

**Locating Women in the Folk. Conference Proceedings,
Sussex, 2018 (Book Review)**

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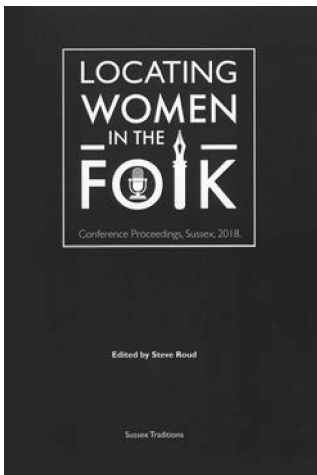
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Locating Women in the Folk: Conference Proceedings, Sussex, 2018

Steve Roud (ed.). Worthing: Sussex Traditions, 2020. iv + 239 pp. ISBN 978-1-5272-5719-1.

In her introduction, Elizabeth Bennett cites the origin of the *Locating Women in the Folk* conference in the reception of her paper on the overlooked Sussex collector Dorothy Marshall. Observing the audience's enthusiasm for sharing their own women-lost-in-time, Bennett and Margaretta Jolly assembled a team to organize a conference showcasing 'Perspectives on

Women's Contributions to Folk Song, Folklore, and Cultural Tradition'. This publication is the result of that event.

Many contributions follow Bennett's lead by shining a light on and re-evaluating the work of a collector, educator, or performer who has been overshadowed, forgotten, or simply never known. They include Bob Askew's presentation of the work of Grace Kimmins, whom he deems 'probably the most prominent user and promoter of traditional folk material until Cecil Sharp started his publicity campaign' (p. 10); Nora Rodes's exploration of the high-profile American collector Helen Hartness Flanders; and a spotlight on Martha Warren Beckwith's progressive, pioneering research into Jamaican folk religions and her propensity for using women informants.

Numerous papers turn the microscope on women as they appear in folk material, and what that means for interpreters, performers, and audiences today. Amy Hollinrake's paper on the presentation of women in Appalachian balladry is a pleasing partner to Diana Coles's contribution, 'Eve's Revenge', which specifically addresses women's relationships with the Devil in folk literature and other modes. These, in turn, complement Emily Levy's meticulous analysis of

women's roles in a sample of Child ballads in relation to contemporary performance.

The third type of paper examines female performers engaged in otherwise male-dominated traditions. Lucy Wright's ongoing research into girls' morris is included, with a fascinating paper that considers whether this vibrant tradition could or should be considered a folk dance, why it has evolved in the way it has, and the reasons for its continued omission from wider folk dance scholarship. The last of these I found particularly invigorating, especially the writer's personal plea for girls' morris to be recognized as a rich tradition happening before our very eyes: 'Imagine if we had the opportunity to go back in time and speak to the grand old men of Headington Quarry and Bampton [. . .] How would such knowledge effect how we dance today? Much of the history of girls' morris dancing is still out there, stored in living memory' (p. 181). In a similar vein, Sangeeta Jawla's fascinating paper on the gradual appearance of women performers in the northern Indian Ragani tradition, 'celebrated by many but opposed by many others' (p. 79), describes the evolution of a folk art to include new forms and to reach new audiences.

There are also papers from the perspective of individual women artists and practitioners. Of these, most compelling is Jenni Cresswell's quiet, contemplative paper on her use of folktales in her textile art, with a considered balance of description, method, and reflexivity that will remain in my memory for the last section alone: 'Just as folktales and oral traditions are passed along the generations, dresses are the carriers of my oral traditions' (p. 52).

The variety of contributions surely made for a headache when editing this collection. Alongside straight-up academic papers, there are ostensibly verbatim talks and interviews, and attempts to translate performances for the page. Encountering 'audio file' or 'Here Janet and Simon danced' at points in the text is disappointing for the reader who did not have the pleasure of attending the conference, but cannot really be helped. Formatting and typesetting inconsistencies abound, there are missing bibliographies and biographies, and a number of papers are in need of a closer proof-read, but for those readers seeking individual contributions and not reading the collection as a whole this will likely not dampen their experience. Conforming to convention for this kind of publication, contributions are ordered alphabetically, ensuring the reader can find particular papers with ease. However, given the fascinating parallels between papers – in research interests, practices, and the material under examination – there may have been a case for grouping papers thematically.

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