

***Songs and Sayings of an Ulster Childhood.* By Alice Kane,
edited by Edith Fowke (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1983.
Pp. 254, \$16.95 cloth.)**

Carole H. Carpenter

Volume 6, Number 1-2, 1984

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1081237ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1081237ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (print)

1708-0401 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

H. Carpenter, C. (1984). Review of [*Songs and Sayings of an Ulster Childhood.* By Alice Kane, edited by Edith Fowke (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1983. Pp. 254, \$16.95 cloth.)]. *Ethnologies*, 6(1-2), 152-154.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1081237ar>

tion orale. Par ailleurs, plusieurs des chansons en sont à leur première publication sonore (*Le meurtrier de sa femme, Départ pour les îles*), ou à leur première publication tout court : c'est le cas entre autres des deux petites chansons locales, « La call chez Narcisse » et « Marie-Rose à la poutine », qui semblent reliées à la tradition des veillées de danse. Cette dernière est d'autant plus bizarre qu'elle mêle l'anglais et le français au point d'être difficilement compréhensible.

Il est assez rare de rencontrer des chanteurs qui, comme Allan Kelly, sont les héritiers de deux traditions à part égale. S'il tient les fondements de son répertoire francophone de sa mère, les cinq chansons anglaises — dont trois possèdent des parallèles français après avoir été traduites et avoir circulé oralement depuis le 19^e siècle — interprétées par le chanteur attestent de la vigueur et de la profondeur de l'héritage chanté qu'il a reçu de son père. Ce sont probablement des personnages comme Allan Kelly, nourris aux deux traditions, qui sont à l'origine de ces passages linguistiques qui ont fait que *The Butcher Boy* ou *The Cruel Mother* ont donné en français *La délaissée qui se pend* ou *Les Enfants tués par leur mère*.

Le volumineux document d'accompagnement (bilingue) permet de comprendre la dynamique traditionnelle dans laquelle Allan Kelly a évolué. Les huit premières pages sont consacrées à la biographie et à un examen de la tradition musicale de Allan et Léontine Kelly. On retrouve ensuite la transcription des textes de toutes les chansons, et un bref commentaire sur chacune des pièces. Finalement, une importante bibliographie sur la chanson (près de 50 titres) complète le tout, et permet au chercheur comme à l'amateur de retracer les parallèles ou les versions complémentaires mentionnées dans les commentaires.

Bref, *Suivant l'étoile du nord* est un document soigné, bien présenté, bien documenté, comme on voudrait qu'il

en existe davantage. Il faut féliciter Ronald Labelle pour son travail et espérer que d'autres initiatives du genre suivront. On peut se procurer ce disque au coût de \$10.00 (et \$2.00 de frais de port) en écrivant au Centre d'études acadiennes, Université de Moncton, Nouveau-Brunswick, E1A 3E9.

Robert BOUTHILLIER
Québec

Songs and Sayings of an Ulster Childhood

By Alice Kane, edited by Edith Fowke
(Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1983.
Pp. 254, \$16.95 cloth.)

To open this book is to loose a parade of images dancing from the recesses of memory, not only the author's but also our own. For Alice Kane, a gifted storyteller, prompts in her readers remembrances of their early times as she shares the treasured memories of her youth in Belfast at the beginning of the century. Virtually every page contains something that sounds a familiar chord, and the portrait that emerges is particularly vivid. More than most of us, and with astounding exactitude for line and verse, Alice Kane remembers. Yet, because of the passage of time, the malaise of the modern age, or selective forgetting, there is a touch of the unreal in the account of the child who wrote :

Alice Kane is my name,
Ireland is my nation,
Belfast is my dwelling place,
And school's my occupation.

Alice Kane's was no average childhood, either by modern standards or, I am sure, by those of the time and place. As she says (quoting Katherine Tynan), she was "born under a kind star in a green world withouten any war." Hers was a large, loving, closely involved family. "They sang to us constantly," she claims, and "Everything was an occasion for a verse or a song." It

is the interaction of the child with this family, and through the family with the community and the world, that ultimately is portrayed in the book. The personality of the child herself is, like the woman she became, reserved.

Canadians today may know Alice Kane as a founder and active member of the Storytellers School of Toronto. But it was as a librarian that she spent most of her adult life. Her teenaged years had been divided between New Brunswick and Montreal. Then, after graduating from McGill, she moved to Toronto and took a job in the Public Library system. She was a children's librarian when, in the sixties, she met and became friendly with Edith Fowke, to whom she frequently recounted children's folklore remembered from her own past or gleaned from youngsters and other librarians. Eventually, she presented a manuscript version of this book to Mrs. Fowke who, astounded at the extent and variety of the material it contained and the quality of the tale, resolved to see it into print.

The book is unique in the burgeoning literature "re-membering" or piecing together childhood, for it is not truly an autobiography, nor is it a collection of childhood folklore, nor is it a portrait of the child. Rather, it is a representation of a child's life within a family, a documentation of a family's tradition — that is, what was known to and shared by its members and marked it off from the outside world. The inter-weaving of the various threads associated with particular people into a strong, rich and meaningful lore is the great strength of this work, which attempts to give the material as it was used, thereby providing readers with a real sense of the context and an appreciation of its meaning in use, puzzling or bewildering as that often was to the child involved.

Because of the author's awareness of traditional material and the editor's prevailing interest in song, there is considerable attention devoted to what are truly folksongs, but such was the case in

Alice Kane's family. Both editor and author have a background in literature, so there is a strong awareness of the literary tradition as well, but works of the Irish Literary Renaissance, Kipling's verse, and the like were clearly popular at the turn of the century and some entered the family tradition. The book shows how Mammy's games and nursery songs are intermingled with Daddy's lusty shanties and salty sayings, the Uncle's music hall ditties and old Irish songs, the aged Aunties' maxims and Biblical sayings, the young Aunties' sentimental and romantic tunes, material from pantomimes and the street, from young and old. Thereby the reader gains a truer portrait of a real tradition in its totality and complexity than the folklore purist or someone interested in childhood *per se* might provide.

This work was a labour of love for both author and editor, for Edith Fowke is of Irish extraction herself and one of few Canadians to publish much children's folklore. She has lightly edited Alice Kane's very readable narrative and, in keeping with her idea that academic apparatus need not make a book unreadable for a general audience, she has provided extended notes and references, but after the stuff that really matters — the text itself.

Despite its fine qualities, this work falls short of being the truly memorable and highly significant book it might have been. There are some decided weaknesses in it, most particularly an organizational problem. Memories are, to be sure, episodic, but their presentation in book form can be more unified than they are here. Neither the chapter divisions nor their sequence (other than the first, starting with Alice Kane's birth in 1908, and the last, ending with her departure from Ireland) are clearly logical. The cord to unite them — an emerging picture of the child herself — is not present, and so the work never achieves the depth or power of such documents of childhood as Laurie Lee's *Cider With Rosie* or Simone de

Beauvoir's *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*. A further problem lies in the total absence of the fears, the dark side, and the sexuality that are a reality of childhood. To be sure, in Alice Kane's childhood "no one discussed such matters as Race, Religion, Sex, and Death with [her]," but that does not mean that children did not think or worry about them. Here lies the unreality of Alice Kane's remembrances, then. Finally, although this is more a wish than a criticism, the book might well have contained some valuable comparative commentary on Canadian material, for both Alice Kane and Edith Fowke are admirably equipped to provide it and thereby make a valuable contribution to the much-needed literature on childhood in this country.

One closes the book wishing there could have been more, just as many a person wishes, Peter Pan-like, to prolong childhood. It's a good book, and definitely worth reading, for it does well what it seeks to do — make available to a wide audience the memories of one woman's delightful childhood and conjure up for every reader memories of his or her own.

Carole H. CARPENTER
York University
Downsview, Ontario

Appareils d'éclairage

Par E.I. Woodhead, C. Sullivan et G. Gusset. (Ottawa, Ministère de l'environnement, 1984, 103 p., ill. — Parcs Canada, Collection de référence nationale)

L'ouvrage intitulé *Appareils d'éclairage* est le fruit d'un travail collectif de chercheurs et de catalogueurs du groupe de recherche sur la culture matérielle de la division des recherches archéologiques de Parcs Canada. Cette étude a été principalement réalisée dans le but de four-

nir aux archéologues un outil de travail qui les aidera à « reconnaître, décrire et interpréter » les artefacts qui peuvent être retrouvés lors de fouilles et qui appartiennent au domaine de l'éclairage.

En prenant comme point de départ des pièces recueillies sur des sites militaires lors de fouilles archéologiques, Woodhead, Sullivan et Gusset ont cherché à identifier et illustrer les principaux modes d'éclairage artificiel utilisés au Canada. Ils se sont intéressés à la période comprise entre la fin du XVII^e siècle et le milieu du XX^e siècle.

La classification que les auteurs ont adoptée est basée sur les principes de fonctionnement des différentes sources d'éclairage. Ainsi, ils nous présentent successivement les dispositifs servant à produire des étincelles ou de la lumière, les chandelles pour lesquelles des combustibles solides sont nécessaires à leur utilisation, les différentes lampes à huile (lampes à bec, lampes à mèche verticale, lanternes) qui consomment des combustibles semi-liquides ou liquides, ainsi que les appareils d'éclairage alimentés par d'autres sources d'énergie comme l'acétylène ou l'électricité. À la suite de chaque mode d'éclairage concerné, les auteurs ont aussi apporté une attention particulière à certains accessoires ou à des parties constituantes des appareils d'éclairage.

Finalement, on confirme l'existence de différents appareils d'éclairage dans le milieu canadien en faisant référence aux artefacts retrouvés dans des contextes archéologiques et on appuie les textes par des illustrations qui permettent au lecteur de visualiser l'appareil et les accessoires dont il est question.

Habituellement, les inventaires de pièces archéologiques qui font l'objet de publications présentent les objets en les regroupant selon les types de matériaux qui les composent : verre, terres cuites grossières, faïence, métal, etc. La présente étude innove, car les auteurs ont choisi de puiser dans la vaste collection de référence nationale de Parcs Ca-