how groups’ imprecise and selective appropriation of folkloric ideas is unreliable with the internet impacting on the speed of sharing ideas (252, 253).

This collection provides a strong rationale for the importance of folkloristics in academia. Despite the long history of folklore studies, Paul Cowdell’s reflections on the representation of folklore and folkloristics in literature raises questions as to how the discipline is perceived and understood, highlighting the “developing interplay between outdated folkloristics and popular culture” through the 1940s, which is not unconnected from fluctuations in the profile of folklore scholarship (p.200), recognising the weakness of some of the scholarship that is prominent in popular culture. Both Cowdell and Diane A. Rodgers point to the popularity of JG Frazer and *The Golden Bough* and its influence on creative practice despite criticism in academic discourse*.* The references to Frazer’s work in several chapters, as well asWalsh’s “Irish reading” of the papers of anti-imperialist folklorist Alfred Cort Haddon (1855–1940), demonstrates the potential for developing new perspectives on individuals and their intention by returning to scenes or discovering forgotten materials.

Robin Hood exemplifies one aspect of the folkloresque that can be examined in a variety of contexts. In his chapter on the forests of England, Harte places Hood in the context of the folklore of forest people, noting the popularity of representations and the acceptance of blending of “folklore and literary reworkings with verifiable historic facts” (60). Clarke’s chapter focusing on Sheffield speaks to the balance of fact and fiction in folklore and the appropriation of symbols, an idea that notably recurs later as part of Smith’s examination of the Pagan far right and, in particular the Odinic Rite, which reflects the postmodern folkloresque by employing “simulacra which bear little resemblance to any historical lived tradition” (p.272). Critiquing the desire to locate and create pedigrees for folk heroes, Clarke notes the development of the narrative of a disinherited nobleman, now familiar through film and television but owing much to Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe.* Later, in Chapter 14, Hart threads an interesting path that considers how heroic outlaws such as Hood and the eco-protest movement break the law in an effort to do what they perceive to be good.

References to race and status are present in several chapters and there is explicit recognition of a lack of diversity amongst the authors in the editors’ introduction. Recognising the limitations that reflects a perceived association between folklore and whiteness, the volume invites a wider readership, signalling the relevance and importance of folklore in contemporary society and academic studies. The issue of race in the development of folklore studies and organisations is foregrounded in Meheux’s overview of the Scottish Anthropological Society, in which she demonstrates the role of class and privilege in relation to George Robert Gair, who reflected the largely middle-class, conservative membership of the Scottish Anthropological Society. The privilege of wealth is also evident in relation to photographer Sir Benjamin Stones in Andrew Robinson’s chapter on photographic surveys of calendar customs in England.

In the introduction, the editors acknowledge the influence and evidence of folklore in art and call for a greater consideration of creative practice, which has not been realised in this collection, with the exception to some extent of the final chapter. In presenting a written transcription of storytelling, the chapter by Shonaleigh Cumbers and Simon Heywood evokes the contemporary relevance of folklore in society. Folklore is not only a source of inspiration for creative pursuit but also serves a multitude of purposes – photography helping communicate understanding, creative writing attempting to explore spirituality. As the editors state, “people meet to share a performance, and the actual meeting makes real community ties, while the performance shares ideas and potentialities” (7). The chapters variously document artistic pursuits including music, dance and photography, usually with a historical perspective, and there is an opportunity to further the interdisciplinary impact of this volume by incorporating more contemporary creative practice.

While this collection is accessible to a broad audience, the editors’ and authors’ highlighting of the popularity of the folkloresque in popular culture is a reminder of the need for critical reflection and academic rigour, which is readily evident across the chapters in this volume.

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