




2015

## Book Reviews

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### Recommended Citation

(2015) "Book Reviews," *The Bridge*: Vol. 38 : No. 1 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/thebridge/vol38/iss1/9>

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## Book Reviews

Timothy R. Tangherlini, ed. and trans. *Danish Folktales, Legends, and Other Stories*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013. 280 pp, DVD. \$50.00

Reviewed by Jason Schroeder

In the preface to *Danish Folktales, Legends and Other Stories*, editor Timothy Tangherlini announces that the book represents an attempt to rethink how folklore collections are published. His attempt succeeds by harnessing the possibilities of computer databases to focus on the individual folklore informants and their repertoires in context. Folklore collections are generally centered around a generic concept: fairy tale, folktale, ballad, proverb, folk belief, legend, etc., and the genres are divided into subgenres: legends about revenants or legends about priests, for example. The concept of genre and its application in folklore editions has its basis in natural sciences, botany in particular. Tangherlini points out the weakness of such single designator classification systems. A legend may have a ghost and a priest that exorcises the ghost: what type of legend is it then? What happens when fairy tales merge with legends? Perhaps most critically, Tangherlini explains that the human beings who tell the stories and sing the songs are effectively erased, as are their repertoires and the sequence in which they tell their stories to collectors. Tangherlini proposes presenting the repertoires of individuals in the order that the collector recorded them.

The book itself is a teaser of Tangherlini's own work. He focuses on Evald Tang Kristensen (1843-1929), a well-known Danish collector, and five of his informants. Tang Kristensen and his informants are well-known in folklore studies: Bengt Holbek based his groundbreaking work *Interpretation of Fairy Tales* (1987) on Tang Kristensen's collections; following in Holbek's footsteps, Tangherlini examined a different genre from his collections in *Interpreting Legends* (1994). The book gives a brief theoretical summary, a history of folklore and folklore studies in Denmark, a history of Denmark in the nineteenth century, a short biography of Tang Kristensen and of five storytellers whose repertoires are represented. The storyteller biographies open selections of their repertoires. The stories seem strange and decontextualized, even with the biographical sketches and Danish history. The reader is confronted

with the decontextualization and entextualization of dynamic ethnographic events. Even with Tangherlini's introductions, the reader may find them incomprehensible. But even in this decontextualization can be a wonderful teaching tool for both the history of folklore as well as fieldwork methodology courses. However, the accompanying DVD addresses this apparent weakness through digitally-interlinked and visual information.

Greatly expanding on the book, the topics touched on in the introduction receive their own chapters. Biographical sketches, theoretical and analytical sections become whole chapters. The entire repertoires of the five storytellers from the book are included. The biographical chapters for the five informants consider Danish history, geography, nineteenth-century economics and social factors. In addition, repertoires of every informant from whom Tang Kristensen collected are also included, although these informants receive the barest of biographical information—leaving much room for a researcher. The theoretical and analytical innovation that Tangherlini introduces is familiar to folklorists: a revision of the historic-geographic (or Finnish) method. But rather than using maps to trace origins, he uses such visual information as an analytical tool in order to find patterns. The informants are plotted on a map, as well as Tang Kristensen's collecting journeys. Story references to places are also plotted. Here is where it gets fun! Click on one of the five treated informants on the map and you will find their biographies, economic and social information as well as their repertoire. I encourage the reader to play around – this edition promotes interactive and non-linear learning and exploration.

It also has a "Topic and Index Navigator" which works as an interactive index; the "Data Navigator" works like a person register, leading to repertoires and biographies. Clicking on a person's name in the right-side window leads to informants' biographical sketches; full biographies can be accessed here. Additionally, places that are mentioned in the informant's stories are plotted on the map to the left; finally, the informant's repertoire, with references, in the order they were collected are listed. The various features that the digital content provide is large—I can only mention some here: the "Topic and Index Navigator" allows the reader to find information by keywords, Etik indices, Tangherlini indices and genre, connected to associated stories, informants, and locations. Tang Kristensen's field trips are

marked by year at the bottom of the map, allowing for not just a spatial representation of Tang Kristensen's work with informants, but also temporal.

Following in the steps of and expanding upon Bengt Holbek's *Interpretation of Fairy Tales* (1987) and Tangherlini's own *Interpreting Legend* (1994), in topic and in analysis, *Danish Folktales, Legends, and Other Stories* is groundbreaking, as it shows the ways that new technology can assist in pattern recognition as well as how folklore collections can be presented as they are connected to agent human beings and their worlds. It is a must-have for courses in folklore theory and history, as well as for students of folktales and Scandinavian folklore. It will be of use to folklore researchers, as it contains images of Tang Kristensen's manuscripts, Danish transcripts, as well as English translations, with clear references, and it carefully contextualizes the material in history. Students of digital analytical tools for the humanities will also find it enlightening in its visual approach to material that is not easily quantifiable. Scandinavian enthusiasts will enjoy the work for the description of Denmark in the nineteenth century, as well as for the tales, legends and songs. Younger readers may well enjoy the digital content educationally, enabling them to play with the map. I highly recommend the book and especially the digital content.

### Works Cited

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- Tangherlini, Timothy R. *Interpreting Legend: Danish Storytellers and Their Repertoires*. New York: Garland, 1994.

Howard L. Nicholson, Anders J. Gillis, and Russell M. Magnaghi. *Danes and Icelanders in Michigan*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014. xi + 93 pp., appendices, notes, further references, index.

Reviewed by Hilary Joy Virtanen

One of the most recent releases in the Michigan State University Press series, *Discovering the Peoples of Michigan*, *Danes and Icelanders in Michigan* contributes to an understanding of these two ethnic communities for both academic and general interest audiences. Though volumes in this series typically focus on a single ethnic-national group,<sup>1</sup> the authors mention in the preface to this work the fact that Icelandic immigrants were recognized as Danish citizens in United States census records until 1930, making differentiation of the groups in an historical context difficult (xi). The relatively small number of immigrants to Michigan from each nation provides additional justification for the combined volume. Each group, however, is explored in separate sections in the book.

The early immigration of Danes and Icelanders to Michigan, beginning in the 1850s and effectively ending with World War II, is summarized, with emphasis on “push-pull” factors of immigration and historical and cultural trends that influenced both migration, and the general culture of early immigrant communities. The much larger section on Michigan’s Danes, written by Nicholson and Gillis, is divided into chapters detailing the group’s social institutions (“Danish Religion, Folk Schools, and Fraternal Organizations”), and its settlement patterns within the state (“Michigan’s Danish Communities”), with introduction and conclusion sections framing these two central chapters.

Magnaghi’s section on Michigan’s Icelanders is much shorter, featuring an introduction and a core discussion of the state’s notable Icelandic individuals and enclaves. Key to an understanding of Michigan’s Icelanders is the relationship Michigan has with other places in which Icelanders settled; as we see, for some, Michigan was a stopover on the road to places more commonly associated with the ethnic group. Washington Island, in nearby Wisconsin, is one such final destination.

Following the core sections of the book, the authors offer several useful appendices including a listing of important archives and

libraries for those interested in direct research on Danish- and Icelandic Americans, recipes traditional to each group, and excerpts from letters from Danish immigrant Knud Nielsen of Menominee to his future wife, Marin. Bibliographic notes and a section recommending further reading are also of interest to both academic and general readers.

The book contains a few mistakes and redundant passages, which distract from its merits; for instance, in the introduction to the Danish section, the authors state that the Kalmar Union between Denmark, Norway, and Sweden was formed in 1387, ten years before its actual foundation. Additionally, Magnaghi presents several facts of Icelandic immigration in ways that are initially lacking in key details and then redundant. On page 54, for instance, he states that the first permanent Icelandic settlers to the United States “settled primarily in Utah at first due to the Mormon connection,” though he does not clarify what this connection is until later in the same page when he states that these settlers had previously converted to Mormonism before immigrating. He also makes a rather curious—and unnecessary—judgment at the conclusion of this section when, in detailing the role ethnic revivalism has in Icelandic American communities, he declares that though this community participates in activities supportive of cultural maintenance, “learning to speak Icelandic is a difficult task for those who try” (62).

Despite these weaknesses, one of the strengths of this volume is its attention to both a broad understanding of the history of each group, and to its detailed treatment of unique individuals, institutions, and communities. The authors are able to devote considerable space to the stories of individual immigrants, providing the reader with tangible and engaging examples of what motivated people to leave their homelands, what they did upon coming to America, and what contributions they made to American life on local, and sometimes international, levels. We learn, for instance, of the chain of migration started among Danes in the parish of Sæby by the efforts of Christian Johnson and later August Rasmussen, who both encouraged migration through their reports of Michigan sent back to countrymen in letters, an approach to stimulating migration found among many American ethnic communities. We learn about Rasmussen’s life in Michigan, his realization that America was not the “land of the ‘golden rocking chairs,’” and his recognition that, because America’s social structure was removed from European conceptions of class and its immense

land size, it was a place in which hard-working immigrants could thrive (22). Some of these vignettes are presented in sidebars, a common component of books in this series, which is an effective form of presentation for stories that would otherwise have no meaningful place in the book, but are engaging nonetheless. These stories are often made possible through effective use of archival and historical society holdings, illustrating the potential good research in such materials has toward understandings of such local histories.

The picture presented is one of two related groups with a long and proud history in their homelands, who later made their own notable contributions to the composition and character of the state of Michigan. Their in-group activities, including folk traditions and institutional organizations and their contributions to Michigan's Civil War regiments, the automotive industry, educational institutions, and local commerce show that despite being small in numbers, each group has made its own lasting impact on the state.

Overall, this book is a good read for those interested in the basic—and largely under-recognized—history of these two ethnic communities. Though small mistakes are present, they are not central to the focus of the book itself, and despite redundancies and several “cart-before-the-horse” descriptions of historical facts, the essential points are still made. It is hoped that future printings may correct these blemishes, but essentially, I do recommend the book because of its otherwise great merits.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The series also features a volume, *Scandinavians in Michigan* (2006), that focuses jointly on Swedes, Norwegians, and Danes, but subsequent volumes have addressed the Swedes (2012), Norwegians (2009), Finns (2009), and Finland-Swedes (2012) separately.

Søren Kierkegaard, and Gordon Daniel Marino, editor.  
*The Quotable Kierkegaard*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.  
234 pp.  
Reviewed by Rachel Hunt Steenblik

Gordon Marino's *The Quotable Kierkegaard* is much more than a quote book. It is an introduction, a biography, a list of sources and abbreviations, a chronology, a gallery, a map of Copenhagen, a bibliography, a curated collection, and a work of love. Dr. Marino begins by telling the story of Kierkegaard's philosophical and theological themes, as well as his own story of finding Kierkegaard, and then himself. He does this simply, skillfully, even beautifully.

The reader quickly learns of Kierkegaard's disdain for academic philosophy and philosophers, despite our present age's remembrance of him as precisely that, as well as the close attention he paid to the *mode* of communicating wisdom, rather than simply the content, and how that consideration shows up again and again in his own writings in the form of pseudonymous authors and "indirect communication." We also come to understand Kierkegaard's dismay at the spiritlessness and lack of inwardness he observed in his own age, which may have influenced his own determination to seek "a truth that he could live and die by" (xiv).

Further touching upon specific themes from specific works, Marino gives us *At a Graveside's* earnestness, *The Concept of Anxiety's* anxiety, *The Sickness Unto Death's* dichotomy of sin and faith (xxxvi), and *Works of Love's* duty to love (xxxvii). More generally, he offers Kierkegaard's deep concern for the inner world, the heart, and sincere reflections on the self.

Perhaps appropriately, then, the most poignant introduction to Kierkegaard is Marino's own experience:

I came to Kierkegaard crawling on cut glass and on the tail of a brutal marital breakup... Who knows how these things happen, but I picked up his *Works of Love* in a bookstore/ coffee shop....I can't cite the verse, but Kierkegaard helped me to grasp that psychological suffering was not a stench but something a person could do well or poorly. His way of recasting the landscape of human existence helped float my



spirit when I was going under in ways that were positively chilling to everyone around me. (xxii-xxiii)

His harrowing, hopeful words elucidate what reading Kierkegaard's words may do for a person.

Marino closes his introduction by offering "A Note on Quote Selection." He acknowledges that, as another expressed, "a book of quotations...can never be complete," particularly one of Kierkegaard's quotations. Accordingly, he "worked from that corner of the corpus" that he knew best, where he "spent the bulk of [his] many years with Kierkegaard, that is, on those studies that bear on the psychology of our moral and religious lives" (xlii). Perhaps because of this, he gives a warning. *The Quotable Kierkegaard* is not light, although it could be. Instead, it presents Kierkegaard in his richness and depth, in his seriousness and earnestness. It is a book on truth that edifies the self.

While Dr. Marino moves on to tell the story of Kierkegaard's life, the beautiful writing, simplicity, and conciseness of the introduction remains. Those who know Kierkegaard well know the importance of this section. Those who do not know Kierkegaard well need this section so that they may make his acquaintance. Everything essential is found here, how Søren Aabye Kierkegaard was born on May 5, 1813, the child of his father's old age; how he learned of God from his father, including the sad familial tale when the father was himself a young shepherd, standing on a hill in Jutland, crying against his maker; and how both father and son believed their family to be cursed because of it. Marino explains why Søren sacrificed his betrothed Regina with a breaking of an engagement, and links his Socrates-inspired "people baths" to the mightiness of his pen and the agony of the *Corsair* affair. Then follows the tale of how the death of Bishop J.P. Mynster heightened Kierkegaard's critique on Christianity, and his emphasis that witnesses of the truth must be martyrs for Christ's sake. Last of all, Marino tells of Kierkegaard's own death. The subsequent chronology displays each event clearly. Consequently, the context-less collection, which constitutes the bulk of the book, is not really without context.

Even within the curated quotations we find some context. We are always given the name of the work and the page number on which it appears. Within a given category, quotations from the same work are often, though not always, grouped together, allowing us to see

a progression of thought. Their close proximity to quotations from other works also permits us to see how the thoughts fit together in the context of Kierkegaard's other writings. We are able to see things that we would not see by simply reading them in their own environment. Especially illuminating is the way the journals and published works inform one another, and how the pseudonymous writings contradict and correct each other. For instance, the following journal entry makes early mention of the anxiety that so often appears in Kierkegaard's writings.

Deepest within every person there is nonetheless an anxiety about being alone in the world, forgotten by God, overlooked among the millions and millions in this enormous household. People keep this anxiety at bay by looking at the many people around them, who are related to them as family and friends; but the anxiety is there all the same—one scarcely dare think about how one would feel if all these were taken away. (66)

Moreover, every quotation could be placed in at least two themes. To illustrate, "[B]ut happiness is not a qualification of spirit, and deep, deep within the most secret hiding place of happiness there dwells also anxiety, which is despair" (85) speaks of both anxiety and despair.

Marino's difficult work of editing becomes clear. Not only was it necessary for him to determine what categories to choose and what quotations to select, he also had to consider other factors, including what order to place them in, and with what emphasis. Here we see Marino's attention to detail, and the art of his composition. Consider two passages from the section, "Love." The first is from *Works of Love*: "Love for God and love for neighbor are like two doors that open simultaneously, so that it is impossible to open one without also opening the other, and impossible to shut one without also shutting the other" (205). The second from *Either/Or 2* directly follows it: "But the person who can scarcely open himself cannot love, and the person who cannot love is the unhappiest of all" (205). The bridge between them, of course, is the idea of opening.

In his curation, the Hong Kierkegaard Library director covered many themes that I was expecting: despair, anxiety, faith, God, Christianity, love, and so forth. There was only one theme that I was not expecting: demonology, and two more that were uncovered

that I hoped to see: remembrance/recollection and forgetting. More specifically, Dr. Marino offers many of Kierkegaard's most well-known quotations, such as "Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing" (56) and "A human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation's relating itself to itself in the relation; the self is not the relation but is the relation's relating itself to itself" (76), but he also offers some lesser-known gems. One of these is, "Father in Heaven! When the thought of you awakens in our soul, let it not awaken like a startled bird which then flutters about in confusion, but like the child from sleep with its heavenly smile" (167). Another is, "And if I were a physician and someone asked me 'What do you think should be done?' I would answer, 'The first thing, the unconditional condition for anything to be done, consequently the very first thing that must be done is: create silence, bring about silence...!'" (114). Even the artwork is lovingly placed. There is a picture of Regina Olsen in the section "Erotic Love" and an illustration from *The Corsair* in "The Press."

Gordon Marino's *The Quotable Kierkegaard* is for everyone. I read it out loud slowly, to my seven-month-old baby, my architect husband, and myself. As a relative beginner, my husband explained that the book was worthwhile because it allowed him to comprehend more of the nuances of Kierkegaard's work without having a complete understanding of who Kierkegaard is. The introduction and biography "make the philosophy so much more meaningful. Marino's book allows you to access that without having the foreknowledge."<sup>1</sup> As a scholar, it was delightful to taste themes in Kierkegaard's writings I am not as familiar with, and to discover additional explorations of the themes I *am* already passionate about. One of these latter instances regards the section "Silence." I have studied Kierkegaard's upbuilding discourse on "the Lily" and "the Bird," and am now eager to examine this theme across various other works. Marino's edited volume is a beautiful and useful contribution.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Ralph Spencer Steenblik.

C. Claire Thomson. *Thomas Vinterberg's Festen (The Celebration)*  
Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014 / Copenhagen:  
Museum Tusulanum Press, 2013. 219 pp.  
Reviewed by Jakob Holm

Thomas Vinterberg's 1998 film *Festen (The Celebration)* is an intuitive, bodily-oriented movie that playfully lets the camera always seem a tad too late to actually register what is going on, as if it is simply trying to catch up with a reality that is already there. This strategy makes for an intriguing movie, in which the spectator is positioned as a lurking, curious fly on the wall, which is an aesthetically pleasing position to occupy. Hence, it is quite understandable that C. Claire Thomson, in her book about this iconic movie, focuses on "the multisensory appeal of *Festen* as audiovisual text" (9). Her aim is to reclaim the movie, to cut it loose from all the spin, hype, and reviews that have obscured the film itself, as well as the many ideological and political contexts that lay claim to it, in order to look at how the movie *looks* and the affects it creates in the viewer. In the introduction Thomson recollects her reactions the first time she saw the movie, and in the final chapter she writes about how her cherished DVD copy of *Festen* "has grown old and battered" (151); this framing makes it clear that this project is personal, grounded in concrete observations rather than in abstract contemporary theories or other supporting wheels. In that way, it is both a brave and admirable book.

The book is structured in three parts: the first deals with *Festen* and Danish film history; the second with *Festen* and the bodies of its creators and subjects; and finally, the third with *Festen* and its own history. The first part focuses primarily on the Dogme 95 movement, of which *Festen* was the first representative, presenting the movement's goals as well as discussing trends in Danish culture and politics around the time of *Festen's* production. Among other things, we learn about the renewed confidence of Danish film in the late twentieth century and its professionalization as a consequence of the state-supported film school. The author also deals briefly with new formal experiments in art and culture, but only in the form of very general considerations. Her analysis here would have benefited from more concrete examples and could easily have been further elaborated. For example, a new wave in Danish fiction saw the light of day when Jan Sonnergaard published *Radiator* in 1997—a year before *Festen* premiered—and

presented the Danish public with a rawer, more intimate, and direct realism that—like *Festen*—also tries to expose the influence of class structures and the false, but general assumption that there are no social classes in Denmark. Accordingly, the hunger for reality in art was prevalent in order to correct this idealized image of the perfect, Scandinavian world. It is also noteworthy that a playwright like Lars Norén is not mentioned. His groundbreaking play *Personkreds 3* premiered, like *Festen*, in 1998, and it presents the viewer with the same ruthless realism that the Dogme 95 movement tries to achieve with its rules. In general, a broader discussion about realism in art at the time would have given the reader a more thorough context in which to understand *Festen*.

In the first part, Thomson rightfully concludes that the tenth vow of the Dogme 98 manifesto—that the director is not to be credited—can only be understood ironically, since Vinterberg embodies the role as *auteur* par excellence. Furthermore, she very enlighteningly and rewardingly discusses the rule about the film format being 35 mm, despite the digital video revolution, and concludes that the Dogme movement should be regarded as a reaction against the emergence of computer-generated imagery. I concur absolutely in those observations. The short chapter about Danish identity and nationalism in the 1990s is a little too quickly completed, however, as Thomson could have presented some more principal thoughts about what makes *Festen* a particularly Danish movie or whether it should even be read as such (and yet why it did not originate in some other country, but precisely Denmark). To my mind, hidden secrets, the complacency, the aversion to conflicts and the distinct consensus thinking that we find in the movie makes it utterly Danish, and these characteristics have also indeed been favorite topics of Danish artists ranging from Johannes V. Jensen to Lars von Trier. This continuity suggests that the thematic content is not new, but has been presented in many artistic contexts during the last hundred years, and in that way it is not particularly tied to the late 1990s, as it is rather the rule than the exception.

The second part of the book offers a close reading of the movie's texture, style, and bodies; in short, its looks. This section is the most consequential and interesting part of the book, as the author brings many new observations to the table and liberates the film from the interpretative constraints that have previously obscured it. Thomson presents a very well-constructed analysis about the handheld camera,

the use of which is required by the third rule of the Dogme 95 Vow of Chastity, and how it gave the film its porridge-y skin and strong physical presence. Her deliberations about the way Vinterberg shoots people watching instead of what they actually watch, and how that creates uncomfortable tensions in the viewer, are very insightful. Her analysis of the setting—the hotel Skjoldnæsholm—and its meaning and influence on the film’s appearance is also very congruent in the way she focuses on how the camera lurks continuously and uses thresholds and mirrors to create an utterly fragmented and ghostly space that reflects the characters’ state of mind.

The last chapter in part two deals with some of the physical objects in the movie—cotton, paper, glass—and how they are used in a formalistic way to create the feeling of disintegration that the viewer is intended to observe and which of course is supposed to mirror the patriarch’s downfall. She quotes Anthony Mantle, the director of photography, who stated: “I just wanted to find a cinematic language that could convey that pretty catastrophic, pitiful—also amusing—situation these people were in.” The use of objects, angles, and color achieves that effect, and Thomson observes accurately that the physicality and mortality of bodies we experience as viewers is achieved through this continuous decomposition and disintegration of images.

Thomson devotes the last part of her book to the “ghostly presences that flit around the film” (111-2). She devotes an entire chapter to the story of Allan—the man whose fictive life story inspired Vinterberg to make the film, in particular its translation from screen to stage. She spends a lot of energy on Allan’s story, which is followed by a chapter in which she takes a close look at various theater adaptations of *Festen*. However, since her stated goal in the book is to make an aesthetic analysis and “let the film breathe, to release the film as a text from the weight of extant interpretations and explanations, to reinvest it with sensuality” (8), focusing on exterior events such as Allan’s hoax and theater productions makes it difficult for her to meet this goal, but has rather the opposite effect of wrapping the movie in external circumstances.

I have a lot of sympathy for Thomson’s project, but the book with its 160 pages (plus appendices, notes and bibliography) seems at times too short and maybe a bit too modest. Hence, in my opinion, the final book about *Festen* has not yet been written. That book would not

only place *Festen* more thoroughly in a contemporary, cultural context and equate it with other cultural products from the same time period that also tried to present the reality as littered with hidden truths, but it would also look more thoroughly at the themes in the movie and relate those to the general topics in Danish cultural history. For example, the fall of the patriarch is a recurring theme in Scandinavian literary as well as film history: from Strindberg's *The Father* and Ibsen's works. All the way throughout *Festen* the dethroned patriarch is a figure we meet time and again. I know it is not Thomson's project to analyze that figure in the frame of Scandinavian cultural history, but it seems problematic to me to talk enthusiastically about new technologies and mainly focus on the material side of things while neglecting that the story is so well-known and typical; in other words, the Dogme brethren may seem avant-garde and revolutionary in their take on movies, but the story Vinterberg is telling in *Festen* is anything but new. Rather, it is inscribed in a long, glorifying tradition of the patricide in Scandinavia, and I am sure that this recognizable and well-worn theme is also part of the attraction and wonder of *Festen*.