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Listening For A Life

Patricia Sawin

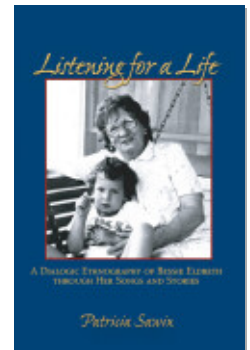
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A DIALOGIC ETHNOGRAPHY OF
Bessie Eldreth

THROUGH HER SONGS AND STORIES

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For my parents, Marilyn and Lewis Sawin,
whose lives and stories I cherish and whose loving listening I
strive to emulate

*Better go down upon your marrow-bones
And scrub a kitchen pavement, or break stones
Like an old pauper, in all kinds of weather;
For to articulate sweet sounds together
Is to work harder than all these, and yet
Be thought an idler by the noisy set
Of bankers, schoolmasters, and clergymen
The martyrs call the world.*

—William Butler Yeats, “Adam’s Curse”

But is it impossible to reveal, through a character’s acts and through these acts alone, his ideological position and the ideological world at its heart, without representing his discourse?

It cannot be done, because it is impossible to represent an alien ideological world adequately without first permitting it to sound, without having first revealed the special discourse peculiar to it. After all, a really adequate discourse for portraying a world’s unique ideology can only be that world’s own discourse, although not that discourse in itself, but only in conjunction with the discourse of an author.

—M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*