**Blanche Saphores**

# Child ballads in the Post-War British Folk Revival

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# FOR FOLK'S SAKE FRANCIS!

## Child Ballads in the Post-War British Folk Revival

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# INTRODUCTION

Ask any innocent passer-by what a ballad is and they'll probably think of a slow, heartfelt pop-rock song. If you happen upon a literature teacher, they might refer you to Romantic imitations of what they will tell you were medieval ballads. But if you chance upon a not-so-innocent old-school folk enthusiast, they might refer you instead to the time-tested "Edward" (Child 13), "Tam Lin" (Child 39), "Sir Patrick Spens" (Child 58) or "Barbara Allen" (Child 84). The ballad, to them, is first and foremost a traditional narrative song, and if they are particularly bent on projecting a connoisseur's ethos, they might in fact be able to give you the "Child numbers" to a couple of them and a historical spiel (which they might just have lifted from Child's *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*) about this or that one. But what are they on about?

At the end of the nineteenth century, a certain Professor Francis James Child of Harvard got it into his head to collect what he thought to be every "English and Scottish popular ballad" in Great Britain; narrative songs which he held to have come down through the ages by oral transmission. He published all 305 of them in his *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*[1], carefully numbered, providing different versions under each heading and commentaries on the texts and their relation to other European ballads. Among them such titles as "The Outlandish Knight" (2), "The Twa Sisters" (10), "Child Maurice" (83), or the aforementioned "Bonny Barbara Allen" (84) and oft anthologized "Sir Patrick Spens" (58). This canon of ballads soon became an established "category of vernacular literature, the Child ballad, an appellation that, like the Grimms' tales, suggests a pedigree and evokes authenticity" (Brown, *Child's Unfinished Masterpiece* 6), and the object of study of an enthusiastic sect of "ballad scholars", who busied themselves with dissecting these texts from a literary standpoint and with tracing their origins. Once a comparatively popular subject along with other "folklore studies", "ballad studies" have dwindled to a rather niche interest.

Far less likely than any of the hypothetical encounters described above, then, would be one with one of these ballad scholars, who would be in a position to chide the literature teacher for their careless dating and to inform them that any evidence of ballads before the sixteenth century is scant to say the least and disputable (Atkinson, *The Ballad and Its Pasts* chapter 2), and most do not appear before the seventeenth century—ballads, that is, such as those contained in Child's *ESPB*. But if your ballad scholar is in sync with the times, they'll have widened their horizons beyond the Child ballad, and will be able to go on at length about a rich broadside tradition

1 *ESPB* from here on.

comprising murder ballads, political ballads, disaster ballads… etc., firmly anchored in their historical context, which were printed from the sixteenth up to the twentieth century. They'll further make sure not to give too restricted and Child-influenced a definition, whether of the "popular" or "folk" ballad (if they hang on to that notion) or ballad in general. For David Atkinson, one of the prominent ballad specialists of our day[2], the ballad refers to "an entire, dynamic culture of cheap verse literature and song, with an emphasis on its narrative varieties", and, funnily enough, in his endeavour to distance himself from the highly subjective and hazy precepts of Professor Child, he, like other ballad scholars before him, ends up dodging the question of precise definition by arguing that "[s]tudy of the subject has surely advanced to a stage where strict definition is not demanded", and "in any case" he illustrates it by example—the way Child himself was wont to do (Atkinson, *The Ballad and Its Pasts* ix). If less up-to-date and self-aware, the quidam will be quicker to refer you to the Child ballads; they might of course be careful to put into question the status of the Child canon, or even the very existence of a "popular" or "Child" type (Shields 41), but will end up pointing you to the *ESPB*'s neatly numbered list all the same. The more modern student of folksong (a wider concept) preferably uses Roud's index, which lists tens of thousands of songs, among which, of course, the Child ballads.

The ballad, with its history of Romantic and fanciful associations, is an awkward subject to study outside of tangible contextual associations, such as in its broadside form (see for example Fumerton et al.), or the object of collections (D. Harker for example)—although due to its oral dimension, it certainly does exist outside these convenient frames of reference. This is a plane that is far less easily documented, leaving much room for the imagination to roam; but since the latter part of the twentieth century, there has been a general attempt at resisting this temptation. The occasion has been seized instead to study the ballad in the contemporary oral context, amidst other folksongs, as sung by "source singers"—singers deemed to operate within a popular tradition—to analyse the context of their singing and their own reflection on their work (see for example Porter and Gower; Andersen, 'Technique, Text, and Context').

Yet the ballad retains a certain indefiniteness, a certain elusiveness. The question of how old it is, for a start, cannot be answered with certainty, and the nebulousness of available evidence amply accommodates the idea of the ballad as "inherently backward-looking" (Atkinson, *The Ballad and Its Pasts* 1). According to Bruce R. Smith, "ballads seem to have had, in the eyes and ears of some people at least, a residual quality" as early as the sixteenth century (Smith 318). From the Romantic ballad craze to the twentieth-century revivals, even as ballads were being sung all the while, they were looked on by editors as the last remnants of an ancient tradition which they

2 Not that the competition is terribly fierce in the field these days.

endeavoured to “rescue from oblivion” (Kidson v). Singers, too, have looked on certain ballads as old songs come down to them through the ages; “auld stor[ies]” (Margaret Laidlaw (an informant for Walter Scott), quoted in V. Bold 358), imbued with “a sagacity embedded in past-ness” (Porter and Gower 75). And yet other ballads, printed on broadsheets, were sold by appealing to customers’ curiosity for new songs, particularly from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century—whether the produce was actually fresh or not; and, as Smith points out, all ballads are made present in the act of performance (Smith 322).

Past the Romantic ballad craze, ballads were not to be the object of a focused large-scale revival again, but would form part of a repertoire of “folksongs”, a notion that came to supersede that of “ballad” at the turn of the twentieth century. Resting on the same notion of oral tradition, it widened the field to songs outside the ballad category and brought especial attention to the music. But ballads did not dissolve into the mass of folksong, retaining instead a prominent place—not only in the collection-driven first revival of the turn of the century but also in the folksong revival that followed the Second World War. Their “backward-looking” quality made them prime candidates for embodying a link with the past, the construction of which Eric J. Hobsbawm identifies as central to the idea of tradition. The very vagueness of this quality lends itself particularly well to imagining continuity (Bohlman 130).

Tamara Livingston, in her 1999 article “Music Revivals: Towards a General Theory”, identifies six main characteristics of music revivals:

1. an individual or small group of “core revivalists”;
2. revival informants and/or original sources (e.g. historical sound recordings);
3. a revivalist ideology and discourse;
4. a group of followers which form the basis of a revivalist community;
5. revivalist activities (organizations, festivals, competitions);
6. non-profit and/or commercial enterprises catering to the revivalist market.

Her model is easily applied to the post-war British folk revival, which saw Albert (“Bert”) Lloyd and Ewan MacColl assume a leading role, valorized source singers, produced anti-consumerist discourse, and gave rise to specially devoted folk club spaces run by non-professional enthusiasts, folk festivals and dedicated labels like Topic Records. At a time of musical, political and social change and uncertainty, the revival turned to folksong as a grounding element, a heritage from which to derive a sense of stable identity. The way in which ballads fit in the revivalist rhetoric offers interesting insight into its conceptions of authenticity, essential to the legitimization of the

revival and to the construction of this identity. The revival also constitutes a new context for ballad singing, and the circumstances and interaction of revival and source singing make up a complex weaving of influences and intents from which arises a different ballad object.

This essay will consider the manner in which Child ballads, themselves crystallizing a Romantic-influenced image of the ballad, influence, reflect and are challenged by revivalist thinking and identity after the Second World War. How does the place of Child ballads in the post-war British folk revival highlight issues and stakes of the revival? And how are they transformed in being taken up by revivalists?

The Child ballads are identified throughout this essay by their numbers in Child's collection, given in brackets following the title (titles given are those of the particular versions considered rather than Child's generic titles). In Scotland, Ireland and Wales, because of their particular claims to cultural (and political) independency from England, the second revival had particular implications requiring specific study which does not fall within the scope of this essay. The following work will therefore focus on the revival in England, with occasional references to other parts (especially Scotland), as, for all their singularities, they were not secluded from one another.

To begin with, it must be remarked that Child could not have embarked on his project of collecting every "English and Scottish popular ballad" to have ever graced the earth had it not been for the preceding process of refinement of the notion of "ballad" in Great Britain, in particular from the eighteenth century onward. We will therefore start by examining this shaping of the ballad idea, allowing us to better understand how Child's work came about and upon which assumptions it was built—assumptions which were then taken up and further built upon by generations of reverent ballad scholars. Child's canon in all its noble authority also played its part in shaping the enthusiastic Edwardian collection of folksong of what would come to be seen as the first British folksong revival, which in turn proved a key source for post-war revivalists.

Although some critics have stressed the continuity between the revivalist impetus of the start of the century and that of the post-war world, the renewed interest in folksong which took over the British isles in the wake of the Second World War is generally described as a second British folksong revival, which distinguished itself from the first in that, where the first was the hobby horse of a limited section of the population, the second found more mass traction (Atkinson, 'The English Revival Canon' 371). The revival is here taken to spread from its first stirring in the forties to a dwindling by the end of the seventies, at which time a marked drop in folk club

attendance signals the end of a period. What place Child ballads were granted, how they were approached, how much of their aura remained or was lost in this new, more popular revival context, as opposed to the previous scholarly one, and how their treatment illuminates certain stakes of the revival will be the object of this second part. We shall thus examine how British ballads helped shape the identity of post-war revivalists: how they and folksong in general were turned to in reaction to growing exposure to American culture, and how the ballads were handled as part of a Marxist approach which endeavoured to include folk music in a process of empowerment of the working class. Ballads in particular came with a significant freight of fantasies which made them prime candidates for use within the "invented tradition" (Hobsbawm) of the revival, which turned to the Past for inspiration in an age of social, political and economic change, and we shall see how this fantasized ballad image fit in the revivalist ethos.

The imaginative relation of revivalists to the ballads will lead us to consider, in a third part, the way in which revivalism de-contextualizes and re-contextualizes the ballads, and how these changing contexts affect the way in which the ballad is experienced and its effect as a dramatic work: is the ballad sung in a revivalist context the same as the ballad sung in the so-called "traditional" context? Which parameters might affect the meaning (encoding and decoding) of the ballad and its effect in different contexts? What rituals does it lie at the centre of? We will examine these questions and attempt thereby to nail down, as have others before us, some aspects at least of what makes the ballad.

# 1. THE INVENTION OF THE BALLAD

> [W]e can characterize the features of the "traditional" ballad, but to do so is to recapitulate . . . those features that were formulated by means of the collecting process. In other words, there is no "natural" form here, but a set of documents shaped by the expectations that led to their artifactualization in the first place. . . . [I]t is impossible to separate the genre from this external history, impossible to locate some purer form outside this tradition. (Stewart 106–07)

## 1.1. Birth of a Myth: Ballad and Song Collection and Ideation B.C. (Before Child)[3]

### 1.1.1. A Brief Overview of Ballad and Song Publications

What came to be known as the "Child ballads" were not always a well-defined (or, at any rate, delimited) group. Once upon a time, the term "ballad" was used far more variedly than to

3 (D. Harker 1)

refer simply to, as Kittredge would put it, "a song that tells a story, or . . . a story told in song" (Kittredge and Child Sargent xi). At the time of the beginning of the publication of Thomas d'Urfey's collection of songs *Wit and Mirth, or, Pills to Purge Melancholy* in 1698, a "ballad" could be any "Common Song sung up and down the Streets" (D. Harker 5). Furthermore, apart from such ballads as would be canonized as national literature were printed, sold and sung sensational ballads relating news, bloody crimes and wonders, and such political and protest ballads as were produced in particular by staunch Jacobites.

In d'Urfey's best-selling collection of songs, which was reprinted multiple times and had swelled to six volumes by 1720, the term "ballad" is applied to various items in a manner not quite consistent with the now current definition of it as a "narrative song"—though even then, already a number of them do fit this description[4]. One might note that d'Urfey, where the combined but separate terms "ballads and songs" (or, alternatively, "songs and ballads") would later become commonplace, offers "Songs and Poems". In any case, the success of d'Urfey's collection encouraged others to undertake similar editorial projects, and with time, some of them attempted to narrow down the concept of "ballad", as what became an editorial genre in itself came to be associated with definite antiquarian pretences which seemed to require some rigour—or at the very least pretence thereof.

Ambrose Philips put the term to the fore with his *Collection of Old Ballads* published between 1723 and 1725. His show of sparing "the many who perhaps will think it ridiculous to enter seriously into a Dissertation upon Ballads" (Philips, *A Collection of Old Ballads* 2:vi–vii) illustrates plainly enough that what lay under that name had not yet attained to literary respectability. Nonetheless, that was precisely where Philips intended to lead it: in the second volume, he offers "*English* Historical Ballads" which he is sure "are old and scarce", and "some of 'em will be thought very valuable" (Philips, *A Collection of Old Ballads* 2:v). Already ballads are accorded value in relation to their supposed antiquity, and as to their quality, he thinks "it would be no difficult Matter to prove, that our Old Songs especially those which we may properly call Historical, are written by the greatest and most polite Wits of their Age", for "[t]here are many of 'em in which we cannot possibly find a Fault. Their Language is the purest that was used in their Days, purer than was used by several great Writers after their Time"; and for support from better-established literary authority, he casually reminds the dismissive reader that "the great Sir *Philip*

4 One example of an item which the ballad scholar, a couple centuries later, would not grace with that title would be the following from volume 6: "A BALLAD, made by a Gentleman in Ireland, who could not have Access to a Lady whom he went to visit, because the Maid the Night before had over-laid her pretty Bitch", which tells no story but is a humorous lament in four stanzas. An occurrence of the term the scholar would deem more fitting would be "The most Famous BALLAD Of King HENRY the 5th; his Victory over the French at Agencourt", which tells just that story, from volume 5.

*Sidney* commands the Old Song of *Chevy-Chace*"—and even "his Commendation is in a much ruder Stile than the Ballad itself" (Philips, *A Collection of Old Ballads* 2:vii). Further, he relies on Addison's *Spectator* papers n°70 and 74 of 1711 to make a case for ballad interest.

These papers, in which Addison extensively praises the "antiquated" ballad of "*Chevey Chase*" and deemed by some to mark the start of the "ballad revival" (Trumpener 154), earned him some scorn and mockery—notably by William Wagstaffe, who wrote in answer the satirical *Comment upon the History of Tom Thumb*. But though "ballads and songs" were still widely regarded as trifles, this kind of contempt did not check the vogue—Dr John Armstrong's derisive remark in *Taste: An Epistle to a Young Critic* (1753) testifies to the effect of Addison's praise: "But thanks to Heav'n and Addison's good grace / Now ev'ry fop is charm'd with Chevy Chase" (quoted in A. N. Bold 7)—and other collections kept being published. Among other noteworthy works, one might thus cite Allan Ramsay's 1724 *Tea-Table Miscellany*, a "Collection of Choice Songs Scots and English", which met with success and had reached its twelfth (considerably augmented) edition by 1763, and *The Ever Green* (1724). In 1765, Bishop Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, which he compiled after chancing upon a manuscript he famously claimed to have found "being used by the maids to light the fire" at a friend's house (quoted in Hales and Furnivall xii), and which his friend Samuel Johnson encouraged him to publish (Percy 3), prompted an unprecedented ballad craze. Self-styled antiquarians and enthusiastic readers went mad for ballads across the country.

Joseph Ritson, for example, published his *Select Collection of English Songs* in 1783. He was very critical of the liberties Percy took with his texts, and stood out by displaying a certain rigour in his editorship. He gave some thought to a genre categorization of his texts, proposing to define "ballads" as "mere narrative compositions", which he distinguishes from "strictly and properly so called" "songs" (Ritson ii). The same year, John Pinkerton's *Select Scottish Ballads* distinguished between "Tragic" and "Comic" ballads, and offered "dissertations" on "the Oral Tradition of Poetry", "the Tragic Ballad" (vol. 1) and "the Comic Ballad" (vol. 2).

Himself much inspired by Percy's collection[5], as well as by Ramsey's and by Robert Burns's work, who also collected songs of the working classes which he adapted in his works, Walter Scott produced his own collection, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, in 1802-1803. The work was favourably received and was subsequently re-edited and expanded. Many who were drawn to join Scott's literary circle shared his interest in Scottish "national song" and sought and

5 "The first time … [he] could scrape a few shillings together … [he] bought unto [him]self a copy of these beloved volumes", never "read a book half so frequently, or with half the enthusiasm", and "overwhelmed his school-fellows, and all who would hearken to [him], with tragic recitations from the Ballads of Bishop Percy" (quoted in A. N. Bold 9).

published such material themselves. Among them were William Motherwell, who published his *Minstrelsy Ancient and Modern* in 1827, and Peter Buchan, whose *Ancient Ballads and Songs of the North of Scotland* appeared the following year. At that time, the phrase "ballads and songs", setting the former apart from the rest of the body of songs, had become commonplace, appearing in such works as Robert Jamieson's (*Popular Ballads and Songs, From Tradition, Manuscripts, and Scarce Editions*, published in 1806), Robert Cromek's (*Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song*, published in 1810), or later in the century, Robert Bell's (*Ancient Poems, Ballads and Songs of the Peasantry of England*, 1857) or John Harland's (*Ballads & Songs of Lancashire Chiefly Older than the 19th Century*, 1869), in addition to Peter Buchan's aforementioned. If it must be said that not all authors necessarily thought much on what might differentiate a "ballad" from other "songs", the notion of a discrimination was still there, waiting to be picked up again and refined. Motherwell for example offered his readers "Narrative Ballads", contrasted with "compositions strictly called Songs" (Motherwell i).

Amidst the general production of "national relics" (Strabone 45), the idea of the ballad was taking shape and putting on flesh.

## 1.1.2. The Construction of the Ballad Myth

### *1.1.2.1. Ballads and Cultural Nationalism*

In these kinds of collections, Scottish material (or material presented as such) figured prominently. This was the consequence of a surge in Scottish nationalism following the Act of Union of 1707, a time at which "the juggernaut of English cultural dominance seemed poised to overtake Scottish ways of life" (Gelbart 30). Ramsay's work in particular was a manifestation of this defensive phenomenon, creating a unified cultural image of Scotland which glossed over Lowland/Highland divisions (ibidem; see also D. Harker 9–11). As detailed by Gelbart in his study of *The Invention of "Folk Music" and "Art Music"*, it is this new cultural nationalism which led to interest in ballads and other musics' origins (Gelbart 12); "a mystified cultural essentialism" was on the rise, and "[t]he essential 'character' of various musical cultures was increasingly established", as ideas of nation and race were mixed with patriotic verve (ibid. 25). The "old ballads" came to be seen as a national heritage, remnants of a glorious past, which the ballad editors felt it was their duty to preserve and present to the modern reader of taste. Ramsay's *Ever Green* and *Tea-Table Miscellany*, by "reframing . . . medieval manuscripts as national relics" and turning "the courtly, aureate, cosmopolitan Middle Scots poets" into "rugged, native, freedom-

loving bards who had defended the nation from foreign encroachment", was instrumental in creating a "bardic narrative of national literary history" (Strabone 78).

Because of Scottish cultural nationalistic endeavours, ballads thus came to be associated in particular with Scotland and the region of the Border. Indeed, even as he is concerned with *English* "minstrelsy", Percy cannot but look to that region in particular, and tells us that "[t]he martial spirit constantly kept up and exercised near the frontier of the two kingdoms, as it furnished continual subjects for their songs, . . . inspired the inhabitants of the adjacent counties on both sides with the powers of poetry". "Besides", he goes on, "as our southern metropolis must have been ever the scene of novelty and refinement, the northern countries, as being most distant, would preserve their ancient manners longest, and of course the old poetry, in which those manners are so peculiarly described" (Percy 25). "In frontier regions, where men are continually engaged in active enterprise, betwixt the task of defending themselves and annoying their neighbours, they may be said to live in an atmosphere of danger, the excitation of which is peculiarly favourable to the encouragement of poetry", echoed Walter Scott in his 1830 "Introductory Remarks on Popular Poetry and on the Various Collections of Ballads of Britain, Particularly Those of Scotland" to his *Minstrelsy*. The border region came to be regarded as the natural habitat of the ballad, then associated first and foremost with the martial spirit of "Chevy Chase".

Yet ballads also became, in spite of a particular connection with Scotland, the instrument of those seeking to establish a pedigree for English culture, and anglocentric British culture. Thus Percy's *Reliques* and his introductory "Essay on the Ancient Minstrels in England" were part of his counterpoint works to James Macpherson's Ossianic publications[6]. Macpherson's *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* published in 1760 were the first of a series of works he claimed to have translated from the Gaelic, and to have initially been the work of the bard Ossian in the Highlands of the third century. He put forward an oral, ancient and noble Scottish Gaelic bardic literature, to which Percy retaliated with the character of the minstrel, descendant of the Gothic *scalds*, into which he assimilated the bard while he was at it (Percy 9). Thus, while in Scotland, as well as in Ireland and in Wales[7], the bard became a symbol of cultural resistance, a national "poet-prophet" (Strabone 51), in England, Percy, meshing it into his minstrel figure, proceeded to an "erasure of the border as separation and hence the melding of a 'national' (i.e., 'British') tradition" (Stewart 110).

6 On Percy and Macpherson's competing visions, see Groom 1996.

7 In Ireland, cultural nationalists vied to reclaim Ossian as an Irish bard; in Wales, see for example Evan Evans's 1764 S*ome Specimens of the Poetry of the Antient Welsh Bards*, drawing, unlike Scottish antiquarians, on an actual Welsh bardic tradition; or Edward Jones's *Musical and Poetical Relicks of the Welsh Bards, Preserved by Tradition, and Authentic Manuscripts, From Remote Antiquity* (1784). See Strabone chapter 3 for more details on the Welsh bardic revival.

For Scottish nationalists, the bard was a hero of a time of national autonomy. In his preface to *The Ever Green*, Allan Ramsay reminded his compatriot readers of this proud past: "[w]hen these good old Bards wrote, we had not yet made use of imported trimmings upon our Cloath, nor of foreign Embroidery in our Writings" (Ramsay vii). Rather a derogatory term up until the eighteenth century, it was Ramsay who first painted bards as the early fathers of Scottish national poetry, applying the word to (known, that is, at least, not anonymous figures) Middle Scots poets (Strabone 2018, 81–82).

Percy, in subsuming the Celtic bard into his English minstrel theory and grouping under the term "English" material from all sources (Scottish in a significant proportion), participated in "the systematic imitation, appropriation and political neutralization of antiquarian and nationalist literary developments in Scotland, Ireland and Wales" through which English literature was constituting itself at the time (Trumpener xi). His use of the term "minstrel" was more novel than that of "bard", which was more common up until Percy's publication (Erik Simpson, cited in Strabone 69), but was readily taken up by others. In his introductory "Essay on the Ancient Minstrels in England" to the *Reliques*, he put forward a theory of Britain's literary origins based on the character of the minstrel, a distinguished musician and poet who was held in high esteem at court, "loaded with honours and rewards" and considered "sacred" before the evangelisation of the British isles (Percy 9). Afterwards (he wrote), they gradually lost their status until "[t]owards the end of the sixteenth century this class of men had lost all credit" (Percy 25). The golden age of minstrelsy being thus located in a remote past, the figure of the minstrel was steeped in fantasies of primitive societies, barbarous but heroic times in which national character was undistilled—and reflected itself in a frank tongue.

### *1.1.2.2. Ballad Style*

Although Macpherson's work was very controversial and ultimately discredited as a forgery, it initially met with great success and, along with Robert Wood's 1769 *Essay on the Original Genius and Writings of Homer* (which painted Homer not only as an illiterate but as having *benefited* from this illiteracy with regard to his art), played a significant part in the development of the idea of oral tradition (see Hudson). He was building on such ideas as had begun to sprout earlier in the century, inspired by accounts extolling the eloquence of Native Americans. Among Macpherson and Wood's precursors was Thomas Blackwell, who in his *Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer* (1735) describes Homer's society as a primitive one in which language had not yet lost "its *Original, amazing, metaphorical* Tincture" (quoted in Hudson 167).

Seeing in them this originality of primitive language, champions of the ballads who took up the pen, while making obligatory apologies for the "Simplicity of the Stile" (Addison 1711), soon moved on to praise this very simplicity. For Addison, ballads were an example of simplicity to be opposed to "the Gothick Manner in Writing" (*Spectator* n°70) of the Metaphysical poets (see Friedman): the ballad of the "Two Children in the Woods" was "a plain simple Copy of Nature, destitute of the Helps and Ornaments of Art" (*Spectator* n°85); as for "Chevy-Chace", "the Thoughts of this Poem, which naturally arise from the Subject, are always simple, and sometimes exquisitely noble; . . . the Language is often very sounding, and . . . the whole is written with a true poetical Spirit" (*Spectator* n°74). Philips concurs: the language of the ballads "is the purest that was used in their Days, purer than was used by several great Writers after their Time" (Philips 2:vii); it is devoid of "vile Conceit", "Low Pun, or double Entendre" and "apparell'd in Majestick Simplicity" (ibid., vii-viii). Bishop Percy as well attributes to "these relics of antiquity" "a pleasing simplicity, and many artless graces" (Percy 4). Ballads became paragons of good, honest, selfless style and sentiment, as opposed to the ornaments of modern poets pursuing fashion and seeking renown; "poetic embodiments of pure presence available to an earlier state of society and subsequently lost in the process of refinement" (Manning 56). In the words of Pinkerton,

> the dialect in which the Scotish [sic] Ballads are written gives them a great advantage in point of touching the passions. Their language is rough and unpolished, and seems to flow immediately from the heart. We meet with no concettos or far-fetched thoughts in them. They possess the pathetic power in the highest degree, because they do not affect it; and are striking, because they do not meditate to strike. (Pinkerton xii)

This representation corresponds to the aesthetic aspect of Enlightenment stadial theory, which held that societies followed evolutionary stages, from hunting and gathering to agriculture to commerce, from a barbarous state to civilisation to decadence. In the field of literature, this meant, according to Hugh Blair whose *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* were published in 1783, that poetry was "frequently most glowing and animated in the first ages of society"—which, in his mind, Addison had demonstrated well enough with his ballad examples (quoted in Manning 54). In spite and because of its primitiveness, the past was a source of vivid and candid models with which to bring shame on and thwart the affected, decadent modern productions.

Yet in the nineteenth century, Scott in his "Introductory Remarks on Popular Poetry" was rather less complimentary: he found that in the ballads, "passages of . . . high character occur seldom; for during the infancy of the art of poetry, the bards have been generally satisfied with a rude and careless expression of their sentiments" (Scott 16). What "felicitous expression, or loftier numbers" did occur were chance happenings and went unnoticed. He adds:

> Another cause of the flatness and insipidity, which is the great imperfection of ballad poetry, is to be ascribed less to the compositions in their original state, when rehearsed by their authors, than to the ignorance and errors of the reciters or transcribers, by whom they have been transmitted to us. The more popular the composition of an ancient poet, or Maker, became, the greater chance there was of its being corrupted; for a poem transmitted through a number of reciters, like a book reprinted in a multitude of editions, incurs the risk of impertinent interpolations from the conceit of one rehearser, unintelligible blunders from the stupidity of another, and omissions equally to be regretted, from the want of memory in a third. (Scott 18–19)

He seems to have been at pains to reconcile his earnest enjoyment of the material with their perceived baseness. In the end, he comes to terms with his appreciation of ballads the style of which he cannot condone by concluding

> that in proportion to the care bestowed by the author upon any poem, to attain what his age might suppose to be the highest graces of poetry, the greater was the damage which it sustained by the inaccuracy of reciters, or their desire to humble both the sense and diction of the poem to their powers of recollection, and the comprehension of a vulgar audience. (Scott 20)

Thus turning poor style into a mark of high style!

### *1.1.2.3. Elevating the Ballad*

Scott was not alone in struggling with his appreciation of ballads. We have seen that Addison's publicly professed enjoyment of broadside ballad publications caused him to be ridiculed, and editors' prefaces routinely belittled their material and apologized for presenting such rough productions. This is not to be wondered at as ballads were connected, in the eye of the polite readers towards whom these ballad collections were marketed, with ballad-mongers—a low character. When Child's distinction between "traditional" or "popular" ballads and "broadside" ones had not yet been properly operated, the whole confused package bore the broadside ballad's mark of infamy. In 1735, a letter to *The Grub Street Journal* signed "Democritus" complained that "the scandalous practice of *ballad-singing*" was

> the bane of all good manners and morals . . . a continual nursery for idlers, whores, and pick-pockets; a school for scandal, smut, and debauchery; where our youth of either sex (of the lower class especially) receive the first taint, which by degrees so contaminates the mind, that, with every slight temptation, they become abandoned, lewd, and strangers to all (quoted in McDowell 152)

so that according to him ballad-printing should at least be taxed.

Ballad-mongering was a marginalized profession, and ballad-sellers were ever at the mercy of a legal system which looked on them as undesirable vagrants (McDowell 156–57). A telling example is that of "[t]he Officers" of Birmingham who issued in 1794 "this public Notice, that they are come to a determined Resolution to apprehend all strolling Beggars, Ballad Singers, and other Vagrants found within this Parish" (quoted in A. N. Bold 73). Therefore, a central concern in marketing ballads to a polite audience was to take them out of the ballad-monger's mouth and grubby hands. This is where the heroic bard-minstrel figure steps in.

Following Ramsay's revaluing of the bard, Macpherson promoted the Celtic bard in his *Poems of Ossian*, as we have seen, and Percy followed suit with his English minstrel in his introductory *Essay on the Ancient Minstrels in England* to the *Reliques*. Going through the annals of the nation, he came up with a carefully-wrought, very selective account—illustrating, for example, the minstrel's high status still in the days of Elizabeth with an excerpt from Robert Laneham describing at length the rich attire of the minstrel. Percy admits that the minstrel is not in fact "a real Minstrel, but only one personating that character" (Percy 24); he refrains, however, from quoting the not-so-flattering part in which Laneham describes the performance as designed merely "to move Mirth and Pastime" by this "ridiculous Device of an Ancient Minstrel and his Song" (quoted in Newman 124).

The essay was instrumental in suggesting an oral tradition separate from the ballad-printing business, creating a "'confrontational' paradigm of oral minstrelsy versus print balladmongering" (McDowell 154): according to Percy, "as the old Minstrels gradually wore out, a new race of ballad-writers succeeded, an inferior sort of minor poets, who wrote narrative songs merely for the press" (Percy 26). Ballad writers notably operated outside the feudal system of patronage in which Percy gave the minstrel a choice standing as the recipient of all favours prior to the sixteenth century (Würzbach, *The Rise of the English Street Ballad 1550-1650* 21); there was simply no chance of mixing up this frequenter of kingly halls with the coarse, destitute (and usually female) ballad-hawker.

But it would be wrong to picture Percy's theory as uncontested; Ritson in particular, Percy's great antiquarian rival, "a critical gadfly" (Newman 134) and a rigorous scholar, disdainfully rebuked his minstrel narrative. He thought the minstrel a miserable vagrant, and the ballad-singer who—he agreed with Percy—displaced him, a greater musical genius. He had none of Percy's contempt for the broadside and in fact valued it as a way to spread songs. However for all Ritson's scorn, Percy's vision of the minstrel held sway with the poets, such as Walter Scott—who re-clothed the minstrel in Scottish garb as the Scottish piper of the border region and took up Percy's idea of a minstrel's oral art which was challenged and defeated by the arrival of the printing press.

The authors of the ballads were also likened to illustrious ancient predecessors: in his ballad papers (*Spectator* n°70 and 74), Addison is not shy to compare "Chevy Chase" to Virgil's *Aeneid*; Pinkerton, in his dissertation "On the Oral Tradition of Poetry", traces the lineage of the ballad back to ancient Egypt; Scott, too, places them in the same tradition as Homer (Scott 12–13).

But for the relocation of the ballad to the mouth a noble poet descended from Homer and Virgil to be credible, its rough text had to be cleaned up. To a certain extent, "improvements" were made openly, with editors acknowledging the necessity they faced to mend the texts, and make sure they would not offend the more delicate ears. Percy's liberal amendments were to become particularly infamous; when Hales and Furnivall published the folio manuscript from which he started his enterprise in 1867, they were not overly impressed by his editorial approach, noting how he "puffed out the 39 lines of the *Child of Ell*; he pomatumed the *Heir of Lin* till it shone again; he stuffed bits of wool into *Sir Cawline*, *Sir Aldingar*: he powdered everything" (Hales and Furnivall xxii–xxiii)[8]. Following in his footsteps, Scott could not find it in him to publish a text without

8 For one of the more extreme examples of his craftsmanship, see the annex pp. 101-105, comparing the folio manuscript version of "The Heir of Lin" with that published in the *Reliques*—"polished till he could see his own face in it" (Hales and Furnivall 174).

"embellishing" it considerably, correcting, restoring, adding, subtracting, collating… as did most of his contemporaries. This practice was warranted by the notion that the texts had been corrupted in the process of transmission: editors were restituting what they declared were restored documents. This "tampering" was made out to counter the "tampering" of transmission by the vulgar; they were seeking to re-produce the ideal Ur-text they imagined must have been created by the bard, also regularly resorting to collating versions to achieve the "best" possible text. Percy was peremptory in his defence of his editorial practices:

> a scrupulous adherence to their wretched readings would only have exhibited unintelligible nonsense, or such poor meagre stuff, as neither came from the Bard, nor was worthy of the press; when, by a few slight corrections or additions, a most beautiful or interesting sense hath started forth, and this so naturally and easily, that the Editor could seldom prevail upon himself to indulge the vanity of making a formal claim to the improvement; but must plead guilty to the charge of concealing his own share in the amendments under some such general title, as a "Modern Copy", or the like. (Percy 5)

In some cases, an ideal text was even produced from scratch—so the infamous "Hardyknute", which Pinkerton praised as "the most noble production in this style that ever appeared in the world" (Pinkerton xii), was written by Lady Wardlaw in 1719 and passed off as ancient, but could not stand too close scrutiny and was soon enough exposed.

While at first it seemed desirable—indeed, unavoidable—that the coarse ballad texts should be touched up, improved, "restored", as its respectability grew concerns arose over authenticity. Scott's repenting confession to Motherwell in 1825, that he thought he "did wrong [him]self in endeavouring to make the best possible set of an ancient ballad out of several copies obtained from different quarters, and that, in many respects, if [he] improved the poetry, [he] spoiled the simplicity of the old song" (quoted in Atkinson, 'The Ballad Revival and National Literature' 291) illustrates the throes of editorship for those who wished to present an ideal ballad to the world and came to feel they were betraying it at once. In Scott's circle, "improvements" were going strong and unadmitted, each editor competing to produce a better version than the others, leading to a sort of status quo in which everyone knew everyone else was taking liberties with the texts, and most of them were not as a rule in a position to speak out against the others. Furthermore, although some editors collected their own material, collections were often compiled from previous publications, perpetuating the same revisions and building onto them.

But the times were a-changing. Motherwell was thus increasingly convinced "of the first importance to collect these songs with scrupulous and unshrinking fidelity", and professed that

> [t]he tear and wear of three centuries will do less mischief to the text of an old ballad among the vulgar, than one short hour will effect, if in the possession of some sprightly and accomplished editor of the present day, who may choose to impose on himself the thankless and uncalled for labour of piecing and patching up its imperfections, polishing its asperities, correcting its mistakes, embellishing its naked details, purging it of impurities, and of trimming it from top to toe with tailor-like fastidiousness and nicety so as to be made fit for the press. . . . These pernicious and disingenuous practices breed a sickly loathing in the mind of every conscientious antiquary, and would, if not checked and exposed, in a short while, lay the broad axe to the root of every thing like authenticity in oral song. (Motherwell iv)

(—and yet, he could not bring himself to present texts he collected from oral sources over texts from manuscript sources, relegating them to footnotes.) Taking a rigorous self-denying stance, he condemned the practice of collating texts (through which the "individuality" of the text "entirely disappears, and those features by which each separate copy proved its authenticity, in the collated version, become faint and dubious, confused and undistinguishable" (Motherwell vi)) even as he recognized the "superior poetical merit", "comparative distinctness and fulness of [the] narrative" of such versions. His main reproach to this practice thus lies not with its artistic merit but with its "being the means of introducing erroneous conceptions regarding our vernacular poetry, which has been recovered from tradition" (Motherwell vi). He takes a historian's approach and insists on the authenticity of the items presented over what pleasure might be derived from them, prefiguring the scientific posture of folkloristics.

This was the natural development of an antiquarian trend which placed value in scholarly paratext. Providing "accumulation of materials authenticated by learning that will place the author's claims within the legal matrix" (Stewart 116) had always been part of the game, and helped turn ballads into suitable material for a polite readership as artefacts "old and scarce" (Philips 1872, 2:v) rather than the contemporary entertainment of lower classes; in his *Collection*, Philips assures the reader that he "ha[s] to the best of [his] Judgment too, always related Fact, for which [he] ha[s] search'd the most authentick Historians, never contenting [him] self with the account given us by any one Writer" (Philips 1872, 3:x–xi) in his "Historical Introductions" to songs; Percy prefaces his work with a scholarly essay; etc. What had changed was that the expectations were being raised.

Another aspect of the process of elevating the ballad to respectability lies in its modality. In John Home's 1756 play *Douglas*, based on the ballad "Gil Morrice", there is no singing (in contrast, for example, to ballad operas such as John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* (1728) or Allan Ramsay's *Gentle Shepherd* (1725); and no Scots besides), nor even "ballad meter" (alternating

iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter). Steve Newman analyses the play as an attempt at elevating the ballad into an ode, and the absence of song shows the restriction of his audience (Newman 47). The texts printed by Percy, Scott or Motherwell, too, lack tunes: they are preserved as *literary texts*. Thus, paradoxically, at the same time as an oral tradition is created to extract certain ballads from associations with broadside print, the ballad is taken out of the loud singing voice of the ballad-seller to be confined to bound pages distinguished from the broadside by their supposedly more permanent status[9]. Where the ballad-monger's singing erupts on the street, calling to passers-by, hawking their wares, the polite ballad turned literary is restrained to the living-room where, if it is sung at all rather than read, it will be so in a quieter fashion, and with words amended by careful editors; or, in the case of Home's play, confined to the stage. For Newman, Home's "muting of the ballad's communal voice reveals the play's elitism and preposterousness" (ibid. 74).

The fact that the respectability of the ballad was a matter of presentation is made evident by the fact that Philips's *Collection of Old Ballads* contained a fair proportion of ballads which had been circulating in broadsides, and by Ramsay's *Tea-Table Miscellany*, which has been described by Sigrid Rieuwerts as "simply the de-luxe edition of the songs sold for a couple of pence individually or in small groups on separate song sheets or chap-books", a way to "ai[m] at both ends of the market . . . with the same material in different bindings and at different prices" (quoted in McDowell 163)—and both works were afterwards used themselves as sources for broadsides. The evolving status of the ballad was not so much a matter of unearthing antiquities as it was of hand-picking elements in current circulation and presenting them in a certain redeeming context, with the appropriate apparatus.

As pointed out by McDowell, this hand-picking also meant, from Percy onward, the exclusion of topical ballads—political or journalistic (171–72); evident products of their time, they of course could hardly be placed in the mouth of long-dead minstrels. Even Ritson found the topical political ballads too ephemeral pieces to be the object of preservation, "too strongly tinctured with the venom of party" (quoted in McDowell 172). The literary ballad was to be timeless.

#### *1.1.2.4. Poets Under the Influence*

This timelessness held a particular appeal for poets. For it should be noted that this fantasized idea of the ballad as a heritage from earlier, simpler, more innocent times was not simply one shared by a few enthusiastic amateur antiquarians, but had a significant influence on

9 Broadsides were temporary artefacts, not meant to last and in fact at a significant risk of ending up as toilet paper (Atkinson, 'The Ballad Revival and National Literature' 285).

the literary world at large. It bloomed with Romantic sensibility; the collecting activities of Scott and his circle bears testimony to Romantic taste for the old pieces and their perceived innocent primitivism, but beyond collecting, original works too bear the mark of the ballad's influence: "the ballad emerged as the genre most implicated in the romantic exploration of primitivity, modernity, and historicity" (McLane 424). The examination of the impact of ballad collection on literary creation highlights the lasting ballad impression on the imagination of the public. The figure of the bard/minstrel was taken up by the Romantics as a mirror for the artist, solitary and attuned to dramatic landscapes, and the ballad, a model of sincere emotional expression to emulate.

Unlike Macpherson's *Poems of Ossian*, or young Chatterton's forgeries of fifteenth-century poetry[10], Wordsworth and Coleridge's works were open imitations. They did not try to pass off their writings for genuine antiquities but sought to produce new works by drawing inspiration from the old. Directly inspired by Percy's *Reliques*, the ballad was for them the medium to get back in touch with a "rustic life" and its mature "essential passions of the heart . . . less under restraint" spoken in "a plainer and more emphatic language" (Wordsworth xi). The language of the ballad is more "permanent" (ibid. xii); a remedy against the ephemeral fashionable "frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse", in short, "outrageous simulation" (ibid. xix)—Wordsworth quotes verses from the "*Babes* in the Wood" as "admirable" material, versus Samuel Johnson's "contemptible" parody (ibid. xxxix-xli). They used the ballad's stanzaic form and "ballad meter", as well as repetitions and "ballad-like" turns of phrase[11] and use of dialogue in an attempt to produce works as emotionally potent as they deemed the ballads to be.

Such works as Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancyent Marinere"[12] or Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" show an association of the ballad with the supernatural, while such works as Wordsworth's "Lucy Gray", telling the story of a girl who disappears in a snowstorm, illustrate rather a connection to a sense of ordinary tragedy. At the turn of the twentieth century, Kipling

10 Chatterton tried to publish poems he claimed to have been written by a monk of the fifteenth century, Thomas Rowley. His literary career was not successful and he killed himself at the age of seventeen. But the Romantic poets differ from the antiquarian in that they did not scorn Chatterton's pretence: on the contrary, they elevated him to the status of *poète maudit*—they were more interested in the idea of imitating the old works than in arguing over historical authenticity. They sought the ballad's authenticity of expression rather than authentic artefacts.

11 In "Lucy Gray" for example, Wordsworth draws direct inspiration from "The Babes in the Wood"—compare: "These pretty Babes with hand in hand / Went wandering up and down; / But never more they saw the Man / Approaching from the Town" ("The Babes in the Wood", as quoted in the Preface to the second edition (xl)) and "The storm came on before its time, / She wander'd up and down, / And many a hill did Lucy climb / But never reach'd the Town" ("Lucy Gray").

12 Note Coleridge's taste for archaized forms, in line with the forgers: as though to give the impression of an "Ancyent" ballad and bestowing thereby upon it the value ascribed to antiquities.

would turn again to the ballad for his vernacular narrative poems, the "Barrack-Room Ballads", and in a 1936 BBC broadcast Yeats would recall that his generation, which had come to "dislik[e] Victorian rhetorical moral fervour" and "all rhetoric", "began to imitate old ballads because an old ballad is never rhetorical" (quoted in A. N. Bold 91). The ballad had become a haven of simplicity to be turned back to whenever poets tired of current fashions; it was at once an archaizing form and a popular one, one that promised permanence and efficiency, and a token of honesty.

This examination of the germination and Romantic bloom of the ballad idea as a relic of oral tradition in the long eighteenth century illuminates in turn Child's work at the end of the eighteenth-century, a continuation of the development of ballad-publishing practices.

## 1.2. Child's *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* and the First Folksong Revival

### 1.2.1. Child's *ESPB*: The Definitive Collection and Indefinite Definition

#### *1.2.1.1. The Man: A Brief Biographical Account*

Figure 1 : Francis J. Child, c. 1890. Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

Francis James Child was born on February 1, 1825 in Boston, to Mary James and Joseph Child, sailmaker, the third of what would be eight children. He showed academic potential early on, and his father apparently earned enough to be able to help him attend Harvard College, though Child had to complement his contribution with his own earnings and a loan from a Boston merchant (Brown, *Child's Unfinished Masterpiece* 10–11). He succeeded brilliantly at Harvard, and was well-liked to top it off. After graduating in 1846, he was appointed tutor in mathematics, then history and political economy, and in 1848 made his first venture into critical editing with *Four Old Plays*, a collection of English early dramatic works. At the end of 1849, he set off for Europe, where he stayed until 1851, visiting France, Switzerland, Italy, and, crucially in regard to his subsequent work, Germany, where he benefited from a week of private study with Jacob Grimm in Berlin and later attended lectures at the university of Göttingen.

Germanic philology left its mark on him, his own future endeavour echoing the Grimms' collection of folklore as representative of the essence of national identity.

Upon returning to Harvard in 1851, he was entrusted with the chair of rhetoric and oratory, and went on to become, in 1876, Harvard University's first professor of English. In the meantime, he had launched into an ambitious project for a 150-volume series on British poets, featuring five volumes on Edmund Spenser which he edited himself and his first edition of *English and Scottish Ballads*, in eight volumes, which he was to take up again and make his life's work. He also indulged a passion for rose gardening in his spare time, and was generally recalled by friends as a "loving and tender" man (Horace Howard Furnace, quoted in Brown, *Child's Unfinished Masterpiece* 9). He died on September 11, 1896, while the final edition of *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* was going through the press.

#### *1.2.1.2. The Work*

The first collection gathered by Child, *English and Scottish Ballads*, published in 1857-1858, was in his eyes rather a frivolous work which he was to completely disavow. Though he already professed to have included "all but two or three of the *ancient* ballads of England and Scotland, and nearly all those ballads which, in either country, have been gathered from oral tradition,—whether ancient or not", he also included "many ballads of . . . second class", that is, "the works of the professional ballad-maker" (Child, *English and Scottish Ballads* vii–viii). He thus already distinguished between a higher and a lower order of ballads, and shunned as much as he could broadsides and garlands. But he had sought to indulge a leisurely readership, and afterwards chided himself for not having been selective enough in his choice of material. As David Harker (105) points out, he does not make any attempt to justify his focus on English and Scottish material and exclusion of Welsh and Irish material, which apparently go without saying. He seems to have unquestioningly followed the editorial tradition which preceded him and which we briefly went over in the above section; furthermore, what Harker identifies as Child's "sense of the primacy of English culture within the 'northern' or 'Gothic' nations of Europe" (105) calls for a focus on England even as the firmly anchored association of the "great" ballads with Scotland strictly forbids its exclusion. In fact, the tendency to slip into speaking of himself as an "English editor" of "English ballads" (Child, *English and Scottish Ballads* xi) suggests the subsumption of Scotland into an encompassing England, in a manner reminiscent of Percy.

As Child's interest in ballads proved to be no temporary whim, he was to exercise much more rigour in his great collection, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, published between

1882 and 1898—his lifework: his tombstone identifies him as the "Editor of the English and Scottish Ballads". As hinted at by the definite article in the title of the collection (absent in the first), his stated intent in undertaking this work was to provide the world with a definitive collection of this species of poetry: he informs the reader in his "Advertisement to Part I" that "[i]t was [his] wish not to begin to print The English and Scottish Popular Ballads until this unrestricted title should be justified by my having at command every valuable copy of every known ballad" (Child, *ESPB* 1:vii), suggesting that he had achieved his aim.

When he undertook this new, definitive edition, Child had come into contact with Svend Hersleb Grundtvig, a Danish scholar who had undertaken a similar project with Danish ballads and had also taken an interest in English and Scottish ballads[13]. Although the two men never met in person, they engaged in regular and friendly correspondence, Grundtvig being something of a mentor to Child, who sought and very much deferred to his judgement. In a letter from 1883, he humbly professed: "Whatever there may be that is not bad in the book is mostly the fruit of your book, and whatever is bad is my own" (Hustvedt 298), and he trusted Grundtvig to "set [him] right when [he] ha[d] gone wrong, and to note [his] little as well as greater trips" (ibid. 299). Apparently investing Grundtvig with the kind of superior perspicacity which some would later attribute to himself, he actually begged of him that he give him that ever-elusive "criterion of the popular ballad, the distinction between ballad and tale, *fabliau*, and between the genuine national or people's ballads and all varieties of a base kind", that he "try to express the more subtle characteristics of an old popular ballad in words", for, he remarked, "the distinction is easier to feel than to formulate" (ibid. 268) (unfortunately, Grundtvig was not quite so obliging as to so far break the back of his work for him).

Again like his predecessors, Child valued ballads as artefacts of the past, and accordingly organized them based on their supposed antiquity: ballads with two-line couplets came first as he believed it to be the older form; quatrain ballads followed; and among them classification was made according to style, more or less archaic language (though purposeful archaisms from unscrupulous editors had to be looked out for), and storyline. He saw the ballads as relics of some distant primaeval oral literature, asserting in 1874 that their "historical and natural place is anterior to the appearance of the poetry of art, to which it has formed a step, and by which it has been

13 Interestingly, although Grundtvig's collection of ballads, *Danmarks gamle Folkeviser*, was a seminal work, it was not to remain, like Child's, a fixed canon, but was expanded instead by subsequent scholars. Child and Grundtvig's correspondence was published by Sigurd Bernhard Hustvedt in *Ballad Books and Ballad Men: Raids and Rescues in Britain, America, and the Scandinavian North since 1800*. Harvard University Press, 1930.

regularly displaced, and, in some cases, all but extinguished" (Child, 'Ballad Poetry' 464)[14]—even though, three years later, he was still testily asking Grundtvig for an opinion as to the time of their production (Hustvedt 278). This reflected a social Darwinist vision of culture, such as echoed that of predecessors, in which ballads were a stage in the development of literature and the advent of the printing press had led to the decay of a tradition of oral literature.

Yet in spite of his insistence on the oral nature of the "true" popular ballad, Child markedly favoured manuscript sources—"unsunned treasures locked up in writing" (Child, *ESPB* 1:v). Convinced as he was of the moribund state of oral tradition "at this late day", he scarcely attempted to collect ballads directly from singers, finding what little he had sent to him by various informants to be "meagre, and generally of indifferent quality" (ibid. v). He was looking instead for the earliest possible manuscripts, which he thought to have fixed oral texts at the earliest possible stage before subsequent degradation: the ideal ballad was one which "had been written down early, . . . and not been left to the chances of tradition" (*ESPB* 3:95). For the bearers of the oral ballad tradition, the folk, constituted in his mind at once a preserving and a corrupting force. He thought the best way of transmission to be "purely through the mouths of unlearned people", in which case "there is less probability of willful change"—in contrast to which, once they have slipped "in the hands of professional singers there is no amount of change which they may not undergo" ('Ballad Poetry' 466); and yet even "unlearned people" were but a lesser evil, as "[a]t every stage of oral transmission we must suppose that some accidental variations from what was delivered would be introduced, and occasionally some wilful variations. Memory will fail at times; at times the listener will hear amiss, or will not understand, and a perversion of sense will ensue, or absolute nonsense, —nonsense which will be servilely repeated, and which repetition may make more gross" (*ESPB* 5:309): "low mouths" and "low hands" will "damag[e]" a perfectly good ballad (*ESPB* 1:360). Departures from a conceived Ur-text best represented by selected manuscripts were indeed seen as corruptions, as they were to previous editors endeavouring to reconstitute the ideal text. Child was not quite so bold, but disapprovingly pointed out such corruptions; what he identified as such were here "extravagance" (*ESPB* 3:381) or "exaggeration" (*ESPB* 3:165), there too "prosaic" a touch (*ESPB* 2:296), "too much . . . refinement" (*ESPB* 4:161), "sophisticat[ion]" (*ESPB* 2:263), "sentimentality", "platitude" (*ESPB* 3:381), "trite[ness]" (*ESPB* 5:156), "incoheren[ce]" (*ESPB* 2:7), or the presence of a "moral" (*ESPB* 1:34), all deviations from what he considered to be the

14 Child's article for *Johnson's Universal Cyclopædia* on "Ballad Poetry" he reportedly "wished to be neither quoted nor regarded as final" (Gummere, quoted in Hart 756); but in the absence of his long-projected, never drafted definitive essay on the subject, quoted it shall be. It is indeed rather illuminating as to the assumptions and fantasies underlying his conception of the ballad, which he was never in a position to replace with hard evidence.

original simple, straight-to-the point, impersonal and detached style of the ballad, its "fundamental . . . absence of subjectivity and of self-consciousness" ('Ballad Poetry' 464).

The way Child ascertained ballads' popular ascendency was thus mostly through style, which he assessed thanks to some sixth sense, an instinct honed by practice, in a way not always communicable—"easier to feel than formulate". Another way to determine ballad pedigree lay in European parallels: to him, "correspondences with foreign ballads . . . are evidence of a genuine traditional foundation" (*ESPB* 2:170). Unable to trace a precise temporal locus of origin to ballads, he "instead sought to connect them with a body of materials that were old and widely distributed and perhaps came from the 'general stock of mediæval fiction', which might comprise whole ballads or merely elements (plot devices, motifs, names, and so forth), and which could be found across literature in different languages" (Atkinson, *The Anglo-Scottish Ballad* 37–38). As for ballads recounting real events, liberties taken with the facts rather than strict adherence, deemed rather "almost a ground of suspicion", pointed to authenticity, as "[b]allad singers and their hearers would be as indifferent to the facts as the readers of ballads are now; it is only editors who feel bound to look closely into such matters" (Child, *ESPB* 2:19). He avoided broadsides, which he looked upon as "veritable dung-hills, in which, only after a great deal of sickening grubbing, one finds a very moderate jewel" (in Hustvedt 254)—though he was in fact often enough reduced to using them. Like Percy, he associated print with the decay of balladry, and this view, as Mary Ellen Brown points out, biased his appreciation of sources: "he implies that broadsides were later, corrupting the popular, orally transmitted version. Chronologically, however, most of the broadsides appear much earlier than the manuscript and orally derived texts in his possession" ('Child's Ballads and the Broadside Conundrum' 68).

The origins of the ballads thus unbound by fact were shrouded in primal mystery. Though Child conceded that "they do not 'write themselves', as William Grimm has said", and "a man and not a people composed them" in the end "the author counts for nothing" ('Ballad Poetry' 464), and he even actually brazenly calls "the true popular ballads" "the spontaneous products of nature" (*English and Scottish Ballads* vii), depriving the folk of actual agency in the conception of ballads and disconnecting their essential nobility from their transmitters. In fact, though he calls the ballad "popular", he manages to dissociate it from low origins by asserting that at the time of its creation, it

> is popular, not in the sense of something arising from and suited to the lower orders of a people. As yet, no sharp distinction of high and low exists, in respect to knowledge, desires, and tastes. An increased civilization, and especially the introduction of book-culture, gradually gives rise to such a division; a poetry of art appears; the popular poetry

> is no longer relished by a portion of the people, and is abandoned to an uncultivated or not over-cultivated class—a constantly diminishing number. (‘Ballad Poetry’ 464)

Ballads were thus hand-me-downs, suffering at the hands of their holders—*gesunkenes Kulturgut*, as the German scholar Hans Neumann would later put it. When they were not imputed to failing memory, mishearing, or misunderstanding, and had to be admitted to be the fruit of a bout of *creativity*, any changes to the ballads were ill-advised and in poor taste. A step in the theory of cultural evolution, ballads were themselves undergoing a pitiful devolution.

He placed their origins at some remote and ill-documented time when “[t]he condition of society in which a truly national or popular poetry appears explains the character of such poetry. It is a condition in which the people are not divided by political organization and book-culture into markedly distinct classes, in which consequently there is such community of ideas and feelings that the whole people form an individual”—a sort of ideal, harmonious pre-class guilt pre-history, in which could be produced a poetry that was “in its essence an expression of our common human nature, and so of universal and indestructible interest”, “an expression of the mind and heart of the people as an individual, and never of the personality of individual men” (‘Ballad Poetry’ 464). Their author, “the unconscious poet of the real *traditional* ballad” (quoted in Hart 799), is thus more of a manifestation of a sort of hive mind than an individual. He speaks also, for example, of Robin Hood as “absolutely a creation of the popular muse” (*ESPB* 3:42)—an abstract concept conveniently removed from any actual person. Furthermore, the distant authoring figure was quite distinct from any modern “folk”, in a divided society incapable of such production; the ballad was a thing of the past, and what modern ballads were created were artist-made, individual, inferior works. Indeed, so eager is he to dissociate the ballad from a lower folk that he soon moves away from even his hive mind people to assert that “the popular ballad is not originally the product or the property of the lower orders of the people. Nothing, in fact, is more obvious than that many of the ballads of the now most refined nations had their origin in that class whose acts and fortunes they depict—the upper class—though the growth of civilization has driven them from the memory of the highly polished and instructed, and has left them as an exclusive possession to the uneducated” (‘Ballad Poetry’ 466). This justifies heralding pieces found in the mouths of the lower classes as the literature of the whole nation—for there is no doubt that ballads were to him, as to most collectors before him, literature; items in his collection were selected and sorted according (to his mind) to literary merit, and he hardly cared to print tunes (he included but fifty-five, in the final volume).

If William P. Ker threw up his hands and pleaded we should agree to define the popular ballad, "[i]n spite of Socrates and his logic", by simply pointing to ballads contained in Child's canon such as "*Milldams of Binnorie* and *Sir Patrick Spens* and *The Douglas Tragedy* and *Lord Randal* and *Child Maurice*" (quoted in Graves, *The English Ballad: A Short Critical Survey* 7), it is because this corpus is defined above all by its adherence to Child's half-stated aesthetic expectations, which he justifies by their being a supposed token of authenticity; to Child himself, of his own confession, "the chemistry of the English and Scottish ballad seem[ed] . . . , *mostly*, as indeterminable as Greek myths" (Hustvedt 272). Rather than uncovering the secret definition Child never put to paper, subsequent scholars thus laboured over an enigma he himself had never solved. And on this collection gathered according to a set of criteria based on a fantasized conception of ballad origins, were based later descriptions of the ballad. As the collection was canonized, the ideology governing it was crystallized with it.

## 1.2.2. The Legacy

### *1.2.2.1. Defining the Indefinable*

> After Child's death, and when the last Part of *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* had been seen through the press by his literary executors, peculiar things began to happen which the Harvard scholar probably never foresaw. His work, and the ideas implicit in it, were taken up by a fair number of professional academics, usually in university departments of English Literature, both in Britain and North America. The study of "ballads" was established, above all in the USA, as a legitimate element in the curriculum; and several of the generation of literary academics who got jobs in the first two decades of the twentieth century in the USA, and later moved on to hold professorships, benefited materially from their association with the prestige in which Child's work was held. (D. Harker 121)

> In some mysterious way, these 305 ballads have come to be canonized as superior to all other folk-songs of the English people. This in the face of such evaluations as Professor Child himself put upon some of them sufficient to indicate their widely divergent values and types. Even the number 305 has come to possess a curious magical connotation which has exerted sway for twenty-five years. When Miss Pound says of ballad-making that "It is a closed account for ballads of the Child type," there is much sound truth in the remark. . . . [A] "Child ballad" means little more than one collected and approved by Professor Child. (James 19)

"Child ballads" thus constituted the core of the brand-new academic field of ballad studies, "the basis but also the classificatory and aesthetic yardstick for ballad research" (Würzbach,

'Tradition and Innovation' 171). The definitiveness of the collection was asserted early on; Kittredge did not hesitate to declare that it "comprise[d] the whole extant mass of [English and Scottish popular ballads]", to which but variants could be added (Kittredge and Child Sargent xiii); for Reed Smith, it was "the authoritative resting-place of what has survived of the splendid body of English and Scottish ballads" (quoted (note) in James 260). Scholars lamented his not having been able to write a projected essay which was to have defined the ballad once and for all. "What is a ballad?" asked Alan Bold, deploring, as late as 1979: "It is one of the minor tragedies of literature that the man best equipped to answer that question did not live to do so" (A. N. Bold 1) (see also, for example, Hustvedt 13; Hodgart 12). But though they could not define it, they were confident that a ballad was what lay in Child's volumes; Child was canonized along with his work, and his "instinct", some kind of sixth sense, trusted whole-heartedly by most. Shortly after his death, Child's starry-eyed student Kittredge panegyrically described this "instinct" as a

> faculty, which even the folk has not retained, and which collectors living in ballad-singing and tale-telling times have often failed to acquire, . . . vouchsafed by nature herself to this sedentary scholar. In reality a kind of instinct, it had been so cultivated by long and loving study of the traditional literature of all nations that it had become wonderfully swift in its operations and almost infallible. A forged or retouched piece could not deceive him for a moment; he detected the slightest jar in the genuine ballad tone. (Kittredge, in Child, *ESPB* 1:xxx)[15]

In the absence of a definition by Child himself, scholars struggled to compose one by trying to see through Child's obiter dicta into his inscrutable mind, and by using his definitive corpus as a basis for attempting a definition of the ballad. In 1906, William Morris Hart did everyone a great service by diligently gathering in his article "Professor Child and the Ballad" all of Child's scattered remarks hinting at his idea of the "true" popular ballad, drawing from his article in *Johnson's Cyclopædia* and his various editions of popular ballads. In the introduction to the abridged, one-volume edition of Child's collection destined to students, Kittredge starts with the basic, undisputed definition of the ballad as "a song that tells a story, or—to take the other point of view—a story told in song"; "[m]ore formally", he goes on, "it may be defined as a short narrative poem, adapted for singing, simple in plot and metrical structure, divided into stanzas, and characterized by complete impersonality so far as the author or singer is concerned" (Kittredge and Child Sargent xi). Its oral nature was also an essential trait, as suggested by the idea of "song"; Gordon H. Gerould gave a similar, lasting definition in *The Ballad of Oral Tradition* (1932):

15 See also for example Alan Bold, praising Child's "ear for the sound of the genuine popular ballad" (18), or David Buchan: "Child possessed a remarkable capacity for distinguishing the stylistic traits of oral—or as he would call it, popular—balladry, even when these traits existed in texts that had also sub-literary characteristics" (277).

“Defined in simplest terms, the ballad is a folk-song that tells a story. Whatever may be added to this statement is by way of amplification, to explain and clarify merely, since the whole truth of the matter is in it. What we have come to call a ballad is always a narrative, is always sung to a rounded melody, and is always learned from the lips of others rather than by reading” (Gerould 3). The picture remained hazy and Ker was no outlier for resorting to definition by example. But scholars also attempted to flesh out the concept of ballads as a separate species of poetry by drawing characteristics from the corpus; thus, for example, George Morey Miller on *The Dramatic Element in the Popular Ballad* (1905), Louise Pound in her *Poetic Origins and the Ballad* (1921), MacEdward Leach in *The Ballad Book* (1955), or Dan Ben-Amos describing “The Situation Structure of the Non-Humorous English Ballad” (1963)—offering on the whole “vague definitions of a mass of materials so nearly indefinable” (James 19). Gerould added to his basic definition three characteristics: centring of the action “on a single situation, which may be either the culminating point in a larger series of events or an isolated happening of sensational value” (6); “a marked tendency to tell the story dramatically” reflected in its “brevity” and “compress[ion]”, as well as use of dialogue (6-7); and an “impersonal attitude to the events of the story” (8).

The field thus took the form of a kind of ouroboros: 1. Child selected a corpus which he claimed included all “English and Scottish popular ballads”, without a clear definition of what he was looking for in the first place; 2. if these were all the popular ballads, as his successors readily believed, then from this collection could be defined the popular ballad; 3. as the definition of popular ballad basically coincided with Child’s canon, nothing (no item Child might have been aware of, at any rate) outside of it could be considered a popular ballad. As a result, the ballad remained a nebulous object of study, Hustvedt’s “ballad enigma” (4), in spite of its confinement to 305 items. For some, the appeal of the ballad lay precisely in this nebulousness; Bold argues that “the ambiguity of their origins has been a godsend to critics in search of a subject”, with “popular ballads offer[ing] immense scope for scholarly speculation” (67).

With so much “scope for scholarly speculation”—or, one is tempted to suspect, for pulling things out of one’s hat—disagreements were bound to arise, and the main area of contention in ballad studies became the matter of origins. Two factions formed in what were dramatically called the “ballad wars”: on one side, the “communalists”, led by Francis Barton Gummere; on the other, the “individualists”, represented by Gordon Hall Gerould, Phillips Barry, Cecil J. Sharp or William Wells Newell. As we have seen, Child left remarks pointing to both individual authorship and a

kind of hive mind creation. Gummere seized the latter interpretation, developing in his 1907 work on *The Popular Ballad* the idea of a "singing, dancing throng" (*The Popular Ballad* 44) improvising stanza after stanza of a popular ballad. This "dancing throng" he locates in a remote past, beyond the reaches of documented history; he reasonably recognizes that "the actual traditional ballad of Europe is not to be carried back into prehistoric conditions", yet still refers us to "the mists of unrecorded time" for its birth date (*The Beginnings of Poetry* 163 and 28)—as ever the locus of the most fanciful, unrestrained imaginings. But others were not all willing to follow his fantasy.

Newell's degenerationist thesis, described in his 1899 article on "Early American Ballads", posited instead that popular ballads were the fruit of fine literary minds, fallen into the hands of coarse illiterates and degenerating ever since—the familiar *gesunkenes Kulturgut*. Barry's theory in 1913 was one of "*individual invention, plus communal re-creation*" ('An American Homiletic Ballad' 4). Gerould came to the same conclusion; he was wary of conjecture, but was at least certain that "neither a melody nor the outline of an imagined story can very well emerge from more than a single mind" (Gerould 213), and was "forced to the conclusion that most ballads, both those which have been in circulation in later times and those of earlier date, have been composed by individuals" (231) (minstrels (226) or, in the case of religious ones such as "Judas", clerks), while the role of the folk was to "perfect the finest ballads by reshaping them under the guidance of traditional art" (234).

Others, like Frank Sidgwick, could not make up their mind and went for the best of both worlds; in *The Ballad* (1914) he at once postulated the existence of some "Aryan bard, who from the primeval Pamir sang songs for all time, songs of universal popularity, songs which despite their origin in his one mouth have never since borne any appearance of having an author" (Sidgwick 15) and attributed "the making of the ballads" to "the undistinguished many-headed common herd—the people" in the next breath (ibid. 20). Kittredge also represented the "extant ballads of England and Scotland" as at once "the end of a process of which the beginning may not improbably be discovered in the period of communal composition" and yet themselves "the work of individual authors, at least in the majority of cases" (though "not professional poets or minstrels, but members of the folk") (Kittredge and Child Sargent xxiv).

Louise Pound had no time for all this lack of empiricism, and not only looked down on Gummere's fantasies but also challenged Child's canon, pleading in her 1921 book on *Poetic Origins and the Ballad* for abandoning the

> belief in the "communal" authorship and ownership of primitive society, disbelief in the primitive artist; reference to the ballad as the earliest and most universal poetic form; belief in the origin of narrative songs in the dance, especially of the English and Scottish traditional ballad type as of dance origin; belief in the emergence of traditional ballads from the illiterate, that is, belief in the communal creation rather than *re*-creation of ballads; belief in the special powers of folk improvisation; and belief that the making of traditional ballads is a "closed account". (Pound vii)

Newell, too, was all for re-opening the account, and became one of the early collectors from living tradition, publishing folksongs freshly reaped from the field as early as 1883. Barry was also rather ahead of his time in advocating learning from folksingers by sitting "at their feet" in order to solve "ballad problems" (quoted in Alvey 71), testifying to ballad singing being alive still, and no "close account". He published versions of Child ballads which were not found in his volumes, suggesting they be added to them, attempting to stretch the limits of the canon, and even taking an interest in folksongs outside of the ballad species. Various ballads were put forward for addition to the ballad canon; in *The Ballad of Tradition*, Gerould lists "The Blind Beggar of Bednall Green", "The Seven Virgins", "The Shooting of his Dear", "The Lake-Wake Dirge", "Over Yonder's a Park", "Corpus Christi" or "The Bold Fisherman" (32–34), but the most widely accepted, since its publication by Frank Sidgwick in 1905, has been "The Bitter Withy", an apocryphal story of the Christ child walking on sunbeams as on a bridge to prove his high birth to his snotty aristocratic peers (they attempt to do the same and drown; the virgin Mary whips Jesus with the bitter withy as recompense). By 1979 however, when Alan Bold again listed it as the one certain candidate outside Child's canon to the title of popular ballad (Bold 1–2), it was still exterior to it, unnumbered, while Child's titles were as ever being cited with their corresponding number from 1 to 305. Gerould in 1930 had boldly remarked:

> A ballad is either a ballad because it conforms to a certain definition as to form and transmission, or it is not a ballad at all. Its inclusion in Child's volumes has nothing to do with the matter beyond the fact that his vast learning and critical acumen enabled him to sift with amazingly few errors of judgement the spurious imitation from the real ballad of tradition. I hope I have made sufficiently clear my veneration for Child's performance, and I yield to no one in my admiration for his two greatest followers, Professor Gummere and Professor Kittredge. I believe, however, that harm has been done by too rigid an insistence on the authoritative completeness of Child's collection. . . . [N]othing like an exact census of English and Scottish ballads can be made. (Gerould 30)

And yet, he also suggested that Child had "brought together . . . so large and so representative a collection of texts that the student requires no further illustration either of the subjects treated or the manner in which the stories are told" (ibid. 15), countering thereby the revolutionary potential

of his remarks. In addition, and despite collectors' enthusiasm at discovering ballads in a living tradition, this tradition was still viewed as moribund, dying, and collection as an attempt at salvaging the remains of a more glorious past. Gerould tellingly dedicated *The Ballad of Tradition* "TO THE DEVOTED COLLECTORS WHO IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY HAVE SHOWN THAT FOLK-SONG THOUGH MORIBUND YET LIVES".

Furthermore, the "folk" remained largely artistically incapable in the eyes of the scholars; even Pound described them as uncreatively contenting themselves with modifying and building on existing airs and texts, and overall participating in decaying the ballad (cited in D. Harker 136). Gerould, who meant to dispel the idea of folksingers' ignorance, made much of their being "trained musicians . . . far from unskilled in verse"; but he somehow robbed them of artistic achievement by adding that they had "acquired their knowledge with so little effort, being in the tradition of it, as to be almost unconscious of artistry" (Gerould 184). This odd qualification of his praise paints the folk as some force of nature, creative but deprived of creative intent: "Forces of which the makers have been almost unconscious have often shaped [the ballad] to beauty, taste acquired through the long-continued practice of a traditional art has directed imagination; but there has been no effort at intellectual control, which is probably why the art of the folk, with all its vitality and vigour, has been a somewhat ragged thing, amazingly lovely sometimes, almost always interesting, but curiously uneven in execution" (ibid. 14).

There was also talk enough of dedramatizing the effect of print on the ballad tradition and looking at versions found in contemporary singing with an equal eye; Barry pointed out that a folksinger "makes no distinction between earlier and later balladry . . . Why make a distinction, when the folk makes none?" (quoted in Alvey 74–75). And yet in practice, collectors were still selecting what items appealed most to their sense of ballad aesthetics; Barry for example did not pursue certain variants of "Lord Lovell" (75) if he thought he could obtain something more "valuable" (quoted in D. Harker 137); Pound approved of the practice of pre-selecting infotmants who would likely yield better texts (see D. Harker 136). The seeds of dissension were there from early on, yet change was slow coming.

Faced with the problem of defining the ballad, scholars started at what they held for certain: Child's canon. It stood in spite of challenges, and from it were drawn descriptions of the ballad; its dramatic qualities, use of dialogue, "leaping and lingering", tightly packed action, incremental repetition, etc., which further served to confirm certain texts as authentic stuff and to brand others with degeneration brought about by distasteful personal interference. Alongside these inquiries rose

to prominence the question of ballad origins, the occasion for checking some of the most flagrant fantasies tied to the ballad—but the folk remained a clumsy agent of destruction or, for the more benevolent scholars, an unthinking force of nature.

When taken up by scholars doubling as collectors such as Barry, the matter of origins lost its centrality, and that of folk's role in shaping the ballad took its place. But he who made the most influential and lasting statement on the matter was Cecil James Sharp, leading figure of Great Britain's first folk revival.

#### *1.2.2.2. Cecil J. Sharp and the First British Folk Revival*

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, a handful of collectors were thrilled to realize that the ballads and songs of old had not yet actually died out, giving birth to such pioneering works as Sabine Baring-Gould's *Songs of the West* (1889-1891) or Lucy Broadwood and John Fuller-Maitland's *English County Songs* (1893)[16]. The creation of the Folk-Song Society in 1898 brought together amateur collectors of folksong like Broadwood, Baring-Gould or Frank Kidson, and provided a base for the development of the collection and study of folksong in Great-Britain. The Society provided advice to encourage collection and published a journal presenting essays and collected items. It benefited enormously from Cecil James Sharp joining the Society in 1903.

That same year, Sharp, aged forty-four, had heard his first folksong ("Seeds of Love") from the mouth of a gardener, John England, in Somerset. He had promptly taken it down, harmonized it, and had it sung that evening at a choir supper by a classically trained young lady (Fox Strangways 33). This was a revelation: he was to devote the rest of his life to the collection and promotion of folksong—and dance, later creating the English Folk Dance Society (1911), with which the Folk Song Society (by the time grown rather moribund) was to merge in 1932 to create the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS), still running to this day.

Figure 2: Genthe, Arnold. Photograph of Cecil J. Sharp. 1916. Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

The entry of Sharp at the Society provided a welcome impetus, and introduced what has been looked back on as "the golden age of English and Scottish folk song collecting"

16 Even more of a precursor was Lucy Broadwood's uncle John Broadwood, whose *English County Songs* were published in 1843.

(Gammon 15). In 1904, his efforts led to the publication of a collection, *Folk Songs From Somerset*. Sharp, just as Child had sifted through "veritable dunghills" of broadsides to extract "a very moderate jewel", had to patiently weed through his informants' repertoires, a mix of music hall songs and "proper" (to his mind) folksongs between which the singers themselves did not necessarily distinguish, or which they did not rightfully hierarchize. His main interest was in tunes, which he took down by ear—words being secondary and emendable if unsuitable for polite company. Another collector, Percy Grainger, was a solitary pioneer in using the phonograph to record informants from 1906. The main counter-argument from other collectors, first and foremost Sharp, to the use of this innovative technology was that the machine would make informants nervous. As it was, Grainger was able to write the most precise transcriptions of tunes of the time. Sharp, on the other hand, followed a policy of transcribing, not what his informants sung necessarily, but rather what he felt they should have sung or meant to sing.

In 1907 was published his theoretical magnum opus, *English Folk Song: Some Conclusions*. It gave an authoritative definition of folksong which was largely taken up by his peers and successors. It defined folksong as the fruit of oral transmission, shaped by three main elements: "(1) continuity, which links the present with the past; (2) variation, which springs from the creative impulse of the individual or the group; and (3) selection by the community which determines the form in which folk music survives" (Karpeles 6). Sharp and his peers were motivated, like their predecessors, by a desire to "save" what was left of what they saw as a dying tradition. These remnants were to be collected from the preferably aged and illiterate peasants, "in those country districts, which, by reason of their remoteness, have escaped the infection of modern ideas" (Sharp 4). Most collectors followed him to the countryside, though Frank Kidson stood apart in his obstinacy to collect from city-dwellers and defence of the despised broadside.

For Sharp, *ballads* and *songs* were two different things, the former an earlier form characterized by its narrative substance and lyrical form, "versified forms of the *Märchen* or popular tales, which are found all over the world" (Sharp 90), and he refers the reader to Child, the one and only authority on the subject. Reconstructing the ballad's history in Europe, he conceives it as intrinsically linked to the epic, into which he imagines it to have blended at one point, before the epic was broken up into ballads again (ibid. 90-91), and situates its origins, like Gummere, in a dancing throng. With English nationalistic ardour, he rebukes the assumption that Scottish ballads are superior to English ballads, attributing it to their earlier collection, before they were as decayed as he found English ballads to be in his day (ibid. 102). As he does not exclude narration from his

conception of songs as opposed to ballads, his categories appear to be entirely founded on the separation of certain items established by Child's canon.

Like the Romantics, he attributes to "folk-poetry" a "simplicity and directness without subtlety", comparable to "the Bible narratives and Shakespeare"; he allows some room for some potentially licentious material under covert of innocence, but rejects as individual rather than communal productions folksongs that are utterly "gross and coarse in sentiment and objectionable in every way" (ibid. 102).

And just like the Romantics had used the ballad as source material to create a renewed, reinvigorated literature, so the revivalists drew on folksong as the essence of a new national music; a comparison which Sharp was happy to make himself, crediting Percy's *Reliques* with having given the "cold formalism" a deadly blow and revived "a taste for genuine and natural poetry" (ibid. 133). The leading composer of this new English national school of composition was Ralph Vaughan Williams, who himself took to collecting folksongs in 1903.

The folksongs collected were proof that England, contrary to the old belief that it "alone of all the nations of Europe possessed no folk-music of [its] own", was in fact "at least as richly endowed as any other European nation" (Sharp 127). "[E]ssentially a communal as well as a racial product", it was to serve as the basis of a new school of national music, such as England was deemed to lack (Sharp identifies Purcell as its last great national composer), which would "express the ideals and aspirations" of the nation "in an idiom that is intelligible to them" (ibid. 130)—on the model of other continental schools of music based on folksong. The idiom was to be inculcated to "every English child" through folksong, so that future musicians would be fluent in it (ibid. 133). Sharp was thus a fervent advocate of the inclusion of folksong in school curriculums, which would also help form children's character; folk tunes were to be the main interest, being "natural, pure and simple" (ibid. 134), with fitting words, re-written if need be. This formative introduction to music would purify their minds and ensure that they did not later fall to the lure of the "superficial attractiveness" of "the poverty-stricken tunes of the music-hall" (ibid. 135). This national musical idiom would furthermore produce patriotic Englishmen moved by "love of country and pride of race" rather than—God forbid—"citizens of the world" (ibid. 136).

By contrast with previous ballad collection, Sharp's focus was on tunes rather than texts. He did not hope to rescue valuable texts, finding that the "English ballad is moribund: its account is well-nigh closed", folksong texts being generally "corrupt" and "incomplete", whereas tunes have been "more faithfully preserved" (ibid. 102). And yet Child ballads were still of interest to

him in his collecting work in that they provided a touchstone by which to determine the quality of a singer's repertoire. When he went to the United States in 1916 to collect folksongs with Maud Karpeles in the Appalachians, he was above all interested in ballads which he was intent on tracing back to English tradition, thereby proving its cultural prominence.

What Lyn Wolz calls the "'look how many Child ballads I found' syndrome" (Wolz 303) also concerned other collectors. A prime example of this would be James Madison Carpenter, an American scholar and student of Child's successor Kittredge, who travelled to Great Britain to collect folksongs in England, Scotland and Wales from 1929 to 1935. He was very pleased with his work, as he felt he could safely say that the collection he would publish would be "the most valuable collection of Child ballads with tunes ever published" (quoted in Bishop 394). His most prized discovery was Bell Duncan, an eighty-two-year-old Aberdeenshire woman. Carpenter was positively elated with the wealth of her repertoire, emphasizing the fact that she "sang sixty-five Child ballads with tunes, *never a single reference to manuscript*", and proceeded to crown her "the greatest ballad singer of all time" (quoted in Bishop 394; emphasis in the original). Her versions were long and complete, and displayed, "instead of the pseudo-archaic language of many printed texts, the rocking-horse meter of wooden broadsides, or the 'school-marm' English of many an editorially 'improved' ballad", "the rugged idiom and the picturesque imagery of the peasant; the language of life, not of literature—at times coarse, crude perhaps, but redolent of peat reek and purple heather, and lit by the fires of unalloyed human passion" (quoted in Bishop 405)—marks of a truly oral transmission: he took care to highlight her assertion of not having learned her ballads from print. He actually swept aside her inconvenient versions of "The Child of Ellie", which was very close to Percy's recasting of a fragment now identified as "Earl Brand" (7), and of "Jock o' Hazeldean" (293), which corresponded to Scott's literary reworking of the ballad.

Another interesting item he collected from her is "Prood Maitland"—his treatment of it is very telling of the significance of the "Child ballad" label, for he classed it as such, even though it is not part of Child's collection. The attribution no doubt reveals the esteem he had for the song.

Child's canon obviously stood as a marble touchstone. This status was to be perpetuated well into the twentieth century and possibly beyond, concomitantly with the uncomfortable notion of its limitedness, leading to such baffling statements as Hugh Shield's who in 1988, proceeding to define his object of study, begins: "the . . . Child ballad, *if it exists*" (Shields 40–41; my emphasis) —before going on with the description of its characteristics and his study of it.

After the First World War, the first revival ran out of steam. Like the rest of the nation, the Folk Song Society felt the human toll of the war. Sharp's vision of a future in which children would leave school proficient in the English musical idiom, though folksong did find its place in the elementary school curriculum, remained to be achieved by the Second World War; and the second revival did not in fact start in the classroom.

# 2. CHILD BALLADS AND THE CREATION OF REVIVALIST IDENTITY IN THE SECOND FOLK REVIVAL

## 2.1. Child Ballads and the Reaction against Acculturation

The story of the second folk revival in Great Britain starts across the Atlantic. Interest in Child ballads' "survival" in the United States was linked to a desire to find ennobling roots to American culture, in order to show it to be on par with Europe's. Child's enterprise itself can be seen as part of this endeavour to antiquate and thereby ennoble the culture of a young nation. Through their imaginary baggage of oral tradition linking them to misty primeval times, they could also be held as tokens of the Anglo-Saxon or Teutonic racial essence in which a portion of the population prided themselves and through which they set themselves apart from other ethnic groups in America. Ballads were thus part of a children's literature used to awaken in them the memory of the race. Ballads, conceived of as having been created by a "dancing throng" in a classless society, also echoed the American democratic ethos, which was supposed to draw its origins in a primitive democratic Teutonic society (Newman 189).

At the same time (and possibly because the search for Child ballads in the United States yielded ballads generally deemed vastly inferior, considerably degraded versions of their British counterparts (see Wilgus)—hardly rewarding for the nationalistically-minded at the end of the day), some collectors endeavoured to look instead for purely American material to demonstrate that native culture was rich enough itself. Like other collectors in the British Isles we mentioned, such people as John Lomax (1875–1948) and his son Alan (1915–2002) were moving away from the manuscript-based kind of collection led by Child and seeking "living" oral material. In 1933, the pair toured the country in search of folksongs to record for the Archive of American Folk Song of the Library of Congress, giving particular attention to African-American music and bringing to national fame such singers as Leadbelly or Muddy Waters. These recordings fed the American folk revival, in which decidedly left-leaning singers like Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger took the lead.

Meanwhile, in World War II Great Britain, American music was making its way into British homes through the newly arrived radio. With men being conscripted, there was a shortage of musicians available to perform for the radio, and the BBC turned to playing more records—most of which turned out to be American popular music, as material shortages did not allow sufficient production of records in the United Kingdom to keep such programmes native (Brocken 19). Nationalistic sentiment in these difficult times however also prompted the creation of the *Country Magazine* in 1942. The programme ran until 1954, playing folksongs collected from the British countryside which were usually arranged for a small chamber orchestra and entrusted to BBC singers or, occasionally, letting the audience hear the actual recordings from traditional singers such as Harry Cox, who was later to rise to fame in revivalist circles. The programme was quite popular, paving the way for others to be aired and prompting a new wave of field collecting.

*As I Roved Out* in particular proved a worthy successor. Running from 1952 to 1957, it involved primarily as collectors Peter Kennedy and Séamus Ennis, and played out, like its predecessor, instrumental versions of folksongs arranged for a small chamber orchestra, sung studio versions by revivalist singers like Isla Cameron or Ewan MacColl or regional bands, as well as snippets of the original recordings of unaccompanied singing, the whole illustrating field reports by the collectors putting forward the quaint personalities and places they had met with and pertaining anecdotes.

American collector Alan Lomax, on the run from the Red Scare, also collaborated with the BBC. The collaboration started with his *Adventure in Folk Song* series broadcast in 1951, which gave British audiences a taste of traditional and contemporary material from the American folk revival (performed mostly by himself or American rock'n'roll singer Robin Roberts). He went on with *Patterns in American Folk Song*, in which he notably discussed and played American versions of the Anglo-Scottish and Irish ballads. He was later involved in the 1953 *Ballads and Blues* programme, in which MacColl, Albert Lloyd ans Isla Cameron also participated, and which offered parallels between British folksong and contemporary American blues and jazz songs. Lomax also devoted airtime to Britain proper, for example in the 1957 *A Ballad Hunter Looks at Britain* series, something of a successor to *As I Roved Out* but featuring more field recordings from what he identified as the three folksong regions: the Celtic West coast from Cornwall to the Hebrides, Ireland, and the Saxon and Danish-influenced East coast; to which regions he added the Traveller tradition.

While we are surveying radio programmes, it is pertinent to mention Ewan MacColl, Peggy Seeger and Charles Parker's "radio ballads", recorded for the BBC between 1958 and 1964. Covering such varied subjects as train driver John Axon's heroic sacrifice to stop a runaway freight train, the building of the M1 motorway, the herring-fishing industry, or polio, they were formally ground-breaking documentaries combining recorded actuality (as opposed to the usual re-written scripts read out by actors), songs, instrumental music and sound effects. The programmes boldly modernized the ballad form, drawing from its narrative essence, lyricism, and dramatic stark realism; the underlying idea, according to MacColl, was that "techniques, implicit in certain types of folk-creation, could be applied to the mass media in a way which would be mutually beneficial to both media and traditional music" (*Journeyman* 335).

Such programmes were overall successful and contributed to a growth in the interest for folk music. This interest grew hand in hand with interest in traditional jazz, wrapped in the same American packaging. The package from overseas also included a square dancing vogue which nourished curiosity for countryside traditions and boosted EFDSS memberships as well. A precursor, MacColl's Ballads and Blues Club opened in 1953 in Soho, and more folk clubs followed—the BBC's *As I Roved Out* programme giving something of an impetus in that regard.

But a real mass movement had not yet been aroused. Though in 1953, MacColl already saw every sign that Great Britain was "on the eve of a great folk-song revival" (quoted in Gregory, 'Lomax in London' 145), another American kick was needed. It came in the form of Lonnie Donnegan, a British singer whose 1954 skiffle cover recording of Leadbelly's version of "Rock Island Line" became a hit in 1956, prompting a short-lived but very enthusiastic "skiffle craze". The main attraction of skiffle, a genre taking its root in African-American blues and jazz music, lay in the use of accessible home-made and cheap instruments such as washboards, rough-and-ready string instruments based on various types of boxes (tea-chest basses, cigar-box fiddles…) and, of course, guitars. The latter soon became ubiquitous: in the words of Michael Brocken, Lonnie Donnegan "(almost literally) placed guitars into the hands of hundreds of young men across the UK" (76), although the proficiency of most stopped at a couple basic chords—precisely the appeal of skiffle: one needed only learn a couple chords to be able to make music with friends. But the skiffle wave had already subsided by 1958, leaving legions of eager young amateur musicians with a newly-acquired guitar and a taste for making music themselves, and where were they to channel their enthusiasm? Their youthful spirit (when they were not won over to jazz) soon swelled the numbers of folk clubs, which also created spaces for amateur performance. Georgina Boyes

describes the development of folk clubs as "a process rather than a single act of foundation" in which "[i]ndividuals got together to sing folksongs, with or without the assistance of the English Folk Dance and Song Society, left-wing choirs adapted their repertoire and settled in a pub, existing jazz or Skiffle clubs with folk performers split or were transformed into 'out-and-out' folk clubs over time" (232).

These folk singers were heavily influenced by American material—blues, jazz and American folk, to which was added an ardent mix of folk music from around the world. Many also imitated the singing style which went with an American traditional folk repertoire, with its prominent feature of head-voice and tight vocal chords. But this kind of repertoire and singing style came into conflict with that of the revivalist component of folk clubs seeking to revive an "authentic" native tradition. Ewan MacColl's infamous ethnic policy was an attempt to put things back on what he deemed to be their proper tracks: singers at the Ballads and Blues club were to sing exclusively songs from their own tradition—the English were to stick to English songs, the Scottish to Scottish songs, American songs should be left to Americans, etc. He and his followers were desirous to "distance [them]selves from skiffle with its legions of quasi-Americans" (MacColl, *Journeyman* 288)—to "pursu[e] some kind of national identity" and "not just becom[e] an arm of American cultural imperialism" (MacColl, quoted in Brocken 34), and "intent on proving that [they] had an indigenous folk-music that was as muscular, as varied and as beautiful as any music anywhere in the world" (MacColl, *Journeyman* 288). The policy was controversial and led to a drop in attendance at the club, and yet it was eventually widely adopted in other "policy clubs" and membership soon rose again. In spite of notable discontent at being told what to sing, the policy was also welcome by some as a nudge towards "indigenous" material (Martin Carthy, quoted in Sweers, 'Ghosts of Voices' 136); nor was MacColl alone in trying to swerve young British folkies towards local singing traditions. American performers themselves thought it rather a shame for British singers to confine themselves to American songs: on the occasion of a visit to Cecil Sharp House (the headquarters of the EFDSS in north London) in 1964, Pete Seeger was keen to encourage local singers to explore their own tradition (MacKinnon 26); Alan Lomax was of the same mind; and English folk singer Maddy Prior recalled having been severely chided by American folk duo Sandy & Jeanie for not being able to sing anything English but only American songs (quoted in Sweers, 'Ghosts of Voices' 136).

But the duo also helpfully provided her with sound material from the EFDSS, as well as from MacColl's personal library. Once they had the curiosity of looking home for traditional material, singers now relied on material from the early birds of the revival like MacColl and Lloyd,

as well as on the Cecil Sharp House library. At first daunted by what he perceived as a conservative and exclusionary attitude from the library staff, Martin Carthy recalls it opening up for him with the arrival of a more welcoming librarian, and having found a wealth of musical resources in the Society's journals (Carthy). MacColl, in addition to his extensive personal library which he was very willing to share, produced records himself, as did his accomplice Albert Lloyd, of "traditional" material; though it is noteworthy in regard to the development of the revival in relation to American influence, that they began by recording eight LPs of Child ballads (as well as an additional volume of ballads not included in the Child collection) for an *American* label, Riverside, in 1956—and only in 1964 was the time ripe for one LP of ballads to be produced in Great Britain by Topic. Their recordings and performances in folk clubs were so many opportunities for audience members to learn new material to add to their repertoires. Furthermore, field recordings were made more widely available on records in the late 1960s, and cheap anthologies such as the *Penguin Book of English Folk Songs,* first published in 1959 and reprinted several times throughout the revival, featuring texts and tunes, were also turned to. The Penguin book was perhaps one of the most widely circulated sources for folk club singers in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Carthy, cited in Burns 184; D. Harker 237).

In short, the American endeavour to demonstrate a rich native heritage independent from Great Britain led to an impactful folk revival which rippled outward to the other side of the Atlantic, and American influence prompted British revivalists in turn to re-discover a rich heritage independent from the United States… And the "godfathers of the revival", Albert Lloyd and Ewan MacColl, had a very political vision of it which left a definite mark.

## 2.2. The Marxist Approach

> [W]ithin the last twenty years or so a new interest in folk song has arisen, nourished by the former revival, but coming from below now, not imposed from above, affecting a broader section of society, employing a wider repertory, and involving a greater variety of uses and usages than were ever imagined in Sharp's time. (Lloyd, *Folk Song in England* 5)

### 2.2.1. The Voice of the People

It took some time for "source singers" to be heard singing the material which was collected from them rather than an intermediary such as Mattie Kay, Sharp's protégée who sang "The Seeds of Love" before an audience in evening dress and John England, the gardener from whom it had

been freshly collected, at a polite musical evening in 1903 (Fox Strangways 33). *As I Roved Out* took a significant step in that direction. "The people" were now for the first time given a voice, a voice heard nationwide on the radio—and a name. While some earlier collectors made an effort to name their informants, many had had no qualms about presenting their informants at times as nameless characters—a "peasant", "boy", or "old man" (Lucy Broadwood and Mary Wakefield, quoted in Francmanis 188). Such a thing was no longer to be borne. At the time of the first revival, the middle classes were undoubtedly not ready to hear the songs as they had been heard by collectors; when *As I Roved Out* was broadcast, producers Spike Hughes and Harold Rogers were still reluctant to play out original recordings and ensured their airtime was kept to a minimum (Gregory, 'Roving Out' 229). But with time, such "traditional" singers as Harry Cox, Jeannie Robertson, Sam Larner or Fred Jordan came to be well-known in folk circles and were invited to sing at folk clubs and festivals. And as folksongs were widely heard outside their sphere of origin, through the mouth of source singers, they came to be regarded as the indisputable property of the "folk".

In this perspective of reuniting folk and folksong, the Workers' Music Association (WMA) created in 1936 was one actor of the revival seeking to (among other goals) "present to the people their rich musical inheritance" ('Aims and Objects' reproduced in Lloyd, *The Singing Englishman* 70). Their most impactful act in the context of the revival was the publication of Albert Lloyd's *Singing Englishman* in 1944, which they commissioned with the intent of setting forth local equivalents to American "people's songs", which were used overseas by the Labour movement (Lloyd, *Folk Song in England* 5–6). The result was a politically committed work which sought to recontextualize folksongs, to "relate them to the times and circumstances they were made up in" and to "the common people" they belonged to (*The Singing Englishman* 2)—by contrast with scholarly approaches which had dissected and speculated about ballads removed from their environment. Though Lloyd later deprecated this small booklet, saying it "wasn't a good book", written in less than ideal conditions, "put together mainly in barrack-rooms, away from reference works, in between tank-gunnery courses" (*Folk Song in England* 6), it had a strong influence on the nascent revival and the continuing demand for it in later years prompted him to write a new, much more fully-fledged work, *Folk Song in England*, published in 1967.

Although his father had been "a good singer of comic songs and the more popular folk-type material" (not necessarily the type sought by Edwardian collectors (Arthur 6)), and he was exposed to Australian folksong during his life there, where he had been sent in 1924 at the age of sixteen following his mother's death, Albert Lancaster Lloyd's first musical love was not folk music but

rather Bach and Mozart. Yet he did learn such Australian folksongs as caught his fancy, and when he got back to England eleven years later in 1935, and occupied his time (being unemployed) with studying at the British Museum Reading Room, folksongs were part of his curriculum. He also joined the Communist Party and took part in anti-fascist militant action. In 1937, he undertook a sea voyage to the Antarctic aboard a whaling factory ship, out of which he got, from a musical standpoint, a few folksongs and the experience of the harmonised singing of a group of Welsh seamen. A self-made scholar, he built throughout the years a reputation as an expert in the field of folksong, joining the EFDSS in 1948 and following up his WMA booklet with collections of American, British or Australian folksongs.

He met Ewan MacColl in the early fifties while collecting material for *Come All Ye Bold Miners: Ballads and Songs of the Coalfields*, a collection of industrial folksongs. The two were brought together by their common friend, Alan Lomax. Born James Henry Miller, MacColl grew up in the Salford slums, imbibing his parents' repertoire of Scottish songs—his father a passionate and well-liked singer among their close ones and relatives. He was left with little prospects in life after completing elementary school, and occupied long periods of unemployment, like Lloyd, by completing his education at the library. Taking after his father, he was politically involved from early on, and found a vocation in theatre, which he approached as a catalyst for political change, starting with agitprop theatre. He took to writing plays in addition to acting, and the company he formed with Joan Littlewood, his first wife, after the war, the Theatre Workshop, came to some renown as a bold, artistically innovative enterprise. But folksong soon took over MacColl's life after meeting Alan Lomax, who contacted him to collect songs from him, and inspired him to do the same. After meeting Lloyd, he joined forces with him in the hope of arousing a new folksong revival, and so they were to be remembered as the

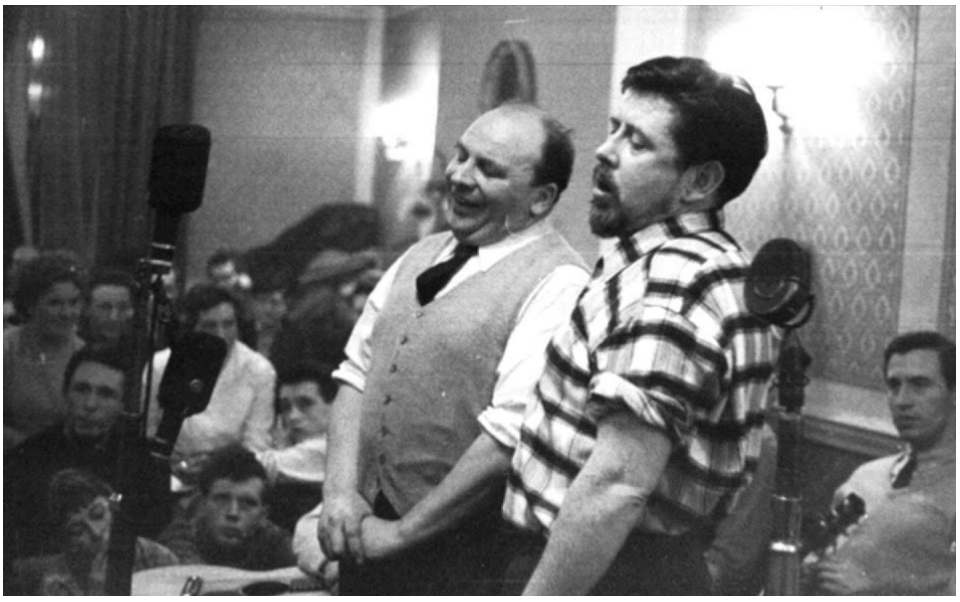

Figure 3: Lloyd and MacColl performing at the Ballads and Blues Club in the 1950s.

founding fathers of the revival. He met American folk singer and musician Peggy Seeger in 1956, and formed a prolific artistic duo with her; they married in 1977.

Lloyd's reputation as a folksong expert gave him far-reaching theoretical influence, writing for folk magazines, holding workshops and lectures, and, of course, performing in folk clubs, as did MacColl. His *Singing Englishman* and, later, *Folk Song in England* became authoritative works among folk enthusiasts. He was appointed artistic director of Topic Records in 1957, was also given a chair at the International Folk Music Council, and edited with Ralph Vaughan Williams (relic of the first revival). *The Penguin Book of English Folk Songs* in 1959. MacColl's tendency to authoritarianism made him a more controversial figure, but an influential one nonetheless—in 1979, at the twilight of the revival, he was described as a "giant figure . . . arguably the greatest and most dramatic singer, arguably the best songwriter in the field, indisputably the greatest teacher" (Fred Woods, quoted in Laing 154); he preached his vision of folk singing at the Critics' Group he formed with his wife Peggy, a formative experience for the young singers who attended it—which ended explosively under pressure caused by MacColl's dictatorial attitude.

Lloyd and MacColl's involvement with the Communist Party and activism was in phase with their environment. They were part of a general movement reacting to a social climate that saw the rise of fascism and working people struggle daily to keep their families fed:

> Those who grew up in the thirties and forties now find it difficult to convey the dead hand of mediocrity and authoritarianism of those days. Britain was a class-ridden society with rigid barriers and social problems that nobody seemed to care about. The mainstream of art, literature, and poetry was largely conformist and snobbish. Even folk music was mainly a middle-class study. It is not surprising that new directions in art, literature, and social change tended to have a left-wing flavour, intensified by the drama of the Spanish Civil War and the fight against totalitarian fascism . . . we were all a bit left-wing in those days. (Leslie Shepard, quoted in Brocken 20)

To Lloyd and MacColl, the revival was a way to rehabilitate and reclaim folksong for the folk ("the peak of cultural achievement of the English lower classes" (Lloyd, *The Singing Englishman* 3–4)), identified as the working class, and to empower the working class by this cultural reclaiming. The creation of new folksongs, contrasted with consumerist popular music targetted *at* but not *of* the people, was also on the agenda. The valorization of industrial and political folksong was a central point in this effort, and "protest songs", modelled after American precursors, were written on contemporary topics pertaining for example to the peace movement, such as nuclear armament or the Vietnam war. Folksong was thus intrinsically linked to politics. At

first sight, “timeless” Child ballads do not appear to be best suited to this kind of politically committed artistic pursuit; and yet, they too had a place in the Marxist revivalist narrative.

### 2.2.2. Down with the Aristocrats(?)

In *The Singing Englishman*, Lloyd resolvedly shifted the prestige of creation to the people, pictured not as a mere conservative-destructive force but a genuinely creative one. He described folksongs as “the highest points reached by the imagination of the ordinary Englishman”, discrediting both those who “find it hard to credit that the lower classes could produce such a fine sensitive kind of art” and who theorize that “the songs were made up by professional musicians”, and those, “kind but hazy”, who believe the folksongs to have “developed spontaneously as a result of some communal activity which they cannot adequately describe” (*The Singing Englishman* 10–11). Their rise and fall he linked to the life of the working class, and not that of the nobility or the advent of the printing press:

> What we nowadays call English folksong is something that came out of social upheaval. That is no random remark, but a statement of what happened in history. It grew up with a class just establishing itself in society with sticks, if necessary, and rusty swords and bows discoloured with smoke and age. While that class flourished, the folksong flourished, too, through all the changing circumstances that the lowborn lived in from the Middle Ages to the Industrial Revolution. And when that class declined, the folksong withered away and died. (*The Singing Englishman* 4)

The nobility associated to the ballad, which placed it above other folksongs, and which Child had carefully swerved away from the people, was thus ascribed directly to the folk who produced it. It took on different qualitative shades in accordance with different peoples, geographically localized, like the Scottish bard reflecting in his compositions the landscapes of his native land:

> Generally the truly great ballads had a sense of honour and a sense of glory far beyond that of the ordinary folk-song, and perhaps because they were the product of a simpler kind of society. But if the best of the ballads and songs have a common trait, it is pride, and if they have another, it is commonsense. This quality of pride and commonsense is as hard and wild as the Border hills and the East Anglian coast, and it diminishes as it comes away from the north and the east. Down in the south, in counties like Somerset, it becomes something charming and picturesque and idyllic; but up on the Border there is such a tradition of danger that it becomes heroic, and in the end, as in all countries bounded by a cold sea, it is bitter and hard and without any illusions at all. (*The Singing Englishman* 14)

If he meekly reproduced a hierarchical vision of ballads in relation to the rest of folksongs (which he would go back on in *Folk Song in England*), it is noteworthy that he should have

included ballads outside the Child canon, such as, for example, “The Cruel Ship’s Captain”, which is directly linked to working class experience through a trade, that of whaling. He also quoted Child ballads that had not been found to be current in oral tradition since the mid-nineteenth century, such as “Clerk Saunders” (69); but navigated between ballads unimpeded by the canon, moving from “Clerk Saunders” to another whaling song outside Child’s collection, “The Spermwhale Fishery”, in which he locates the same elevated sentiments (ibid. 13). In fact, he made little reference to Child. He was evidently more conscious of the whole academic apparatus when he wrote *Folk Song in England*, and more consciously set about contesting the canon.

To begin with, he presented folksongs not as dead museum material but as the product of a lively popular creative force which was still bearing fruit, in the form of industrial ballads in particular. In *The Singing Englishman*, he was still harbouring a conventional historical romanticism, evoking a past golden age contrasted with current decay, identifying the eighteenth century as a time “before the folk songs turned into something empty and vulgar and debased, before they parodied themselves to death” (ibid. 30–31). In *Folk Song in England*, while he agreed with the idea that at one point “the old lyric of the countryside crumbled away”, he observed the rise in turn of “a new lyric of the industrial towns” (*Folk Song in England* 297). He countered the notion that “[b]allads are the unquestioned aristocrats of the folk song world” by qualifying it as being “the scholar’s view, seldom the folk singers’” (ibid. 127). Defining ballads as “properly narrative songs of substantial length and strong story-line”, he pointed to their “many kinds of qualities, enthralling or tedious in plot, of glorious or banal poetry, with tunes that may pull down the stars or never get off the ground”, and makes it plain that

> [t]he matter of “unquestioned aristocracy” can only refer to a limited selection of ballads, if at all. And whatever the literature dons might think, not all these nobles are in Francis J. Child’s *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, nor can all the items in that great compilation be numbered among the peers of the folk song realm. The majority of Child’s selection represents but one stage of the ballad, a middle stage lying between the old form of epic song and the newer form of domestic ballad, journalistic ballad, street song and the like, such as began to show itself with the invention of printing, and had become dominant by the end of the eighteenth century (most powerfully with the “come-all-ye” type beloved of latter-day narrative singers). (ibid. 127–28)

Rather than seeing the advent of the printing press as the downfall of folksong, he thus envisioned current practices as a continuity of older tradition, the process being “no indication that the common people are losing their talent and their creative force, but rather that their social and economic life has outstripped the older kinds of song and demands a new poetry and melody, a different spirit, a fresh tone of voice” (ibid. 155). He brushed off concerns of authenticity for

industrial songs as a "vain preoccupation", calling instead for reflection on "the aims of the creators and bearers" (ibid. 298). He conceived of folksongs not as relics to be ideally handed down without change, but as necessarily changing with the society they were born into: "[o]nly a moribund tradition is *dominated* by the past; a living tradition is constantly sprouting new leaves on old wood and sometimes quite suddenly the bush is ablaze with blossom of a novel shade" (ibid. 68).

The re-evaluation of the role of printing also led him to demysticize the idea of the oral essence of the ballad, reassessing broadside ballads "not as *contaminated* tradition but rather as *reinforced* tradition" (ibid. 31). He also addressed the prevailing assumptions concerning the rural nature of folksong, attributing them to "deafness" on the part of collectors (ibid. 30); completely dismissed the notion of ballads as *gesunkenes Kulturgut* as "haughty and vainglorious" (ibid. 55); demystified their anonymity, calling it "in the main, an economic and social accident" (ibid. 24); and suggested illiteracy might be "a negative factor" rather "a *sine qua non*" of authentic ballad tradition (ibid. 21). At the same time, he also referred to Sharp reverentially, hoping *Folk Song in England* would help the "solitary beacon" that was *English Folk Song: Some Conclusions* to "shine clearer, if only by putting a little fat in the fire" (ibid. 5), and quoting his definition of folksong—while later Marxist scholars would be far more critical[17].

The canon was also challenged in performance, as Lloyd and MacColl included in their repertoires the industrial ballads and other broadside and topical ballads of political protest. The Topic Records label, founded by the WMA in 1939, was also instrumental in integrating such songs to the revivalist repertoire. The label was fundamentally politically oriented, and in spite of significant material difficulties throughout its history, it made a name for itself as the first independent label in the world, and a reference for all folk enthusiasts. Appointed artistic director in 1958, Lloyd was in a position to have issued what songs he wished to become a part of the revival repertoire, and he and his friend MacColl were the most prominent artists to partner with the label (Brocken 61).

And yet MacColl and Lloyd were also still recording anthologies of Child ballads specifically, bearing testimony to the standing reputation and authority of the collection. In addition to their American Riverside series and Topic LP, MacColl recorded a series of "English and Scottish Popular Ballads (Child Ballads)" in three volumes, issued by Folkways between 1961 and 1964, as well as a *Long Harvest* series of ten records featuring "traditional ballads in their English, Scots and North American variants" with Peggy Seeger, issued by Argo between 1966 and

17 See especially the works of Vic Gammon, and the more virulent Dave Harker and Georgina Boyes.

1975. The text at the back of the sleeve clarifies, rather paradoxically, that "[n]ot all the ballads recorded are from Professor Francis Child's great *definitive* collection THE ENGLISH AND SCOTTISH POPULAR BALLADS. Here the choice of material has been made on the basis of whether a ballad has entered into tradition both here and in North America, and been subject to the same folk processes that operated on most of the ballads included in the Child canon" (my emphasis). This self-contradicting statement illustrate the conflict between the unwillingness to do away with the enduring status of Child's collection and the need, brought about by receptivity to the actual developments of folksong, to challenge it. Even the proposed additions are here put forward on the grounds of their likeness to the Child ballads. In spite of theoretical challenges, the *ESPB* remained a prestigious canon. Lloyd's recording of Child ballads is especially significant as he apparently felt like he could not overlook them in spite of having reportedly expressed a distaste for them, considering them to be "boring old songs" (MacColl, *Journeyman* 290). What is more, he has been credited with being responsible for making dauntingly long ballads such as "Tam Lin" (39) seem more approachable, including by folk-rock performers (see Sweers, *Electric Folk* 220); he had a vital hand in shaping the revival's repertoire.

In the eighties, MacColl and Seeger were recording yet another series of ballads, *Blood and Roses*, comprised of five records—all identified as Child ballads with their corresponding numbers, save three ("Fair Rosamund", "The Little Cabin Boy" and "Rinordine")—though the back of the record still referred to Child's "definitive collection of traditional ballad texts". Topic, too, re-issued between 1968 and 1970 a series previously issued by Caedmon in the United States in 1961, *The Folk Songs of Britain*, in ten volumes, volumes 4 and 5 of which were "The Child Ballads". One might have imagined dispersing the ballads among the different volumes, which were organized by theme ("Songs of Courtship", "Jack of All Trades", "Fair Game and Foul", "A Soldier's Life for Me", "Animal Songs" (Caedmon) or "Songs of Animals and Other Marvels" (Topic), etc.), but the Child ballads significantly stood on their own instead, a unitary species in spite of its own variety. MacColl also recorded other types of ballads, such as the *Barrack Room Ballads* issued in 1958 by Topic, or the *Bothy Ballads of Scotland* (the songs of northern Scottish farm labourers) recorded in 1961 for Folkways; but Child ballads remained at the heart of his repertoire, and it was to them he always returned.

Atkinson suggests that part of the appeal of the ballads with revival audiences might come from the fact that, in spite of the wishes of Lloyd and MacColl and the like, most of them were not working-class but middle-class. While singing blatantly working-class material might have felt

rather awkward for them, ballads could have thus represented more "neutral" ground, common property—the national heritage promoted by earlier collectors (Atkinson, 'The English Revival Canon' 373).

And yet arguably, the ballads too were imbued with subversive associations. MacColl perceived hostility from his "literary friends" towards folksong, and ponders: "It's as if people feel threatened by the very idea of folk-song" (MacColl, *Journeyman* 284). Folk music emerges as a subversion to the established artistic order crowned by "sophisticated" music. Élisa Mantin describes the revival as a "mouvement de lutte contre la musique de commodité perçue comme un objet imposé, extérieur au peuple et à sa culture et conduisant à son aliénation" (Mantin 67); and while she distinguishes between "interventionist" clubs in which songs of protest against the oppressors of the working-class dominate and "autonomist" clubs where the repertoire centres around songs of rural tradition, for her, in both cases, "c'est le lieu qui confère une virtualité opoositionnelle à ce répertoire" (73). In her view, "l'objet lui-même est une quête et une idéologie avant d'être un genre musical" (72).

The Marxist narrative of the revival corresponds to what Livingston identifies as the twofold purpose of revivals to "serve as cultural opposition and as an alternative to mainstream culture"—identified as the capitalistic, mercantile system controlling a musical output which is imposed on the working classes and discourages its own creativity—and to "improve existing culture through the values based on historical value and authenticity expressed by the revivalists" (Livingston 68), that is, repossess the working class of its artistic and communal traditions, in the hope that they would "help English, Irish, Scots and Welsh workers to assert their national and class identity" (MacColl, *Journeyman* 338). *Folk* music was music by the people, for the people, whereas *popular* or *pop* music was music by the dominant classes, who controlled the means of production and dissemination, for the people, preventing their solidarity and self-affirmation in artistic creation (Hamm, cited in Sweers, *Electric Folk* 57)—popular music constituted "[a]n elaborate means of bourgeois social control" "induc[ing] amnesia, suspending the working class in a perpetual present and severing them from their own homegrown popular culture, such as the artistically and politically nourishing 'music of the people' that they'd created or adapted for themselves" (B. Harker 155, after MacColl).

This ideological quest to reclaim folksong, creating a folksong exceptionalism opposed to a capitalistic system churning out soulless commercial music, drew on the imaginary baggage associated with the ballad, echoing the values and driving attractions of the revival.

## 2.3. Perpetuating the Ballad Fantasy

### 2.3.1. Good Honest Works

A the back of the sleeve of the *Long Harvest* records, MacColl and Seeger commented:

> One of the most encouraging features of the current British folksong revival is the way in which the repertoire of traditional ballads is being opened up and explored by a steadily increasing number of young singers. Audiences, too, begin to manifest a remarkable familiarity with traditional ballads and it is not unusual for those who sing in folk clubs to find themselves, after a performance, cornered by a section of the audience and made to defend their particular version of a ballad against other versions recently heard. More and more singers report an increase in the ratio of ballads to other types of songs requested by club audiences.

Ballads took centre stage as representatives of an "authentic" art form displaying a purity of expression "commercial" music was deemed to lack. Where pop music was looked down as ephemeral and superficial, ballads were praised as meaningful stories which had stood the test of time: the text at the back of the Topic "Child Ballads" anthology advertises them as making "fine listening for all who love a good song, well sung, *with some depth to it*" (my emphasis); MacColl and Seeger, in the paratext to their *Blood and Roses* albums, stated the ballads to be "fascinating" on account of their "first rate" stories which "have certainly stood the test of time, and that isn't a bad recommendation", and their "breathtaking" poetry, "memorable lines" which "generat[e] enough heat and light to radiate an entire ballad". "[I]n these proud commonsense songs", crowed Lloyd, "you can feel the singers knew the facts of life precisely, and were not trying to avoid anything, dodged nothing, and even if what they had to say was horrifying and heartbreaking, they expressed, in the best songs anyway, no disgust, no disappointment, no resignation" (*The Singing Englishman* 14)—a far cry from the cheap sentimentality attributed to pop songs.

Folk music offered an answer to those dissatisfied with the perceived hollowness of pop music, a form of dissension which at the same time places the folkie in a reassuring set of stable values because dissociated from the present: "Si la musique pop devient un vecteur d'expression privilégié de la jeunesse, le folk exprime, pour sa part, un manque et un désir de s'opposer, par la musique, aux valeurs matérialistes dominantes tout en s'évadant de la société présente dans un passé à fonction cathartique" (Mantin 65). Participants in the revival were reuniting with what they felt was their heritage; going back to their own roots. Folksongs were to them, as they had been to Romantic ballad enthusiasts, symbols of a more innocent past, one untainted by the excesses of modern capitalism; a hazy golden age, a vision allowed by their not being linked to a specific time but timeless, a timelessness which also allowed a sense of heritage which erased actual

discontinuities in transmission up to the present time: “folk music, because of its new timelessness, carries the weight of continuity and tradition” (Bohlman 130). This continuity feeds a grounding sense of community and identity not only in the present, but across time: “We’re talking about identity, and we’re talking about continuity. What interests me is forging a link with the past and—if you like to be overdramatic—holding out a hand to the hand in the future. That’s what human beings are. If we are not that, then we are nothing” (Martin Carthy, quoted in Sweers, *Electric Folk* 238).

This perceived continuity allowed the identification of the folk, not only as Sharp’s illiterate peasant, but as the folk enthusiast—this even though, as we have seen, most of them were middle rather than working-class. Niall MacKinnon, who conducted a survey on folk club attenders in the 1990s, suggests that the “disproportionately large number of the upwardly mobile middle class in the service sector” attracted by the folk scene, “one generation removed from working-class origins”, might have been looking for a sense of identity which they could not find in the “elite culture” of their “new social location”; a way to “resist the cultural passivity of middle-class Britain” by reclaiming a heritage (MacKinnon 68; see also Finnegan 68). Besides, while in Scotland or Ireland, the exploration of traditional music corresponded to a (cultural) nationalistic endeavour, in England it provided a way of defining a national cultural identity on other grounds than the old and now negative imperialistic associations. At the same time, Scottish balladry retained prominence, with particular reverence given to Scottish Travellers such as Jeannie Robertson or the Stewarts of Blair. MacColl’s Scottish descent certainly played a part in the establishment of his pedigree on the folk scene (he was keen to highlight it himself, starting with the name he chose for himself, and his habit of claiming to have been born in Scotland rather than in Salford). Scottish ballads were “anglicized” by English singers who could not very well sing in Scots without embarrassing themselves, and Scottish balladry thus once again fused into a global British heritage.

The British folkie took the place of rightful inheritor of the tradition; and yet the “folk” was ever *other*. Enactment of tradition was an imitation which, by striving towards coincidence, highlighted the gap. The style of source singers was imitated; musically fluent newcomers went through a difficult process of unlearning their classical training. Singers found themselves reaching for a practice which, on account of being the product of a thoroughly different context, could not coincide with theirs. Nor did they necessarily want it to: the appeal of folksong also lies in this

otherness. It was authentic also because it did not sound like pop music, seemed foreign to the capitalistic world the folkies were bathed in and which they rejected.

Ballads, narrative works steeped in a nobility ratified by the reverent scholar and poet, were the prime representative of this perceived dissentious folk musical sphere, the epitome of *meaningful* music. They were consequently given a place of choice in the repertoire of revivalists. Martin Carthy's first solo eponymous album released in 1965 contained three Child ballads (out of fourteen); his seventh, *Shearwater* (1972), contained six out of ten tracks, including "Famous Flower of Serving Men" (106), which became "his" signature ballad, inaccessible to upstart folkies, for a while (MacKinnon 108). The 1970 first solo album of Nic Jones, another big name of the folk revival who played a distinctive and complex style of guitar accompaniment, is titled *Ballads and Song* and features three Child ballads (out of nine tracks), in addition to which the ballad "Annan Water" has been fetched (and "altered and simplified . . . considerably", as stated in the sleeve notes) from "an appendix of volume 4 of the *Child Ballads* [sic]", where it was "found tucked inconspicuously away". The name of the album unmistakably recalls the tradition of collections from Sharp back to the Romantics, and is complemented by a medieval-inspired cover art which evokes the historically inaccurate but stubborn identification of the ballad with romanticized medieval times[18]. The three Child ballads are "Sir Patrick Spens" (58), "The Outlandish Knight" (4) and "Little Musgrave" (81), all three identified together as "very common ballads", "well-known to anyone with a knowledge of balladry, as they are well represented in most ballad collections". These three ballads are accordingly some of the best known of the revival repertoire; "The Outlandish Knight" is also featured in Carthy's *Shearwater* album, and has been covered innumerable times. Number 4 in Child's collection, it benefits from an outstanding pedigree as an old ballad with equivalents all over Europe. Carthy's famous "Scarborough Fair", usually identified as Child 2 "The Elfin Knight", is also a well-established number. In the booklet to the folk compilation *The Electric*

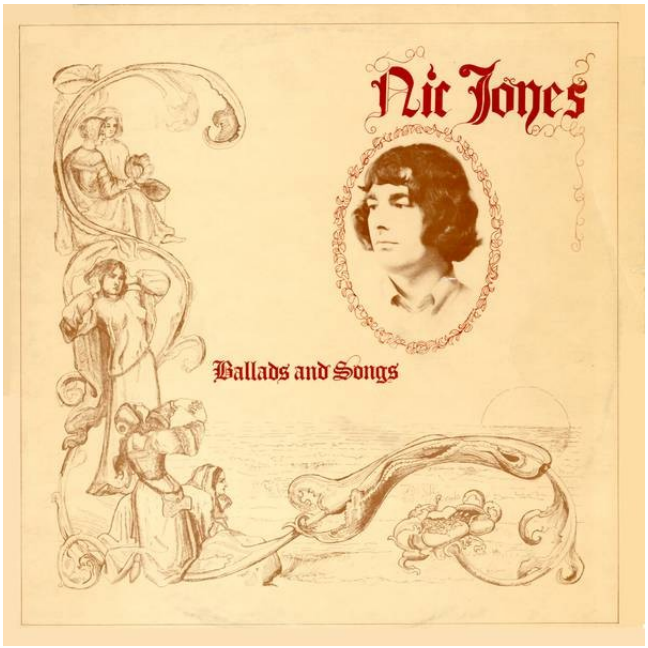

Figure 4: Cover of Nic Jones's *Ballads and Songs* album (1970) by Janet Kerr.

18 Nic's haircut perfectly matches the aesthetic, too.

*Muse: The Story of Folk Into Rock* (1975), a wildly fanciful "ancient, possibly prehistoric lineage" is attributed to it by Karl Dallas based on its use in children's games (one is reminded of Gummere's "dancing throng" hailing from the mists of unrecorded times), and the impossible tasks evoked in it are given "magical significance" (Dallas 9). Though ballads outside the Child canon were sung as well (most notably broadside ballads, such as the mid-nineteenth century "Lord Franklin"), Child ballads remained the surest source of undoubted authentic material, complete with oral pedigree and imaginary prehistoricity or romantic medievalism. They provided both a grounding sense of continuity and an escape into fantasised pastness.

It is thus no surprise that English folk-rock precursors Fairport Convention should have turned to them in creating their repertoire. "Matty Groves" (81) and "Tam Lin" (39), which appeared on the seminal *Liege & Lief* album in 1969—considered as the first British go at folk-rock—, were to be staples of the band's repertoire, regularly played live, along with "Sir Patrick Spens" (58), which, although it did not make it onto the album[19], became part of their live repertoire at the same time (and is "still probably the high point of folk-rock on record" for Atkinson, writing in 2018 (*The Ballad and Its Pasts* 146), and the version through which a whole generation was made familiar with the ballad); to the point that these songs came to constitute "an integral part of their identity" (Burns 130).

But what prompted the choice of these particular ballads? Which elements of the ballads were salient and appealing to revival performers—and, assumedly, audiences? Let us take a look at a selection: Carthy's "Famous Flower of Serving Men", Nic Jones's "Outlandish Knight", and Fairport Convention's "Matty Groves", "Tam Lin" and "Sir Patrick Spens"[20]. Nic Jones justifies taking up another version of "The Outlandish Knight" on his second, eponymous 1971 album by "the strength of certain phrases or words that are enjoyable to sing due to their inherent lyrical quality"; that seems sensible enough, but let us not stop at that.

"Famous Flower of Serving Men" tells the story of a woman whose mother sends men to kill her husband and child. The heroine buries them, cuts her "lovely locks", changes her name from "Fair Eleanor" to "Sweet William" and goes to court to serve the king, which she does so well that the king grows quite fond of her and makes her his chamberlain. One day the king goes to hunt, sees a white hind and chases it; it eludes him and as he sits down to rest, there comes a dove.

19 It appeared on *Full House* the next year, with lead vocals by Dave Swarbrick. Sandy Denny, the band's singer when *Liege and Lief* was recorded, had also rehearsed the song for recording.

20 See the annex pp. 106-111 for the full texts.

It is no other than the spirit of the chamberlain's husband, who tells the whole story. The king hurries back to court and kisses his chamberlain, still in her male attire, before the court; he has her mother arrested and executed.

In "The Outlandish Knight", a young lady is led to run away with a knight promising her marriage, stealing her parents' money and two horses. As they come to the seaside, the knight announces that he has drowned six maidens there, and that she shall be the seventh. She distracts him, takes hold of him and tumbles him into the water to be drowned in her stead. When she comes home before daybreak, her parrot draws her father's suspicion away from her.

"Matty Groves" is a gripping tale of adultery and revenge. Lord Darnell's wife takes a fancy to Matty Groves as she sees him at church and invites him over as her husband is away. Unfortunately, an overzealous servant runs off to warn Lord Darnell, and Matty Groves finds him standing at the foot of the bed when he awakes; they fight a duel, and poor little Matty Groves is killed. As his wife defiantly assures him she still likes Matty better than him, Lord Darnell kills her too, and has the pair buried together—with his lady at the top, "for she was of noble kin".

In "Tam Lin", young Janet encounters the mysterious Tam Lin, reputed never to let maidens go through Carterhaugh without relieving them of "their mantles of green or else their maidenhead". When she comes home, lo! she is with child. She will not reveal the name of the father, but runs back to Carterhaugh. There, Tam Lin reveals to her that he is under the Fairy Queen's spell, and tells her the way to break the charm that night on Halloween. She dutifully holds him close in her arms as he is transformed into various animals, until he finds his human form again and is freed. As she realizes he has broken free, the Fairy Queen curses after them.

As for "Patrick Spens", it tells the story of a man ordered by his king (following the advice of a "bonny boy" in Fairport Convention's version) to make a sea voyage. Sir Patrick Spens obeys, though he is not the great sailor the boy has made him out to be, and predicts the ship will meet a tragic fate as signs point to an upcoming deadly storm. It happens just as he feared, after a "mermaiden" appears to predict their imminent death again.

#### *2.3.1.1. The Ballad's "Erotic of Transgression"*

What Susan Stewart calls after Georges Bataille and Michel Foucault, a trifle provocatively, the ballad's "erotic of transgression" (Stewart 125) stands out as the chief appeal of Carthy's "Famous Flower of Serving Men". Stewart links this concept to the tragic; it is however arguably applicable much more widely, as some of the examples in this small corpus show.

Carthy's own sleeve notes to the song point to the idea of "the heroine [who], seeking to hide some shame, takes on a disguise" as the core interest of the ballad. The heroine is of course not donning just any disguise in this story but cross-dressing specifically, crossing gender barriers in a manner not normally allowed, but justified here by her backstory. Similarly, the king ostentatiously kissing his chamberlain before the court is the occasion of a scandalous display of homosexuality, underlined by the reaction of the gentlemen and ladies present:

> His nobles stood and they stretched their eyes
> The ladies took to their fans and smiled
> For such a strange homecoming
> No gentleman had ever seen

The pleasure derived from this transgressive act is also allowed by the context: we know the chamberlain is in fact a woman. And because transgression is indissociable from the idea of a set limit to be crossed, it is worth noting that transgressive enjoyment of this ballad from another century still holds in the post-war revival because the restrictive gender and sexual laws on which it is built do.

"The Outlandish Knight" similarly stages a reversal of roles, as the heroine gets the better of her male assailant and tuns him into prey in her stead. The icing on the cake is the alarming, indeed, almost tantalizing risk of parental discovery at the end, which is delightfully thwarted; the transgressive runaway is permitted to go unpunished.

The transgressors of "Matty Groves" are not so lucky; their transgression is arguably not so easily condoned, appealing as it is. The tale of adultery makes for an exciting story; the danger of discovery, even though it is inevitable, keeps the listener on the edge of their seat. The culminating catastrophe, with its hyperbolic double killing—the heart-rendingly subdued announcement of Matty's death ("So Matty struck the very first blow, and he hurt Lord Darnell sore; / Lord Darnell struck the very next blow, and Matty struck no more") followed by the outrageous explosion of the lady's comparatively graphic murder: "Lord Darnell he jumped up and loudly he did bawl, / He struck his wife right through the heart and pinned her against the wall"—is an amply satisfactory denouement in its panache. The violence certainly partakes of the shocking appeal of transgression, and its display finds justification in the preceding transgression.

Transgression also lies at the heart of the happier-ending Tam Lin, as Janet knowingly visits Tam Lin's grounds in the face of the opening warning. She is not simply being disobedient; the content of the warning, which states that maidens do not leave Carterhaugh with their maidenheads intact, the suggestive symbolic of her pulling roses when Tam Lin appears and her subsequent

pregnancy all indicate that she consciously, actively seeks sexual intercourse, outside marriage—nor is she repentant when her pregnancy is discovered. The fairy nature of her lover (which she publicly, boldly and unapologetically admits to: "For if my love were an earthly knight, as he is an elfin grey / I'd not change my own true love for any knight you have") constitutes a further element of transgression, an unnatural blurring of boundaries between worlds. The ballad also features a bout of violence as it concludes, not on the couple's happy reunion and marriage, but on the Fairy Queen's impotent outburst of rage, which serves to reinforce Janet's defiantly transgressive status as, like that of the heroine of "The Outlandish Knight", she goes unpunished.

At this point, the remarkable association of the folk revival with "incest ballads" (see for example Colin Irwin, quoted in Burns 82) is also worth mentioning—a persisting association in spite of the fact that such ballads do not account for the greater part of the ballad repertoire and are in fact a definite minority which hardly constitutes the best-known or most popular ballads of the revival[21]. This stubborn association indicates an intimate link in the imagination between ballads and transgression—represented by the transgression of a particularly well-entrenched taboo. Once linked to a martial Border spirit, or to innocent sentiment, ballads were now imagined as transgressive stories.

#### *2.3.1.2. Ballads and Exoticism*

This transgressive element is probably related to a certain otherness, a certain strangeness of the ballad which could also be described in terms of its exoticism, especially to twentieth-century audiences. This exoticism resides first of all in the setting and characters of the ballads, peopled with ladies, lords and kings going from castles to greenwood in a timeless medieval past, as well as in the very sound of the ballad (Sweers, *Electric Folk* 215). This medieval-like setting echoes fantasy works such as Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, which was gaining great popularity in the 1960s. The magical element of course adds an even more exotic note in ballads like "Tam Lin", which pictures a world in which fairies, curses and metamorphoses are a given.

This exoticism is especially strong in the context of folk-rock, which addresses a broader audience less familiarized with traditional music. Even within the band itself, and except for Sandy

21 "Lucy Wan" (51) and "Sheath and Knife" (16) are perhaps the best representatives of this category, the former having been notably sung by Martin Carthy, and the latter perhaps best known as performed by Ewan MacColl, in an impressive dramatic delivery. "Lucy Wan" tells the story of Lucy Wan's brother murdering her after she has told him she is pregnant with his child. "Sheath and Knife" tells a similar tale of siblings in love, the sister becoming pregnant by her brother, and the pair agreeing that she should die. In MacColl's version, her baby lives and is entrusted to a wet-nurse.

Denny and Dave Swarbrick, already well established on the folk club scene, other members of Fairport Convention at the time *Liege & Lief* was recorded were not very familiar with the revival repertoire, and set their hearts on ballads they thought extraordinary even though they were in fact already well-known in folk clubs (see Burns 131, 134–35). Tellingly, when folk-rock band Steeleye Span added Child 4 to their repertoire in the 1990s, they did not go for the "Outlandish Knight" version generally preferred by revivalists, in which the knight is simply a Scotsman, but chose instead to sing "The Elf-Knight", in which the knight is a supernatural being. Their telling of the story even has the heroine defeat him with the help of "a small charm", an unusual variant.

Similarly, Fairport Convention's version of "Sir Patrick Spens" significantly differs from that of other revivalist interpretations. Interestingly, it does not include the most often quoted and lauded verses, described as prime example of fine ballad style, and a variation of which appears, for example, in Nic Jones's version from *Ballads and Songs*:

> So the king he has written a broad letter
> And signed it with his own hand
> And he's sent it off to Sir Patrick Spens
> A-walking all on the strand.
>
> And the very first lines that Patrick he read
> A little laugh then gave he
> And the very last lines that Patrick read
> The salt tears filled his eyes.

In addition, the band includes the intervention (unnecessary as to plot) of a mermaid, an uncommon occurrence in this ballad. This seems to point to an interest in the ballad aroused not so much by its "lyrical quality" and poignancy as by its exoticism, evoked by the fantastical sea creature as well as by Sir Patrick Spens's predictions based on the mysterious but unequivocally bad omen of "the new moon / With the old moon in her arm", which, though nothing more than the description of the earthshine phenomenon (earth reflecting light onto the darker portion of the crescent moon), at which time tides would indeed be high, is couched in obscure enough language as to evoke to the modern layman rather esoteric omen-reading than rational observation.

This exoticism was also directly linked to the violent element in many ballads, of considerable appeal to folk-rock performers. Ashley Hutchings, Fairport Convention's bassist at the time of *Liege & Lief*, is intent on distinguishing the band's folkloric element from the other "airy-fairy, very whimsical stuff happening in the late 60s": the material they chose was not watered-down fairy tales aimed at children; "[i]t was The Seventh Seal, not Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. It was magical, but the magic was elemental" (quoted in Harris). Elements of violence,

sexuality and death authenticized the material as “the real stuff”, unsanitized. In sharp contrast to the carefully-picked and sagely sung folksongs learnt at school, ballads were rediscovered as subversive material. They displayed a raw quality, akin to the honesty praised by the Romantics, but characterized this time by the blunt treatment of taboo subjects.

It thus seems significant that these songs rather than, say, the more homely “Get Up and Bar the Door” (275)—less of a favourite, much lower on the nobility scale—became representative of the revivalist repertoire. Of course it might be argued that the popularity of these songs in the revival reflects the source repertoire which inspired it; but the revivalist influence on this source repertoire, too, ought to be taken into account. Revivalist influence from the Edwardian collectors, of course, as we have seen; but also in the second revival. Scottish Traveller Jeannie Robertson, for example, one of the most influential source singers on the revival scene, seems to have eliminated music-hall pieces and “cowboy or ‘sentimental’ ballads of American origins” from her repertoire as she became renowned (Porter and Gower 77; also Sweers, *Electric Folk* 50–51). A self-conscious performer, Irish Traveller Margaret Barry would learn songs from the most popular recordings to satisfy audiences, indicating a will to please and conform to expectations. This conscious adaptation to revival audiences’ expectations is also visible in the practice of Stanley Robertson, of Scottish Traveller tradition, to sing adapted, much shorter versions of ballads at festivals and other revivalist events than he did in private—a conscious juggling between private and public versions also practised by his aunt Jeannie Robertson and her daughter Lizzie Higgins, for example (Andersen, ‘Technique, Text, and Context’ 36). Jeannie Robertson’s attribution of a “pièce-de-résistance” status to her ballad “Son Davit” (13) is also imputable to revivalist demand for it as a rare ballad: “The traveller concept of the song as but one of the ‘old songs’ valued for their use by previous generations (it had vanished from nontraveller oral tradition) was displaced by her identification of it as a ‘big ballad,’ as she moved away from traditional aesthetic concepts” (Porter and Gower 274).

Furthermore, revivalists did not hesitate to revive songs which were not current in tradition. Lloyd thus reinserted in the contemporary repertoire the ballad of “The Two Magicians” (44), for example, adapting it and fitting it to a tune himself. The tale of sexual pursuit and metamorphosis proved an attractive one. Even as certain songs were becoming familiar to audiences, the search for “new”, unknown material was a way of renewing the unfamiliar, strange value of folksong.

### 2.3.2. Identity and Authenticity

> For the revival, the pull exerted over and again by the ballads canonized by Francis James Child . . . is not aesthetic alone—it is essentially bound up with the revival's conception of its own authenticity. (Atkinson, 'The English Revival Canon' 378)

Besides their aesthetic appeal, Child ballads also held the attraction of a convenient official stamp of authenticity. If it was agreed that industrial songs were perfectly honourable, and for all the revalorization of the printed medium, Child ballads, shrouded in their mystique of oral tradition, still had a more imposing grandeur.

MacColl and Seeger, in the paratext to *The Long Harvest*, marvelled at the quick diffusion of different versions of a ballad once introduced into the revival repertoire:

> Another interesting phenomenon is the speed with which alternative versions of ballads appear on the folk scene. A case in point: Lambkin (Child 93) was introduced to revival audiences in the spring of 1965 and within four months five distinct versions were in club circulation, two of them collected from field singers by revival singers. A similar proliferation of versions followed the introduction of The Broomfield Hill, Lucy Wan, The Bramble Briar, Henry My Son (Lord Randal) and The Two Sisters.

This phenomenon can be ascribed to the need to differentiate oneself; as MacKinnon points out, "[t]he notion of the 'common repertoire' is central to the folk scene as a genre, and it is scarcely surprising that this should create tensions for musicians who are setting out to establish their own status and individuality" (109). Paradoxically, while the revival stressed a focus on a repertoire described as popular, in the sense of being "of the people", and the principles of sharing and transmission were central values, marking oneself out with lesser-known material which one appropriated was one of the best ways to earn status on the folk club scene.

By adding a Child ballad to one's repertoire, one is making a safe bet on a piece of near-undisputable pedigree; but looking for a rarer version, and above all one directly fetched from "the field" (as two of "Lambkin" boldly were in the above example), is placing oneself a step above on the connoisseur scale. A few interpreters on the revival scene, such as MacColl or Shirley Collins, could boast having inherited a repertoire from a familial mode of transmission, conceived of as ideal in the construction of continuous tradition as a heritage[22]. It mirrors, for example, the Travellers' tradition, in which family transmission plays a central role, and in which the revival scene took a particular interest (MacColl himself, with Seeger, edited a book, *Till Doomsday in the*

22 About the album MacColl recorded in 1962 with his mother, *A Garland of Scots Folksong: Betsy Miller and Ewan MacColl*, his biographer Ben Harker comments: "There are few forms of music in which cutting a record with a seventy-six-year-old mother could augment a reputation, but the folk scene was all about authenticity, and Betsy Miller was living proof of MacColl's" (B. Harker 154).

*Afternoon*, about "the folklore of a family of Scots Travellers, the Stewarts of Blairgowrie"), or the tradition of the Copper family, known for their unaccompanied harmonized singing, and another example of a singing family which found recognition on the revival scene. In the sleeve notes to the 1956 album *Alan Lomax and the Ramblers*, Alan Lomax paints a very flattering portrait of MacColl—and himself, incidentally, as having been brought up with the songs: "Ewan MacColl and I were both raised with folk songs like *Gypsy Davy* and *Careless Love* right in the house with us. Ewan's father, a Scots iron puddler, used to spend the whole of Hogmanay with his pals singing Scots ballads and drinking songs".

By tracing the source of the songs, singers contextualize themselves in a continuous tradition; "learned from the singing of…", followed by the name of a source or field singer, bestows upon them the prestige of oral tradition. This was done in spite of the fact that most singers learnt most of their repertoires from fellow revivalist performers (Lloyd being a particularly authoritative figure in this matter) and/or mass media—secondary sources, such as the radio, recordings and print (e.g. the *Penguin Book of English Folk Songs*, Child's collection, and Bronson's complementary volumes). In fact, performers readily deleted mention of the middleman, referring for example directly to the oral source behind a song from the *Penguin Book* rather than to the book itself.

But the limits and artificiality of distinguishing source singers and revivalists based on their sources, and therefore of constructing authenticity based on oral transmission, is made apparent by some telling counter-examples. Sweers thus points out that while recognized source singers like Irish Traveller Margaret Barry learned some songs from popular recordings so as to respond to her audience's demands, or from newspapers, a performer such as Dick Gaughan who learned a great portion of his repertoire at home was not labelled "traditional singer" on account of the different context in which he performed (Sweers, *Electric Folk* 225).

As both song and literature, the ballad is endowed with the potentially magical aura of speech strengthened in song, capable of binding listeners and exerting power on them, like the Greeks' singing mermaids (see Frankfurter on speech and magic). This evocative power of speech is also represented in the ballads themselves, as in "Clyde's Water" (216), in which Sweet William's untimely death befalls him after he has been cursed by his mother; or, less potently, those whom an ill fate befalls utter imprecations, like the Fairy Queen at the end of "Tam Lin", or Margaret in June Tabor's "Clerk Saunders" (69)[23] upon finding her lover has been slain by one of her brothers: "Cursed be my bloody brothers! / Aye and an ill death may he die!" These

23 The song appears on her 1977 Topic album *Ashes and Diamonds*.

imprecations are without consequences (the story is over), and yet demonstrate the necessary attempt to counter or influence the state of the world through speech. Even impotent, they too draw on the magic potential of the Word.

The orality of the ballad took on renewed prestige with the comeback in fashion of the bardic figure through the academic work of Milman Parry and Albert Lord, whose book *The Singer of Tales* (1960) discusses Yugoslavian oral composition of sung epics. James Jones promptly attempted to apply Lord's oral-formulaic theory of composition to Anglo-Scottish balladry in his article "Commonplace and Memorization in the Oral Tradition of the English and Scottish Popular Ballads", and was ruthlessly debunked by Albert Friedman. The idea was however not dead, and was notably later taken up by David Buchan in his controversial but certainly influential book *The Ballad and the Folk* (1972); it thus enjoyed some currency, reviving the bardic ghost and its potent associations of mystical verbal power. It gave academic credentials to an idea already firmly planted in collective imagination; Lomax, in the same sleeve notes aforementioned, half-jokingly and for all that flatteringly describes MacColl as having "wandered over the British Isles as a poet and an actor, picking up songs along the road. When there was no traditional song to fit a scene in one of his many plays or radio programmes, he composed one, *like a true Scots bard, drawing upon a heritage of tunes and verse forms he acquired before he could read or write*" (my emphasis). The essential oral nature of the ballad was once again put to the forefront.

In an environment which placed value on authenticity, authenticating was done in large part by displaying intimate knowledge of the material, its source and its history. This paratext attested to the profundity of these works and unequivocally distinguished them from the pop ephemera of the day, and Child's compilation was a wealth of information in that regard: it not only provided the peruser with versions of the ballads, but also with scholarly commentary notably tracing lineage in the timeless European tradition. *The Penguin Book* also offered short notes on the songs at the end of the book. About a quarter of the songs featured in the *Penguin Book* are Child ballads, with eleven out of about sixteen clearly identified as such in the commentaries to the songs at the end of the book[24]. The lack of systematism in the identification of Child ballads is surprising given the scholarly tone (in spite of their brevity) of the notes, perhaps indicating a certain distance taken

24 Some songs are identified as related to Child ballads, but not considered to be Child ballads themselves. Identification is sometimes tentative; for example regarding "The Sailor from Dover": "Child has a ballad called *The Brown Girl* (295) which is like the *Dover Sailor* in reverse, for there it is the man who first scorns the girl, then falls sick with love for her, and the girl arrives and mocks his situation. There is some argument as to whether The Dover Sailor is sufficiently distinct to be reckoned as a separate song" (Vaughan Williams and Lloyd 122).

with its authority—although it might be nothing more than lack of thoroughness, for Child's canon is still taken as a reference. The book also contains songs explicitly identified as ballads which do not appear in Child's list, such as "John Barleycorn", "The Trees they Grow So High" or "The Bramble Briar", described as an "interesting ballad, not included in the Child compilation" (111). If Child remained a reference, the repertoire was by no means restricted by it. Even as Child ballads still stood amidst them in the cloud of their own mystique, folksongs and even ballads were not limited to them.

Learning was flaunted in particular in sleeve notes to albums, forming a kind of antiquarian apparatus reminiscent of that of the early ballad collections, authenticating the songs. But if appeal to academia was part and parcel of this game, the bolder musicians could actually afford to question information retrieved from Child's *ESPB*: Martin Carthy, for example, discusses Child's appreciation of "The Twa Magicians" in the notes accompanying his first album *Martin Carthy*:

> In his notes to the ballad of *The Two Magicians*, Child describes it as a "base-born cousin of a pretty ballad known all over southern Europe, in especially graceful forms in France." He goes on to say that there is little doubt that they were derived from stories either of a youth and a maid pursued by an ogre or sorcerer and eluding him by transforming themselves, or of a youth apprenticed to a sorcerer learning the black arts by surreptitious reading, being pursued, assuming various forms, and finally killing his master. There is a story in the *Arabian Nights Entertainment* of a battle of transformation and others from all over the world telling of supernatural battles of giants, so in fact this "base-born cousin" may be closer to the source.

Interestingly, Carthy takes the time to mention a piece of scholarship he disagrees with; if Child's ballads generally carry prestige, there are also times when the folk revivalist, generally engaged in revalorizing the popular repertoire, also has to revalorize pieces slighted by the very self-assured and peremptory scholar himself, denigrating them among his own selection. Being knowledgeable in this way, capable of nearly academic commentary on the material and even contestation, provided performers with high status. This demonstrated an intimate knowledge of the tradition which was proof of authenticity, as opposed to a superficial, disengaged passing interest such as could be attributed to that in pop music[25].

The accessibility of folk music, its "ready performability" (MacKinnon 57) was also central to its image; as we have seen, many people were drawn to folk clubs via their involvement in

25 It is worth mentioning that not every folk club attender and performer was keen on this academic projection, or on saving their heritage, or on empowering the working class. For some, such as Heather Wood, member of the a cappella singing band The Young Tradition, "it was about free beer and getting laid. We were all stoned out of our gourds" (quoted in Bean; pagination unavailable).

skiffle, and the promise of "live, accessible, small-scale music-making" (MacKinnon 66) remained at the core of their expectations. The sole requirement to participate was to have a voice. A certain informality of the folk club encouraged attenders to take part, as "floor singers": in addition to joining in the chorus, any audience member could perform a song, and be listened to as were "booked singers"—professonialized singers who were paid for their performance. The very informality of the folk club, far from being incidental, also functioned as a "marker of distinction" (MacKinnon 117) which strove to erase the artificiality of the revivalist endeavour. This is not to say that the folkies were not in earnest; but informality was part of the popular image purposefully projected by the folk club—the image of the folk, as opposed to Sharp and his friend dolled up in evening dress to hear a classically trained singer offer up a cleaned up folksong.

Yet the notion of accessibility came into conflict with the demands of authenticity. MacColl deplored that "[t]he widespread myth that the singing of folk-songs required no special skills made it a simple matter for mediocre performers to gain a foothold in the rapidly expanding club movement" (*Journeyman* 284); the revival was to be a popular affair—but authentically so, in conformity with the image of the folk which was to be revived, which meant mastering certain musical skills. MacColl had precise ideas about what the authentic way of performing folksong was, and in spite of discontent and accusations of gatekeeping, these ideas still held sway with the more traditionalist revivalists and were applied in many folk clubs (MacKinnon 27–28). Ballad performance was held to particularly high standard. Above all, it was ideally to be sung unaccompanied; and the quality of the voice, too, was to be studied after that of source singers. In *The Singing Island*, Seeger and MacColl recommended the avoidance of metrically or harmonically restrictive arrangements and caution regarding the use of accompaniment, which might "drow[n] out or leve[l] out" subtle rhythmic variations, inflections and decorations; if used, instruments should preferably be traditional: fiddle, flutes, concertina or melodeon, for example (cited in Sweers, *Electric Folk* 145–46).

Yet in spite of MacColl's insistence on "getting as close to traditional models as possible" (*Folk Songs and Ballads of Scotland* 5), his own style was noticeably influenced by his theatre background, making for an intent dramatic delivery; and his "singing style, mannerisms and songs created their own tradition in the British folk clubs"—as did the styles of other performers, for that matter, such as Martin Carthy's distinctive guitar playing; "from the mid 1960s until the 1980s", comments Carole Pegg, "almost every club had its own Ewan MacColl and Martin Carthy" (Pegg 135). Inspired by source singers, the revival nonetheless created its own image of authenticity. Points of contention as to what should be considered authentic regularly arose: was guitar accompaniment acceptable? Did the Watersons' polyphonic singing have roots in tradition? The

tradition of the Copper family vouched for it; Martin Carthy's guitar playing style ensured a continuity with tradition by taking inspiration from traditional fiddle playing; and of course, for all of the staunchest traditionalists' conservatism, there was no shortage of advocates for innovation as a way to keep the tradition alive and even a natural process of folk music.

Billy Connolly, himself unafraid to spice up the folk repertoire, critically recalls conservative traditionalist influence on the English folk clubs:

> The Scottish clubs liked entertainers and English clubs liked educators. They seemed to like to be educated by the traditional unaccompanied songs. It was like Brussels sprouts, supposed to be good for you. I remember at some clubs it was very difficult because the crowd had been weaned on English traditional stuff and when we went, the Humblebums, they were saying, "What the fuck's this?" They'd much rather have had the Young Tradition [a trio singing a cappella after the Copper family fashion] or something. (in Bean; pagination unavailable)

He was not the only one in sensing "an almost puritanical reverence for traditional music" in the folk clubs of the 1960s (MacKinnon 28).

In this context, the advent of folk-rock could not but cause a bit of turmoil. Bob Dylan's use of an electric guitar at the Newport Festival in 1965 reportedly sparked divided reactions, between enthusiastic cheering and resentful booing. Bruce Jackson, a director of the festival, gathers from memory and tapes of the event that the booing was in fact caused by disappointment at Dylan's leaving the stage, and not the use of electric guitar; perhaps influenced by press coverage of the event ascribing booing to disappointment with a perceived electric treachery, Dylan was in any case booed at subsequent concerts (Sweers, *Electric Folk* 21–22). The electrified guitar was seen as a symbol of commercialized music—Dylan was selling out. Concern was expressed that the mixing of genres produced an unsatisfying hybrid from the point of view of both folk and pop-rock: Bob Dawbarn, writing for the reference music magazine *Melody Maker* in 1965, suggests that the electrification was offensive to "folk purists" on the one hand, and the "length, monotony and uncommercial lyric" would be unappealing to pop fans (quoted in Sweers, *Electric Folk* 23) on the other. Yet the mix obviously found its audience with the more adventurous and less conservative-minded.

In Great Britain, a native version of the genre was officially born in 1969 with Fairport Convention's *Liege & Lief* album. It innovatively combined the use of electric instruments with a traditional and traditional-inspired repertoire and traditional instruments such as, most notably, the fiddle. The use of electric instruments was at odds with the ideal of authentic performance which had currency, as it is described by MacColl and Seeger. And yet this image of authenticity was

clearly not simply the "objective" reflection of tradition, but very much a constructed one. While MacColl and Seeger include the accordion among recommended or acceptable instruments, its use dated from no earlier than the nineteenth century. The insistence on unaccompanied singing denied certain source singers' preference for accompaniment—with whatever instrument was handy. Using new instruments seems to have been incidental, and purists' refusal to see it happen reflects the canonisation of a certain view of a certain practice at a certain time, of a single snapshot. Authenticity was thus linked to stability, a refusal to be influenced by external changes—changes *perceived* as external, that is, from the point of view of a *perceived* whole of authentic folksong.

It must be said that, as demonstrated by Robert Burns (see Burns, chap.4), the electrification of folk music implied certain changes to the music beyond sound quality. Rock music notably implies "a structured, constant, repetitive rhythmical pattern", applied to songs often characterized by a "freer rhythmic nature" reflective of the solo singer's personal "lyrical and rhythmic interpretation" (Burns 165). The need for regularity and playing in unison felt by most rock bands also calls for a rationalization of metre which differs from the common rubato performance of source singers too, the latter style allowing for more variation not simply in the interpretation of one song (folk-rock does have recourse to irregular meter throughout a song, faithfully reflecting first revival collectors' notations often used as source), but from one interpretation of a song to another (whereas the set irregular metre of folk-rock performance is reproduced from interpretation to interpretation) (ibid. 183).

This fundamental change to performance style was difficult to swallow for purists. Folk-rock, with its higher sound volume, was foreign to the intimate folk club scene. It shattered the snapshot of tradition they sought to perpetuate, which had produced strong expectations to which this kind of performance was anathema. Although the innovation of British folk rock is to be credited in large part to performers rather unfamiliar with traditionalist folk, as we have seen, it also involved artists intimate with the folk club scene—such as Maddy Prior, lead vocalist of Steeleye Span from 1969 to 1997 (and again since 2002), who recalls struggling with the precepts of the folk club scene even after leaving it, tormented by a "little judgmental voice" which gave her a sense of violating the rules of authenticity (Sweers, *Electric Folk* 219). This kind of innovation could not take place within the traditionalist folk club scene and signified a necessary break with it. Steeleye Span's Tim Hart was aware that they had officially "sold out the moment [they] plugged in. Even then it was too late to stop..." (in Woffinden; pagination unavailable). Introducing an interview of Steeleye Span for the *New Musical Express* in 1973, Charles Murray, though he is clearly not taking sides with the purists against them, tellingly describes their work as "some of the most violent playing ever applied to English traditional music" (Murray; pagination unavailable).

For MacColl and Seeger, this kind of treatment was simply a betrayal of the music's nature. If on the one hand the canonized mode of representation they heralded was taken to be the "natural" sound of traditional music, and thus carried implications of truth and a direct reflection of reality, then the transformation of sound, as with electrification, distorted the natural image of the music, thereby perverting the image of reality it supposedly carried (Brocken 90). Regarding ballads in particular, they write disparagingly, in the notes to *The Long Harvest*, of such performances as Fairport Convention's rendition of "'Sir Patrick Spens' with spangles and a rock accompaniment"; for them,

> the ballads don't lend themselves to this kind of treatment. They don't make good "production numbers". The poetry gets in the way: too much action, too many incidents, and the quality of the language leads to a kind of rock parody. The words of the ballads have something of the feeling of stones fashioned into a smooth perfection by endless tides. Attempts to create settings, arrangements for the poetry only succeed in making it seem overdressed—like putting a silk garter on the Venus de Milo. Also, in a curious way, a ballad appears to have difficulty breathing inside an arrangement, for though the bond that fuses the ballad text and tune into a single whole is oddly flexible and appears to be constantly shifting its centre of gravity, it appears to be unable to function in the proximity of foreign musical influences.

The idea of ballads as something like "the spontaneous product of nature" is evident here, as it is pictured as a natural object "fashioned into a smooth perfection by endless tides", incompatible with the artifice of electrification and its too regular, artificial rhythms. Also conceived of as art, it is compared to a sculpture (the Venus de Milo, significantly an anonymous work) which, though in the classical line, is still located in a distant past that allows its association with a more natural, primitive beauty contrasted with modern ornaments.

These kinds of deviant performances, discredited, also served to reinforce a sense of self-righteous authenticity. As Burns points out, "an audience whose perception of community is bound by a notional series of knowledge-based mores is also able to isolate itself through aspects of disapproval to other musical styles as perceptions of purity become reinforced through elitism and exclusivity" (Burns 220). MacColl, reminiscing on the difficult times when he felt "the revival slipping away" (MacColl, *Journeyman* 341), traces it to the influence of rock music in the sixties, and self-righteously places himself apart from both "self-styled purists and antiquarians"—the EFDSS—and rockers (and sympathizers, be they folkies—especially folkies), in a humble spot outside misguided trends where those true to themselves stand:

> All those long ballads sung without accompaniment, those country songs plain and unadorned didn't really belong in the swinging sixties. There were new prophets now like Mick Jagger and Jimi Hendrix, young Turks in revolt against… what? Melody, perhaps? Audibility? Coherence? Shirts with buttons? The old fuddy-duddy traditionalists (as one would-be with-it folkie reviewer put it) should be getting out—or was it down?—into the market-place with Dylan and the rest of the modern whiz-kids of music. (MacColl, *Journeyman* 340)

In the face of folk-rock and folk-pop innovation, he notes, most likely not without a kind of martyr-like triumph, that "[m]eanwhile, those who were content to sing the ballads and songs of tradition without the benefit of rock backing were repeatedly branded as eccentrics or—worse—as reactionaries, who were afraid to bring their unimproved music into the big, wide, vibrating, amplified, four-beats-to-the-bar world" (ibid. 340).

It is clear from his writing that he did not consider himself to be a purist treating ballads like museum pieces, freezing them like dead butterflies; in fact, he took pleasure in picturing himself as one of the subversive revolutionaries, speaking derisively of those older members of the EFDSS he describes as thinking longingly on "the good old days before the floodgates opened and allowed the riff-raff to come in" and peasant representatives of the folk were sweet subservient old men and women. He also defended his friend Lloyd's process of "Englishing" Irish, Scottish or North American songs against accusations of forgery, contending that "[i]n a sense, all folk-songs are forgeries" (MacColl, *Journeyman* 290). Against the notion of an "ur-'Barbara Allen' or ur-'Lord Randal'", he described the repertoire as "a body of texts and tunes in a state of constant change, of evolution and devolution" (ibid.). This might seem surprising coming from a man so often described as an intransigent purist; but the mention of "devolution" as well as "evolution" points to a vision of change as potentially negative as well as positive or neutral. It is clear that he distinguished between the type of innovation he deemed to be in line with the traditional process, and/or that experimented by his friends, and that he deemed to be inauthentic, untrue to the material —based on his own criteria of authenticity. While he might have allowed for some evolution, he thus froze a fenced path for it, if not the object itself. He advocated for the creation of new folksongs based on the old models, and consecration for him was to write a song that could be mistaken for a traditional one, as when he sang his "Shoals of Herring" to the fisherman Sam Larner, who declared: "I known that song all my life" (quoted in MacColl, *Journeyman* 323).

And yet Fairport's and Steeleye Span's was still an earnest interest in folksong and the ballads, and their endeavour mirrored that of traditionalist revivalists: Steeleye Span, especially its founding member Ashley Hutchings, were keen to discover and revive what they perceived to be

their heritage, focusing especially on English songs, and raided Cecil Sharp House for material. The involvement in the group of established folk performers like Tim Hart and Maddy Prior bears testimony to the lineage of a genre that did share traditionalists' will to reinvigorate the tradition, but broke away from its reverential and conservative treatment, seen as a dead-end. They incorporated classic folksongs, including Child ballads at the core of their repertoire, which grounded them firmly in the constructed tradition. This place within the revivalist folk tradition was further asserted in the sleeve booklet of *Liege & Lief*, which featured pictures and texts pertaining to folk traditions such as pace-egging or the hunting of the wren, as well as a picture of Professor Child, whose *ESPB* is described a trifle ironically as "the definitive collection, never to be superceded"—which seems to indicate a degree of awareness of the excessive enshrinement of the work; a picture of Cecil Sharp, credited with "restor[ing] to the English the songs and dances of their country"; and a picture of a source singer, George Wyatt, an informant to Sharp, and "one of a vanishing breed of rural songsters, who gleaned his knowledge of music from his fathers before him". From the middle of the 1970s, Child ballads took a growing importance in Steeleye Span's repertoire, as they seemed to sift through the *ESPB* for inspiration. For folk-rock performers less familiar with the revival repertoire, such an institution shone like a particularly bright beacon.

If a historical haziness was the necessary attribute of a revival creating its continuity with the past, folk-rock also seemed to violate this, paradoxically, by plunging head-first into a medieval fantasy distinctly removed from the here and now. This was done in a self-aware, tongue-in-cheek manner, which marked a certain distance with the material. *Enjoyment* was the key word, which also meant playfulness and boldness when it came to envisioning this imprecise heritage. Medieval influence is evident in such album titles as *Liege & Lief*, Middle English for "loyal and ready", or *Below the Salt*, referring to "the use of salt at the medieval food table", which salt, "placed at the centre of the table", divided "[a]bove the salt . . . the family and intimates of the household" and "below the salt . . . the servants and dependants", as explained in the sleeve notes to the album. Visual aesthetics

Figure 5: Cover art for Steeleye Span's *Below the Salt* album (1972), by Grahame Berney.

also made the trend obvious, as can be seen in album covers. *Below the Salt*'s cover art and title playfully place Steeleye Span below the salt—in the place of the folk, in a re-imagined context that is perhaps only different from the traditionalist revivalist's in that it is unabashed in its outspoken fantasized nature.

For Frederick Woods, folk-rock's musical experiments and unhistorical play with medieval imagery ("a retrogression into a medievalism not always perfectly understood") are part of a deliberate if somewhat naive attempt at actually making folk music widely accessible (quoted in Sweers, *Electric Folk* 60)—including to the performers themselves, by liberating them from traditionalist diktats to fully appropriate the material. Folk-rock, in the same way that the post-war revival distanced itself from stuffy Edwardian living-room performance, strove to re-enliven the tradition by distancing itself from stuffy folk club performance. Simon Nicol of Fairport Convention outspokenly explained this intentional break in a 1969 interview for *Disc & Music Echo*:

> When it comes down to folk, it's still a form of music that's very alive, but has always been restricted. The songs exist in libraries and in folk clubs, but the people who play in folk clubs, and the people who go to listen, never advance. It's always been the same people singing the same songs to the same audience. A kind of innate snobbery . . . I'm sure the kids are completely unaware of their heritage. I count myself among the kids, because I was reared on music that was always a distillation of American influences. We feel the time is right to bring the music out—getting away from the blues scale and introducing something completely new. All the folk songs have reached a very pure form by now—a kind of sorting the wheat from the chaff. And there are some fantastic songs about. I mean there's nothing like a good murder ballad to get them going! (quoted in Brocken 101)

—also clearly highlighting the appeal of shocking, violent elements in ballads. As it had been for the Romantics' literature, folksong was a way for these artists to breathe new life into the music sphere.

These changes in the approach of folksongs and of ballads and ballad performance, this shifting relation of performers apprehending their source material, calls our attention to the corresponding variations in their performance contexts. What changes affect the ballad, in source contexts and varying revival contexts? What meanings are given to its performance?

# 3. CONTEXTUALIZATION, DE-CONTEXTUALIZATION, AND RE-CONTEXTUALIZATION

> the eternal contradiction of revivalism: in order to popularise some kind of tradition one has to recontextualise it (Brocken 8)

## 3.1. The Ballad Object

The multiplicity of formats in which the ballad appears—print, song, writing, recording, recitation, illustration…—begs the question: what is the ballad, or as Atkinson puts it: *where* is the ballad (*The Anglo-Scottish Ballad*, chap.1)? The minimal definition "narrative song" has been settled on; and yet where does it lie? Is it present in the text, dormant, waiting to be sung? In the sound waves coming from the gramophone? In the singer's live performance? Is it the same ballad the singer sings from one performance to another? And is that ballad sung by Harry Cox before he has been "discovered" by the collector the same as that sung by Martin Carthy on the revival scene?

For Child, as for his predecessors Percy or Scott, ballads were evidently literary texts, of which there existed more or less perfect versions. In the course of ballad history, the exclusive focus on text to the detriment of melody was denounced: it was already deplored by Ritson in the eighteenth century; and in the twentieth Bertrand Harry Bronson, for whom, unequivocally, a ballad is "not a ballad . . . [w]hen it has no tune" (Bronson ix), finally set out to complete Child's collection with four volumes of *The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads*, published between 1959 and 1972 (complete with their texts, a plethora of variants to Child's titles from the British isles and the United States). From their standpoint, a ballad only becomes a ballad in the event of performance, when it is sung out.

In 1913, Phillips Barry suggested that the ballad is not an event, but a "process . . . by which a simple event in human experience, of subjective interest, narrated in simple language, set to a simple melody, is progressively objectivated" (Barry, 'An American Homiletic Ballad' 5). This idea can be linked to Sharp's conception of folksong as undergoing continual change through variation and selection in oral tradition, and to Lothar Kupke's vision of the ballad as undergoing a shaping process which polishes it from a five-act narrative into a three-act one, towards maximized dramatic efficiency. In this view, the ballad written down, printed, and even recorded, is "fixed" at one stage of its development. Versions, texts as well as tunes, become canonized in collections and recordings; they acquire "a profound appearance of permanence and stability, and consequently of . . . authority", such as is associated with "diachronic reproducibility" (Atkinson, 'Folk Songs in

Print' 457). For Thomas McKean, versions fixed by collectors are "snapshots of tradition" which "itself continue[s] its arc of life, changing, disappearing, reappearing, subject to human memory, use, and creativity"; and if they are "dead" on the page, "as soon as someone apprehends it in any way, reading, speaking, or singing it, the song may live again, albeit in a slightly different form (the folk process)" (McKean 38).

That the integrity of the ballad lies in its text's is evident in the practice, perpetuated in the second revival, of collation—as though editors and artists were still seeking the Romantics' elusive ideal text. In editing *The Penguin Book of English Folk Songs*, Lloyd and Vaughan Williams openly resorted to collation to conform to what Barry calls the editor's "duty to make both singable and understandable the song he edits" (quoted in Vaughan Williams and Lloyd 8). They rejected earlier editors' prudish "cleaning-up" and "rewriting" of "objectionable" texts and restored bowdlerized lyrics, yet unashamedly admitted to "shorten[ing] songs that seemed overlong for what they had to say" (ibid.). In a way, restoring good taste had not gone out of fashion; the fashion of what was in good taste had simply changed. Robert Graves, editing his *English and Scottish Ballads* in 1957, is also of the opinion that giving a single whole version, "unless such a version happens to be superior to all others in every stanza", "seems unjust to the reader, who is entitled to the best text", and thus elects to "combin[e] several versions, choosing the most telling stanzas, or phrases, from each", and even "restore[s] the missing lines in the spirit of the original" where he deems no versions sufficient (Graves, *English and Scottish Ballads* xxiv). The Caedmon/Topic anthology, too, which endeavoured to complement the scholar's knowledge of ballads with their sound dimension, presents some versions collating verses by singers from different regions of the British isles, making for particularly strikingly composite objects and begging the question—is this kind of patchwork a ballad? The compositeness is here taken to a higher level than in the case of a coherent collated text sung by one singer.

And the practice of collation was current among revival singers themselves: besides resorting to the Penguin book's collated texts, the more invested singers not only sought rarer versions but crafted their own texts based on one or more. If MacColl's use of collated versions in the *ESPB* Folkways series seems to reflect Vaughan Williams and Lloyd's practice of emending texts for the sake of coherence, Martin Carthy's process for example appears much more personal. He describes his handling of "The Famous Flower of Serving Men" (106), for example, in the following words in the sleeve notes to *Shearwater*:

> Having first read "The Famous Flower" and been fired with enthusiasm, I was sobered by reading the rather pedestrian text of the Broadside ["The Lady Turned Serving Man"], which immediately followed, and gave the story an ending, because it simply did not

> match—either in intensity or in elegance—the considerably older, shortened version, and decided to try and tell it *my own way.* (my emphasis)

For singers, as for Romantic poets, the artistic drive justifies "manipulation" of texts. In this frame, the ballad is an idea: a story which might manifest in different forms, and one to be appropriated by different singers. Wilful changes can be ascribed to poetic license, a laudable creative impulse which is the very source of art. Another standpoint would be to take the ballad text as an inherited artefact, "authentic", nearly sacred, to be transmitted as it was received—the point of view of the scholarly editor Child looking down on changes made to texts, regarded as tampering.

For Atkinson, the different versions of a ballad available are "multiple sets of instructions or exemplifications for the reconstitution and repetition of a work" from which to draw (*The Anglo-Scottish Ballad* 23). Arranging texts and tunes as seen fit, making up tunes for texts without melodies, matching a text with another song's tune are thus all ways of recreating the ballad "work" in a version. Lloyd's version of "Sir Hugh" (155) on the 1956 Riverside anthology is a collation of the text of John Swain of Donyatt, Somerset, and two other versions from the same region, sung to John Swain's tune; Martin Carthy freely matches texts and tunes, as, for example, "King Henry" (32) which he sings to the American tune of "Bonaparte's Retreat", or "The Outlandish Knight" (4) to a tune of his own creation. Irish musician Andy Irvine, who drew a text for "Willie o' Winsbury" (100) from the *ESPB*, then got the ballad number confused in looking up a tune in Bronson's volumes—creating a new association that was canonized by the folk-jazz band Pentangle's recording. Nor is this kind of practice unheard of from source singers: famed Norfolk singer Harry Cox freely admitted to having learned "Henry the Poacher" (a ballad not included in the *ESPB*, about the deportation of a poacher to Australia) from a songsheet bought at Norwich market, and to have made up the tune, as there was none on the sheet—adding, according to MacColl's testimony: "I'd have made the words up, too, if I could ha' spelt" (quoted in MacColl, *Journeyman* 291). If the ballad is to be sung to "come to life" (Smith 322), a specific tune is in any case not essential to the ballad, whether in "tradition" (Bronson's volumes are illustration enough of the variety of tunes available for one ballad) or on the revival scene.

If re-creation of personal versions was common practice, an interesting point is that the source of the text is usually traced. Vaughan Williams and Lloyd in the *Penguin Book* tend to name only one informant for collated versions, but they still make a point of naming one[26]. Sleeve notes to folk singers' albums usually cite the source of their version. MacColl's scholarly-leaning *ESPB*

26 Lloyd, on the other hand, is remarkably not keen on giving his sources in the notes accompanying his recordings. He apparently constituted enough of an authority himself that this went unquestioned.

Folkways series systematically cites its sources; and if it means he admits to having learned some of the ballads from print, it also allows him to position himself in an oral tradition, an important source of authenticity, as we have seen: the most prestigious mention is probably "learned from singer's mother/father".

Atkinson challenges this notion of the superiority of the oral medium over the written medium. As the singer of the Child ballads is never the author[27], and the same ballad idea exists instead in different minds and is transmitted from one to the other in different realisations, he likens ballads to a kind of *langue* located in people's mind, which is realised as *parole* in song, but also recitation, writing, or print (Atkinson, *The Anglo-Scottish Ballad* 96). This raises the question of whether the "work" in the mind of one singer is truly the same as the one in that of another—of whether they speak the same *langue*. The question bears asking in particular in the case of source and revival singers. As has been pointed out, revivals take material "out of its original social context into revival cultures that embod[y] a completely different social group with values and codes differing from those of the original performers" (Sweers, *Electric Folk* 61); under such circumstances, is the re-contextualized work quite the same as that which has been de-contextualized? The *parole* might be the same, but is it decoded in the same way? Do the decoders (singers and audiences) possess the linguistic knowledge that would allow them to decode what was encoded in the ballads' original context?

## 3.2. The Ballad Contexts

### 3.2.1. Text Fed by Context

Barre Toelken's study of metaphoric language in folksong in *Morning Dew and Roses: Nuance, Metaphor, and Meaning in Folksongs* (1995) brings to light a "metaphorical coherence grounded in culturally recognized images (rather than privately invented conceits, for example) [which] works together with narrative coherence to re-create and intensify dramatic experience" (145)—and which easily eludes the uninitiated. "The various contexts in which vernacular songs have had meaning for those who sang (or sing) them are important", he insists, "for usually the words themselves do not carry the metaphorical meaning, but rather the skilled application of the words in particular culturally recognizable situations" (48).

27 Atkinson applies this to the tune also, but this is more debatable: see for example Carthy singing "The Outlandish Knight" to his own tune; or Jeannie Robertson, who "cud make a tune for some of those ballads" the words to which she found tuneless in a book or broadside, or the tune of which she did not care for (quoted in Porter and Gower 44).

In building the connoisseur ethos discussed above, folk initiates make a point of uncovering precisely this kind of cultural subtlety; Tim Hart and Maddy Prior, for example, discussing the ballad "Young Hunting" (68) in the sleeve notes to their 1969 album *Folk Songs of Old England Vol. 2*, recognize the possibility of the interpretation of the bird who taunts the murderess as "the transfiguration of the soul of her victim"[28]. Incidentally, failure to decode this might well be what led Harry Smith, the editor of Folkways' 1952 *Anthology of American Folk Music*, to misunderstand the plot of the ballad ("Henry Lee" in this American version) sung by Dick Justice in 1929[29], as evidenced by his summary of it. Edmund O'Reilly, in discussing his mistake, attributes it to the ballad having been truncated to fit the three minutes of recording time, and thereby made incoherent (O'Reilly 86–87); but this does not seem to hold as many American versions follow the same plot[30]. In Dick Justice's version, a woman invites her lover to stay the night. He refuses, telling her he has a girl "in the merry green land" he loves better than her. She proceeds to murder him, and disposes of his body in a well with the help of the "ladies of the town". The story then cuts directly to the woman inviting a little bird to come and alight on her right knee, in language mirroring that used in the first couplet; the bird refuses, thinking she will kill him like she killed her lover; she threatens to do just that, and he threatens to tell on her. The narrative sometimes varies in other similar versions by having the girl regret her act, call for a doctor and begging her love to live on; and there is often a couplet introducing the bird in-between the disposal of the body and the girl's beckoning to the bird, such as

> A pretty parrot swinging in a willow tree,
> Hearing all they had to say,
> Said, "Yes, that pretty girl in Archer's land
> Shall long for his return home."
> (version taken down by Vivian Bresnehen from her father in Missouri around 1917,
> reproduced in Kittredge 300)

—but the absence of these elements does not necessarily confuse the text: succinct as it is, it does not seem half so obscure *provided one identifies the bird's associations with death*.

In any case, this kind of anecdotal knowledge might not be sufficient to be well-versed in the source singer's language. Flemming G. Andersen, in studying the use of formulas in ballads, comes to the conclusion that

28 See also Toelken's discussion of English and American folklore surrounding birds, and the bird in "Young Hunting" specifically, in *Morning Dew and Roses* pp. 90-91.
29 See annex p. 112 for the text.
30 It also resembles Child's F text from Motherwell's manuscript, ending with the dialogue with the bird.

> many singers have employed formulas deliberately to produce different layers of meaning in the stories. In the performance context of an audience *steeped in the ballad tradition* the singers will be able to arouse specific expectations by employing specific types of formulas. . . . Fieldwork has demonstrated that singers are indeed aware of the poetic potential of the kinds of phrases that we term formulas, and there seems to be a reasonably large correspondence between the results of textual analyses and the singers' own observations. (Andersen, 'Technique, Text, and Context' 25; my emphasis)

In *Commonplace and Creativity*, Andersen examines recurring formulas in the Child ballads, and observes links between certain formulas and subsequent narrative development. He observes, for example, that the formula "But word's gane up and word's gane doon" (and variations), which he identifies in different versions of twelve ballads, seems to signal a transgressive love relationship usually involving pregnancy and ending "in a sharp confrontation between the opposing interests of the girl and her parents" (Andersen, *Commonplace and Creativity* 186); or analyses "He's taen her by the milkwhite hand/by arm/by middle" as pointing to "sexual compulsion or extramarital affairs" (ibid. 162), "the consummation of marriage" (167); with "in arms", tenderness; or violence, foregrounding the death of a character—bearing in any case "overtones of both tender love and violence" (174). Furthermore, Andersen suggests that certain singers, not contenting themselves with rote repetition, use formulas' associations and vary them to suggest different shades of meaning in particular contexts, as does Motherwell's informant Agnes Laird with the "what news, what news" formula in "Lord Thomas and Fair Annet" (73), to convey Annet's mistake in taking the message to mean she, and not the "Brown Girl", is to marry her lover. This kind of variation is doubtless not so readily accessible to the revival singer.

Versions are thus liable to be deemed defective by urban revivalists which make sense to their singer, and elements disinvested of their meaning; furthermore, ballad variations in the revival context might be created according to a personal expression which does not share in the metaphoric and formulaic idiom of the source singers, learned through enculturation in a context of social singing, for example.

### 3.2.2. Getting Intimate

Source singers sang the ballads in private context, or in a local community setting; on the occasion of the ceilidh of Scottish tradition, for example. Along with other songs, they formed part of a repertoire that was exploited for entertainment at private parties, local gatherings, at home in the evenings, at the pub or at work, to pass the time. It also had practical purposes: in Traveller

tradition, Jeannie Robertson saw it as not merely entertainment but a way to communicate value and meaning, releasing tension in the community, expressing social concerns and educating the children (Porter and Gower 75).

Figure 6: From Christopher Heppa's collection: "A typical east Norfolk 'singing pub' and its clientele, the Lion at Somerton." c. 1930.

Ginette Dunn, documenting the singing traditions of Snape and Blaxhall in East Suffolk (men's pub singing as well as women's singing at home or local social events), describes a community in which "the singing function . . . is of great importance" even though "there is little self-conscious awareness of it in the community, little assessment of its quiddity" (Dunn 17), and "[s]ong is an expression of self", expressing "man's understanding of his humanity, his contact with others, his view of the world, and his realisation that the world has a view of him" (ibid. 14). The importance of singing, and for it to be listened to, for pub-singers like Harry Cox is illustrated by an incident in the 1930s which saw him and his friends walk out of a pub in a temper after being offended by interruptions from "rowdy youngsters" (Heppa 574). Good singers with vast repertoires were recognized by their peers, as was Harry Cox, or his father Bob (ibid. 576), but as noted by MacKinnon, "[t]he intimacy of such performance settings and the nature of 'ready performability' would have prevented the emergence of stark separation between performers and audience. A crucial point is that this music evolved in and for small communities in situations where the performer and the audience actually knew each other" (MacKinnon 58).

The folk club attempted to recreate this kind of intimate context. Unlike the first revival, which sought to integrate (with necessary transformation) folk music to the parlour and the concert hall scene, the second revival shaped a space wherein not only to imitate traditional folksong as an object (in text as well as manner of singing), but itself imitating the context of traditional folksong. The pub back-room, an informal space suited to socialization and entertainment, cheaply rented, was the elected location of the folk club. The usual absence of a propped-up stage and an acoustic

set-up[31] ensured an equal footing between performers and audience, and the audience was invited to take on an active role by joining in on the chorus and through the practice of floor-singing, which allowed anyone in the audience to rise and give a performance. Carthy expressed expectation that the audience should somehow take part, even if quiet, and not be passively "voyeuristic" (quoted in MacKinnon 57). A sense of "closeness" is created between audience and performer, which "often negates perceptions of performer 'status' normally associated [by contrast] with rock music performance" (Burns 201); booked singers, although they are paid professional, unlike floor singers, are expected to be friendly, have no back-room to prepare before the show, and are normally put up at the club manager's place for the night. But "[a]n apparent lack of formality and staging in the folk scene belies the fact that performers do indeed have to construct a careful front, only that in the case of the folk scene the lack of a 'stage door syndrome' can actually mean that the performers get no respite" (MacKinnon 93), with the difficulty of balancing the indispensable show of casualness with expectations of virtuosity.

The folk festivals which started being promoted in the mid-1950s obviously posed certain problems in terms of intimacy; the stage and amplification create a necessary distance between audience and performers, and it is no coincidence that this kind of scene, in which the kind of carefully constructed intimacy of the folk club could not so easily find its grip, were much more likely to program folk-rock than the folk clubs when it appeared. Yet a number of practices besides the staged performance still attempted to counter the estrangement of the performer on the festival scene. Sing-around spaces, such as the "folk song loft" which the Sidmouth Folk Festival started promoting in 1962, were thus created with the intention of recreating something of the folk club's intimacy. The performer is also expected to have a drink with the audience after the show, and to participate in workshops, on the occasion of which any member of the audience can perform on an equal footing with the guest performer, who is expected not to monopolize performance. This is all part of what Simon Frith sees as a "constant attempt to deny the actual (commercial) separation of folk stars and folk fans" (Frith 41).

Whether successful or not, the point of the revival was thus not simply to perpetuate "authentic" material but to do so in an "authentic" context which ensured the authenticity of the material as well, through a collective, communal experience. In his autobiography, MacColl recalled feeling ill at ease performing in an environment closer to the living-room entertainments

31 On the controversy raised by the introduction of electronic amplification in a folk club, see MacKinnon chapter 12. It is seen by some as raising a barrier between singer and audience, discouraging chorus singing and encouraging chatter.

of the first revival, a “stuffy benefit for some cause or other” where he could not help but feel a certain hostility towards an audience which he imagined must think him “a queer fish” (MacColl, *Journeyman* 292). This is in contrast with the environment of the folk club, where, in spite of his controversial reputation, he was revered as something of an authority, and knew his art was respected and held in high regard. Yet there is a definite and unbridgeable gap between the context of inspiration and that of the folk club.

A tradition such as that of pub-singing mentioned above is also governed by certain rules, linked to age-related hierarchy for example (Heppa 578), or gender; but an important distinction lies between such customs and those of the folk club in that the former were learned through the socialization process from a young age, whereas in the folk club, newcomers are confronted to a set of unspoken rules which their own socialization has not prepared them for, and which can run counter to it—as with the expectation of quiet listening, for example, where other kinds of live music in an urban pub would not preclude talking. As MacKinnon observes,“[t]he mode of listening particular to the folk scene is no longer a societal norm” (MacKinnon 80), so that the folk club’s replica is necessarily “an elaborate construction of informality” (ibid. 81), “tightly bound by a series of mores and expectations as to how to behave” (ibid. 79). For Brocken, the revival was fettered by the canonization of not only its material, but of all of its rigid ritualized practices: “The relative failure of the folk revival was that, ultimately, it merely replicated classical canons by offering itself up as a formal text to be learned” (40).

The gap between “traditional” and revival settings is highlighted by the experience of source singers on the revival scene. Their integration in the revival marks the revivalists’ desire to go back to the source, rejecting the first revival’s “inauthentic” piano arrangements for middle-class living-room entertainment; but far from being truly integrated, these singers earned something of a celebrity status which, in certain cases, estranged them from their own community. Scottish Traveller Jeannie Robertson is one example of a source singer who was “discovered” by Hamish Henderson in 1953 and came to be hailed as the “undisputed Queen of folksong” in folk circles (Sweers, *Electric Folk* 61), known in particular for her performances of tragic ballads and certainly one of the most influential source singers of the revival. Her recognition (she was awarded the MBE in 1968) was a source of pride, and she was eager to share her songs with the world; but not all such stories are without their downsides. The comparable rise to fame of Belle Stewart, of the Stewarts of Blair Traveller family, “discovered” by journalist Maurice Fleming in the early 1950s, in time caused resentment in the family, and she became alienated from most of

them (Douglas 437). The folk scene was simply not equivalent with her home context, and provided her with a different status than she had as a singer in her own community.

Try as it might, the folk club is thus unavoidably different from the contexts it draws from and seeks to imitate. But how does this differing context impact the potency of the ballad?—is it sung to the same effect in the folk club as it is at a homely ceilidh, or at an East Anglian pub session?

## 3.3. The Ballad Ritual

### 3.3.1. Ballads and Tragedy

> When I began listening to what singers themselves valued, as well as nudging them along the lines of my planned research, I soon found myself having to discard some preconceived ideas. Little good came from my distinguishing the "Child ballad" from other types of balladry, for example, or indeed from marking off the "ballad" at all as an analytical category separate from traditional narrative song of all description, for these are not native categories. That was just the beginning of my taxonomic troubles. I also had to ask by what features "narrative" song can be distinguished from singing of any other kind. Do not virtually all songs imply a story, if they do not tell one outright? Moreover, by what objective factors can "traditional" singing be distinguished from singing practices in general? (Niles 36)

The concept of the ballad as a "narrative song" (preferably "popular") is one that has been shaped by scholarly taxonomy without consulting their "source singers" or informants. Pondering how these singers conceptualize the ballad themselves, Andersen observes:

> It is quite evident that singers themselves distinguish among different types of songs in their repertoires; *depending on how much contact they have had with collectors and field-workers*, they will classify certain kinds of songs as "folk songs", "muckle sangs", "ballads", "classical ballads", "big ballads", "great big ballads", or even "great big heavy ballads". It should come as no surprise, however, that the singers do not have ready-made definitions to present at the scholar's request. As an ethnic genre the traditional ballad is perhaps best defined by example; although singers are taken aback by the ballad scholar's obsession with abstract theorizing, they can themselves immediately classify individual items in their repertoires. (Andersen, 'Technique, Text, and Context' 26–27, my emphasis)

It is difficult to say how much source singers' conception and singling out of the ballad owes to collectors and scholars' influence. There is no doubt that collectors' as well as revival audiences' expectations have impacted the way they conceptualize their repertoire. The fact remains in any

case that they have learned to align themselves (more or less successfully) with the expected ballad corpus, and vice versa: collectors used their ready-made, "pre-contact" taxonomy to describe source singers' repertoires. MacColl and Seeger, for example, unhesitatingly equate Belle Stewart's "big/old songs" with "the Child ballads" (MacColl and Seeger 163).

This repertoire has been persistently connected to tragedy: Gummere confidently asserts that "tragedy is well to the fore" among ballads (quoted in Roberts 77) (which Warren Roberts disputes, concluding from a survey of the Child ballads that "one hundred and fifteen are tragic . . . and one hundred and sixty-five are non-tragic in view of their happy endings", while "[t]he remaining twenty-five ballads must be classed as indeterminate" (Roberts 78)); for Ker, "[t]he best [ballads] are lyrical tragedies" (quoted in Roberts 77); Andersen observes "the domestic love tragedy" to be held as "the typical ballad story" (Andersen, 'Technique, Text, and Context' 25). Carpenter, collecting from Bell Duncan around 1930, comments that "her songs were remarkably well balanced as between comedy and tragedy. Yet despite her not inconsiderable repertoire of delightfully 'high-kilted' ballads, she was true to Anglo-Saxon tradition in preferring the tragic ending" (quoted in Bishop 399). Lloyd also puts tragic songs to the fore, finding that "[f]olksongs deal mostly with the simplest things and in the commonest way and with a strong preference for tragedy in the songs that are deepest felt" (Lloyd, *The Singing Englishman* 34). Ballads seem to be almost as intimately linked in the common imagination with tragedy as they are with pastness[32]. Perhaps due to the influence of scholars and collectors putting to the fore tragic stories amid Child's collection, the same association of ballads and tragedy can be observed with source singers; Jeannie Robertson thus defined her "big ballads" as "any ballad which tells *a serious or tragic story*, and which is sung in slow tempo and in solemn style" (quoted in Andersen, 'Technique, Text, and Context' 27, my emphasis).

From Aristotle to the present day, a long tradition identifies the point and effect of tragedy as catharsis. The action of tragedy as described by Freud rests on "a play of contending forces", "a striving of the will and some opposition thereto" (Freud 146). Although a distinction can be made based on the calamitous outcome of tragedy, the basic notion of contending forces can be argued to lie at the core of narratives outside tragedy, such as other "transgressive" ballads discussed above, and to permit as well, down different lines, a form of catharsis; if the "or" of "serious or tragic" in Jeannie Robertson's definition introduces an alternative (rather than a synonymous or explanatory term), these ballads are perhaps the "serious" ones for which she makes rooms in addition to

32 Confirming this image, Loomis House Press (an American publishing house specializing in "traditional music, ballads, and folklore") recently published a book by Susan O. Friedman, *Body Count: Death in the Child Ballads* at the back of which a blurb begins: "Child ballads are those long, bloody songs where everyone dies, right?"

tragedies. It might well be that the association of ballads and tragedy also rests on these ballads which, though not ending tragically, also put into play the "contending forces" seen as characteristic of tragedy.

Catharsis is understood here, after Aristotle's concept, as the purge of emotions through their *ex*pression; it is however applied more broadly, not necessarily tied to feelings of pity and fear, the main point retained being the easing of tensions through emotional expression. It is conceived as the desired outcome of a ritual, taken in a broad sense, enacted primarily through the ballad's fiction rather than actual ceremony. We are focusing here on performances involving an audience; it should be noted, however, that ballad singing is not necessarily communal, in source or revival contexts. It can be an accompaniment to domestic chores, for example, especially for women; Thomas McKean also explores the case of a source singer's enjoyment of folksongs primarily as a solitary pursuit in "Willie Mathieson and the Primary Audience for Traditional Song". Solitary singing or listening (to recordings), for all that, by no means precludes catharsis.

## 3.3.2. Catharsis

### *3.3.2.1. Individual Resilience*

A cathartic experience, then, is arguably the main appeal of the "traditional ballad". Phillips Barry first drew attention to links between certain source singers' ballads—between their particular versions—and their personal lives (Barry, 'On the Psychopathology of Ballad Singing'; 'The Part of the Folk Singer'), pointing to an intimate relation between ballad singing and personal experience and emotion. Examples such as Belle Stewart's particular relationship to the ballad of "The Two Brothers" (49) (a tale of fratricide), which James Porter links to her family experience and close relationship with her brothers (Porter, 'Parody and Satire' 318), Jane Turriff's singing of "Mill o' Tifty's Annie" (233) (in which a young woman is beaten to death by her family for loving a mere servant boy), connected to a tragic love affair which took place in her community (Porter, *Genre, Conflict, Presence* 148), or Jeannie Robertson's lament-like "Son Davit" (13), a mother-son dialogue (he confesses to his brother's murder after much questioning) which echoes the trauma of her son's death (Porter and Gower 275), demonstrate the use of ballads as an emotional outlet. These ballads, in such instances, are a means of narrativizing painful experiences, albeit not necessarily explicitly, by transferring or superimposing personal experience onto the existing narrative—a means of reconciliation through the transfiguration of experience into art. The ballad, constituting a socially sanctioned form of expression, makes for a socially acceptable emotional

outlet which favours resilience in the face of trauma (Cyrulnik and Duval 21; Cyrulnik 14). Such works imply "an aristocracy of suffering, an excellence of pain" which revalorizes painful experience (Steiner 9). They participate of storytelling's function of "giving cognitive and emotional coherence to experience, constructing and negotiating social identity" (Bauman, quoted in Niles 4).

This is supported by testimonies of intense emotional involvement on the part of singers and audiences, such as Jeannie Robertson's nephew Stanley Robertson, who confessed he "used to weep [him]self when Jeannie sang ["Lord Lovat" (75)]" (quoted in Andersen, 'Technique, Text, and Context' 31), or Ewan MacColl recalling the family's lodger Bill Wallace weeping "for the fate of Patrick Spens and his drowned mariners" as he listened to MacColl's father, Will Miller, sing (MacColl, *Journeyman* 78). The Travellers' concept of *conniach* shines a light on the importance of emotional communication in their ballad singing. The word probably derives from the Gaelic *caoineadh* referring to keening, and has shifted to signify "the special energy or inspiration which can unleash the affective power of a song" (McFadyen 156; see also Douglas 437; and Andersen, 'Technique, Text, and Context' 37). Singer and Scottish Traveller Sheila Stewart describes the notion in the following way:

> Just like maybe somebody says to you, "you sang there and the hair on my head stood up", you know? Well this happens to me, deep within me when I sing a ballad I like. I just go way out there to outer space or into oblivion and I'm singing it to myself and this causes the most emotion to the song and it's a build-up, and that's what causes this. (quoted in McFadyen 156)

Ballad singing is here approached as a kind of dramatic performance, in which the performer does not merely imitate but embodies emotion. Ewan MacColl's personal approach to ballad singing is interesting in that regard, as he draws from his theatre training and in particular Stanislavsky's techniques (which he inculcated to the Critics' Group). Explicitly comparing ballads to "the best in tragic drama"—"*King Lear*, *Macbeth* and *The Oresteia*", based on their containing "situations of high drama" and "scenes of great violence" (while necessitating less apparatus for performance, as he points out) (MacColl, *Journeyman* 344), he recommends careful study of the ballad text and pondering of the characters' motivations and emotions in order to give an emotionally effective performance (see MacColl, *Journeyman* 343–55).

For the narrative aspect, however essential the musical dimension can be said to be, is the core of the ballad in both source and revival contexts. This is highlighted on the folk scene by the recurrent practice of explaining the story before singing a ballad, a way of making sure that it is understood, as long-windedness and archaic or dialectal language for example could trouble its

reception as it is sung. This mirrors the Scottish Traveller custom of telling the story beside singing it. Stanley Robertson recalls having been taught the precise scenario relating to the ballad of "Lord Lovel's Lament" (75) at the same time as he was learning the ballad itself. In this tradition, the ballad constitute a dramatic rendition of a story which it is important to know to fully understand the implications, moral and emotional, of the song. Traveller singers such as Jeannie Robertson, Duncan Williamson or Lucy Stewart are known to have alternated between singing and spoken explanation of the ongoing action (Porter and Gower 75). Considering for his part Irish tradition of mingling song and narrative commentary, Hugh Shield explains it by a "special regard for oral history". Examining what he identifies as a version of "The Two Sisters" (10), he describes its plot, which the collector might describe as "fragmentary" when compared with its accompanying explanation: the song tells of a married woman drowning while another woman refuses to help her, while the tale explains that the drowning is the doing of the unhelpful woman, who coveted her husband; she does marry the drowned woman's husband afterwards, and upon discovering by chance one day that she was the one to have killed his first wife, he kills her. Shields contends that the explanation "enhances the diachronic aspects of performance insofar as the song is a celebration of history", i.e., the story's worth lies in that it relates to *true* events; in the Gaelic tradition studied by Shields, the song emphasized "feeling and response to events" (D. K. Wilgus and Eleanor Long, quoted in Shields 47), but the narrative explanation remains essential to a cohesive whole.

As for the *singing* of the ballad story, which demonstrably can be told in spoken prose, it arguably intensifies the cathartic potential of the ballad by heightening emotional intensity; it "ritualizes and intensifies the communicative act" (Porter, *Genre, Conflict, Presence* 147). While the storyline evokes emotions by recreating a situation, the music arouses emotional responses even more directly, uncontrollably, like a reflex (Peretz 23), doubling the effect of the narrative.

#### 3.3.2.2. Group Therapy

In addition to the personal interest of catharsis, the communal utility of ballads highlighted by Jeannie Robertson is also related to relations within the group. Many ballads, in particular those held in high regard as examples of "high drama", stage after all interpersonal conflict—especially within the family, as in Jeannie Robertson's "Son Davit" (fratricide), "The Two Sisters" (10, sororicide) or "The Lass of Roch Royal" (76, mother meddling in her son's love life with tragic consequences), and in romantic situations, often triangular, such as "Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard" (81, adultery), "Barbara Allen" (84, indifferent Barbara Allen lets Sweet William die of

lovesickness—and follows him in the grave) or "Lord Thomas and Fair Annet" (73, Lord Thomas marries for money instead of love, and his slighted true love shows up to the wedding; bloody ruckus ensues). In picturing conflictual human relationships, the ballad narrative actualizes the emotions they arouse; representation makes the conflict present again—in the words of Peter Brook, "it is not an imitation or description of a past event" but "denies time" (Brook 172), a view which is supported by Jeannie Robertson's conception of her ballad singing. She insists on the actualized reality of the stories she sings: "When I'm singing the song . . . I picture it, jeest as if it was really happenin . . . My songs are natural . . . they're aboot people and they're real" (quoted in Andersen, 'Technique, Text, and Context' 32). Porter and Gower describe a "fixity of experience, realized and recreated in the act of singing" that is "concrete and interactive", a "performative process [which] is not just the objectification of experience via singing communication, but the experience relived and shared, reflexive more than responsorial" (Porter and Gower 75).

In this performance, conflict is played out unto its catastrophic implications, and thereby allows the release of frustration. This is done by providing a context in which this frustration is *safely*, acceptably eased: firstly, the experience, at the same time as it is personally felt, poses no risk to the individual, who does not carry out the action themself and thus suffers none of the consequences. Thus the extreme of death for love in "Barbara Allen" or "Lord Thomas and Fair Annet" can be indulged in without any drastic repercussions in real life; the same point of giving expression to grief can be argued to lie at the heart of "Sir Patrick Spens" (58), for example, a grief perhaps aroused by a conflict, not necessarily with the *other*, but between the individual's will and the order of things (in "Sir Patrick Spens", the king's order are apparently as unopposable as God's will, or Fate). Secondly, the narrative can be made socially acceptable in other ways besides its fictionality, for example through the fatal consequences of the protagonists' misbehaviour in giving way to their conflictual, transgressive impulses: Matty Groves and Lady Barnard (or Lord Darnell's wife, or whatever her name may be) die, Son Davit must flee; the transgressions of the protagonists of "Fair Flower of Serving Men", as observed earlier, are made room for by a convenient plot—as are violent outbursts: ballads provide a stage for violence that justifies it and/or make it harmless through fictionality.

The ballad's potential as an outlet for violence is perhaps most striking in the ballad of "Long Lankin" (93). There exist versions of this particularly gory murder ballad in which Long Lankin's deed of murdering a lord's lady and her baby is justified by his not having received payment for building his castle; in the most common version, however, further spread by *The Penguin Book of English Folk Songs*[33], there is no such explanatory introduction and the act appears

33 See annex p. 113 for the full text.

completely gratuitous. Long Lankin, rather than a revengeful stonemason, has become a sort of bogeyman that "lives in the moss", "lives in the hay", against whom all the doors must be bolted and all the windows pinned, and who creeps in through one little window left open. This particular ballad has such horrific potential, also because the notion of opposing forces is all but absent from it (leaving but one murderous force), that it seems to step out of tragedy into the realm of the tale of horror—also a means of giving expression to repressed material, particularly repressed sexual energy, often "expressed symbolically by means of aggression, cruelty, injury, murder and death" (Göller 31; Wood).

In this way, these ballads, as suggested by Alan Dundes (considering the functions of folklore), seem to "reflec[t] (and thereby reinforc[e]) the value configurations of the folk" even as they "provid[e] a sanctioned form of escape from these very same values" (Dundes 59). The instances of transgression in some of the most popular ballads of the revival repertoire are thus not subversive: in fact, they "n'ont pas pour finalité de remettre en cause les fondements de la société, mais contribuent, bien au contraire, par leur puissance cathartique, à les conforter" (Hastings et al.; pagination unavailable). This echoes Gluckman's concept of "ritual of rebellion", which "act[s] the conflict" and thereby "emphasizes the social cohesion within which the conflicts exist" (Gluckman 127; see also Bell 38 for discussion). Conflicts and tensions acted out in a more or less exaggerated way, as in jealousy-ridden love triangles leading to murder or defiance of gender roles, are thereby expurgated and their threat to social harmony dissolved. The relegation of transgression to this fictional, delimited space and time also reasserts the state of order outside of it.

Where transgression causes death, or at the very least alienation (symbolical death; as in "Edward/Son Davit" (13)), this execution can be seen, as it is by René Girard, as a kind of ritual murder through which the community is purified. According to Girard in *A Theatre of Envy*, this symbolic purge exerted by tragedy works by impressing upon the community a counter-model, checking hubris by picturing pitiful and frightening sufferings as its consequences. If the visual dimension of theatre seems to lend itself better to this idea of tragic death as a ritual murder than does ballad singing, the idea of a counter-model points us to the potential didactic dimension of ballad-singing. Such a function is documented in Traveller culture, which "culture involves intense discussions of ballads (and stories): Children are advised directly about the moral and metaphorical meanings of songs and encouraged to analyse the precise meanings, with particular relevance to Traveller culture" (V. Bold 359). The experience of the embodied ballad as it is performed, which discussion complements, gives its listeners access to a quasi-first-hand experience—"*connaître* rather than *savoir*, *Erleben* rather than *Wissen*" (Nuttall 102). The performance is a demonstration,

creating a world of experience, a kind a microcosmic representation from which universal conclusions on the human condition can be drawn (see Bell 160–61).

Ballads can thus be seen, to use Kenneth Burke's expression, as "an equipment for living", permitting the regulation of emotions in the individual and tensions in the group, as well as having a teaching function. It acts as a ritual which provides a socially sanctioned outlet for emotions and the release of tensions, purged by enactment—a transformative ritual, also providing communal experience which strengthens bonds and reinforces the values of the community.

But if this is applicable to a culture such as the Scottish Travellers', does it, and *can* it fulfil the same role for revival audiences? Valentina Bold looks at Scottish ballads collected and performed in a revival context as "colonized" culture, which the "colonizer" "acclimatizes . . . to his or her own standards", without the "inside understanding of the colonized". This, she argues, might prevent them from "transmit[ting] the full value and experience of the items collected" (V. Bold 359). How does the climate of the folk club impede access to the material sought?

### 3.3.3. Catharsis: Special Club Edition

The demand of informality put upon folk performers evoked earlier, of negating that their status should set them apart from the audience, requires from them a peculiar kind of "*double enactment*" (Frith 212) in which they are expected to enact both the song and their humble folkie persona. The question of self-consciousness and its impact on performance is illustrated by an anecdote from Jeannie Robertson's experience on the revival scene[34]. The story takes place in a particular context which we have not addressed so far, that of performance in a television program. The circumstances are thus markedly different from those of the folk club in a crowded pub room, but nevertheless emphasize the self-consciousness brought about by singing for strangers and perceived expectations, particularly in the case of source singers used to sing in a quite different context.

In 1961, Jeannie Robertson was invited to sing on a program on Independent Television also attended by actor John Laurie and revival singers Isla Cameron and Ewan MacColl. A first shock came to her at having to be heavily made up; a second shock awaited her in seeing herself perform in the monitor. "Then when I lookit at masel' singing", she recalled, "I says, 'O, God bless us aa, surely ma face is nae sae pitiful.' . . . I'd aa sweated, ye know, and I lookit at aabodies' faces, ye see . . . I felt embarrassed tae start again" (quoted in Porter and Gower 51). Ordinarily a self-confident woman who had been known to take pride in her looks, Jeannie Robertson was brought to become aware of the way she was perceived, which impeded (on the spot at least) her capacity to launch into performance. She

34 The incident is retold in Porter and Gower 50–52.

was in fact expected to look the way she did, and which so embarrassed her: she was told not to mind it and to carry on in the same manner, for such earnestness of expression was no doubt just what was wanted from a source singer, a member of the folk ever pictured as unselfconscious and innocent. But she had become aware that she did not look the part of the standard television singer, she perceived her act to be excessive, inadequate, and the consciousness of it held her back.

The revival singer, who is generally all too aware of the front that is expected of them (singer-songwriter Alan Taylor observes the paradox: "You are just one of them, but you also have to be something different before their very eyes" (quoted in MacKinnon 75)), must constantly keep up this front which suddenly silenced Jeannie Robertson, and might find there an obstacle to the expressive abandon which she is capable of before becoming aware of what she perceives as the excess of her performance. This is not to say that performance in source contexts and self-consciousness are mutually exclusive, or genuine, unselfconscious emotional performance impossible on the revival stage. The revival context however, particularly that of the folk club, implies more complex layers of performance, brought about by expectations, which might impair the core level of song performance.

But performance is not the sole prerogative of the singer. The folk club insistence on audience participation, possibly vocally but first and foremost through quiet listening, might well be founded in part on the recognition that what Porter calls the "presencing" of the ballad requires an "active relationship" in which "the singer or performer and audience are inter-responsive in a specific physical space that they share" (*Genre, Conflict, Presence* 7; see also McFadyen); Jean-Luc Nancy conceptualizes this as the need for "listening-*with*" rather than "listening-*to*", with sound forming a physical though intangible link between audience and performer (cited in McFadyen 161–62): "the experience of folk song, both in production and reception, induces a sense of connectedness through the embodied experiencing of self and others as co-participants in a live, enacted and unfolding event" (ibid. 161). The musical dimension seems particularly apt to produce "emotional communion" (Peretz 24). As Brook put it with regard to actor and audience in the theatre, "what is present for one is present for the other" (Brook 173).

The ballad ritual, "the keying of the performance frame", whether in "traditional" contexts or in the carefully staged folk club session, is also "an invitation [for the audience] to regard the act of expression with special intensity and to evaluate it" (Bauman 101). Brocken describes the development of the club's ballad ritual based on its source models:

> One of the primary concepts behind folk listening practices has been knowledge of historical performance givens concerning levels of socio-musical democracy and de-staging: the song is "carried", the performance is de-staged. Performance was, therefore, expected to unfold within this spiritual mode, just as it was entangled in it "in the

> beginning". The radical 1950s concept was of unfixing performer–audience relationships. By the 1970s a model performance was an inscription of cultural coherence and, together with a concept of the performer as a "specialist", incorporated abstractions surrounding the importance of listening space (the club) and a vigilant listener/receivership (the "folkie"). The organisation of performance space had to include the serious listeners, for they were regarded as equal to the performer in every way. (Brocken 116)

This mindfully constructed folk club ritual we have seen to be one of elaborate informality, of performative relaxation the principles of which are not obvious to newcomers. It seeks to reproduce a communal experience such as is associated with the source context, evoking a link with customs of folk communality located in the past, in a process of "traditionalization" which endows the performance with a ritual-like quality (Bell 145); while the same ritual quality helps "make traditional that which is unexpected and new" (Barbara Myerhoff, quoted in Bell 149), the redefinition of the performer/audience relationship. Considering that "performance art . . . needs an audience of performers [to work]" (Frith 206), it seems particularly true of the folk scene, in which the audience not only takes part in the communal enjoyment of the performance, but performs its part as *the folk*. Both at once, they are endowed with that status by the performance, and must embody it convincingly to begin with. In his autobiography, MacColl recalls an incident which occurred at an Easter Monday afternoon concert in Southampton, where such a folk concert was organized every year and attended by an audience in their best dress. Before the performance, MacColl and Seeger were approached by "a scruffy young couple in jeans" who reproached them for singing to a crowd they identified as more bourgeois than working-class, based on their dress. The duo then proceeded to demonstrate, by having audience members give their occupations, that the audience was, in fact, working-class—while the couple turned out to be Cambridge students (MacColl, *Journeyman* 294). The couple were in fact typical folk club attenders, and looking the part for them was part of an authentic folk experience. Jeans were the folk uniform, and showing up in your Sunday best to a folk club was rather eccentric behaviour.

The rules of the pseudo-ritual, if unspoken, exist, and reveal themselves when broken: an uninitiated performer, chatting during a ballad performance, will earn the glares and shushes of the communers. If folk-rock posed such a problem to traditionalists, it is also because it endangered the viability of the revival ritual: where traditional, authentic practices (that is, practices perceived as such) ensured a near-palpable continuity with the past (so central to revivalist identity) through its experience in performance, folk-rock's bold change of sound broke the charm. It threatened the recognizability of the form established in the folk club ritual, and thereby the success of the ritual.

But if for regulars the folk club could be "a home from home" (anonymous attender quoted in Finnegan 61), where the community-affirming value of the ritual is successful, the contrivedness of these unspoken expectations of quiet listening but manifest interest, singular on the modern musical scene outside classical music, made the folk club appear as a closed-off space to some people. One attender recalls discomfort in the face of expectations of participation in sing-arounds: "I never wanted to play. I never wanted to sing. I can't imagine anything worse, personally. So why was I made to feel almost guilty when I declined the 'do you want to sing' look? Can't I just listen?" (Chris McKenna, quoted in Brocken 117). Himself a folk singer, Tim Hart recalls his own dislike of a folk club atmosphere perceived as unwelcoming: "It was a very eclectic little thing, folk music went on in upstairs rooms in pubs, and you had to sit very quietly through it. If you weren't the right sort of person, if you didn't fit, you couldn't listen to folk music—it was totally bloody silly" (quoted in Sweers, *Electric Folk* 219). The communion sought by folk clubs, if it is achieved to some extent, seems to alienate certain attenders or potential attenders. Ewan MacColl's club gives a particularly strong example of control over the ritual. Known for his autocratic tendencies, he would severely limit the opportunity for floor singers to perform (floor singing being one the most representative practices of folk club "democracy"), and "cancel them all at a whim if he thought it necessary" (Fred McCormick, quoted in Brocken 35). Whatever one's opinion on the "amateurism" potentially threatening the music's integrity in floor singing, this kind of practice must have created a very perceptible hierarchical imbalance in the club, in which some know who should perform what and when, and others submit to their better judgement. The perception by some attenders of an off-putting "almost puritanical reverence for traditional music" (MacKinnon 28) in folk clubs, an approach too visibly ritualized, also points to a sense of rigidity and self-consciousness that comes into conflict with the vulnerability required by the kind of emotional communication involved in the ballad ritual.

For Brocken, more than rituals of presence in communion, the folk club's are "rituals of retreat"—"social and cultural retreat from the here and now" (Brocken 110–11). "[E]mphasis on a kind of dramaturgical analysis" such as that encouraged by MacColl he sees as making for a "looking glass self" music whose introspection he links not to cathartic anagnorisis of the self in the ballad, for example, but perceives as "bre[eding] alienation" (ibid. 110-11). He analyses the revival in the 1970s as being characterized by the "esoteric introverted connoisseur", who has the canons down by heart and "convert[s] chance moments of performance into 'historically based' connoisseurship" (ibid. 112). Under the rule of the connoisseur, where the most knowledgeable dominate a tacit hierarchy of the folk club, "[f]olk club performance as an expression of community remains restricted to that community being elevated enough to appreciate the second revival's

constructions of folk song" (ibid. 119), establishing pre-requisites of initiation to the enjoyment of ballad performance, and potentially obstructing the immediacy of the experience with a wall of intermediate antiquary knowledge. In trying to replicate a socially, almost spiritually meaningful context, the folk club crafted an unordinary, ritualized and fragile environment that was under constant threat from those not ready and willing to recognize it. The ordinary, normal behaviour of other popular musical scenes was a menace to it, calling into question its credibility and validity, and causing it to further retreat upon itself.

Folk singers Frankie Armstrong and Brian Pearson, writing in 1979, perceive the folk club as having become an inward-looking space serving an escapist fantasy, and come to the conclusion that "Such incapsulation [sic]—a sense that the club is a separate activity, an escape from life rather than an integral part of it—encourages a resistance to the exploration of the emotional, psychological and social richness of the material" (Armstrong and Pearson 98–99). The "exotic" appeal of ballads for revivalists, illustrated by the most prominent ballads of the revival repertoire showing an attraction for strange elements and shock value, as well as by their association with medieval fantasy (in particular in folk-rock), also points to an appreciation based on escapism rather than a consideration of the ballad narrative as something *true* with a concrete link to reality (as they could be to Traveller singers for example; see Andersen, 'Technique, Text, and Context' 27, 32[35]). The learning in the first place of ballads from Edwardian collections, or even from living source singers nonetheless perceived as representatives of a bygone age—rather than from family, members of or travellers transiting through the community, or even a broadside beheld as an ordinary object (and not a historical document)—adds to the perception of the ballad as disconnected from the here and now. Performers are then liable to slip into a fantasy of ballad pastness instead of actualizing the ballad in the present. The very conscious adaptation of the music, perceptibly foreign to their own culture, widened this distance.

Furthermore, the very idea of the reproducibility of the source ritual can be questioned. Reflecting on the perpetuation (or imitation) of old rituals in a modern, newly-built cathedral, Peter Brook comes to the conclusion that "[g]oodwill, sincerity, reverence, belief in culture are not quite enough: the outer form can only take on real authority if the ceremony has equal authority—and who today can possibly call the tune?" (Brook 53). Perceiving and feeling an attraction for meaning in ballad performance, notably in Traveller culture, revivalists attempt to replicate it; but if "[i]t is only when a ritual comes to our own level that we become qualified to deal in it" and, for example,

35 See also Sharp 93; he recalls, rather condescendingly: "'Yes, Sir, and it is true', is the reply that has often been made to me by a folk-singer at the conclusion of a long ballad which I have praised. . . . [T]he peasant singer is like the child, and loves to think that the story which has moved him is not fictitious but true."

"the whole of pop music is a series of rituals on a level to which we have access" (ibid. 55), the traditionalist folk club imitation, which precisely rejects the accessibility of pop music to construct its own supposedly immediate ritual, cannot but fail as it reaches towards something foreign, sprung out of a different context, with which it cannot coincide—something clearly inaccessible, which remains on another, ideal level. As they reflect on the state of folk clubs at the end of the 1970s, Armstrong and Pearson deplore that even new songs written "reflect a mechanical use of the commonplaces of broadside composition", so that "their relation to the realities of the world is tenuous". For them, the "reliance on old forms stems not only from nostalgia, but from the remnants of an idealistic view of what constitutes a popular form of expression" which is disconnected from reality, and they question the "too easy conviction that the musical and verbal conventions of folk song were fully adequate to modern demands", estimating that though "their range is certainly very wide . . ., that vocabulary needs considerable extension to be able to handle many aspects of modern consciousness" (Armstrong and Pearson 99). Denouncing this moribund hanging-on to a fossilized form of tradition, Brocken suggests that

> [d]espite many claims that the popular, the professional and the experimental remove the performer from the sanctions of tradition, quite the reverse is often the case. Even an extreme form of experimentation within traditional music forms requires that the performer understands both the social and musical tolerance levels of that tradition. Ultimately, static folk performance without dialectic fails to refer to any musical tradition whatsoever, for the real performance tradition at work within the British Isles is one of expansion of musical and cultural boundaries. (Brocken 122)

The tendency to constraining imitation is however opposed by the creative impulse of certain performers, such as folk-rock bands, but also artists performing in a more folk club-friendly field, such as Martin Carthy, who believe in the necessity for creative initiative in the perpetuation of folksong, rather than parrot-like copying. Moreover, testimonies of intense emotional experiences and connections in revivalist context (see for example McFadyen 160) attest that revival folk rituals are not doomed to fail due to self-conscious imitation. The core of the ritual, the ballad narrative, retains after all its evocativeness, and performance can still be achieved that is unhindered by self-consciousness. Revival folk singer Frankie Armstrong looks at "the great ballads" as works of singular emotional depth and wisdom:

> There are always lessons to be learned from the songs. Some of the broadsides could be crass and cheaply sentimental, but in the great ballads, as in mythology, the lessons are much more subtle; you just live with them and they will gradually osmose into your consciousness. In them we can find immense compassion, imagination, and illumination of the human condition—in all its complexity and contradictions. (quoted in Sweers, *Electric Folk* 236)

—suggesting that for all the razzle-dazzle of medievalism enchantment and performative front, the human interest lies ever at the heart of attraction and perpetuation of these works. Folk clubs were once successful because they answered an existing demand for meaningful social interaction, and facilitated it through a musical medium that connected people beyond the need for words. This need remains.

## CONCLUSION

From at least the eighteenth century, ballads have been shrouded in an aura of pastness, the locus of ideals that have nourished those who, discontented with the state of things, were looking for a remedy to perceived modern ills—from the Romantic poets who turned to them as to a spring of youthful, artless (in the best sense) art against decadence; to Child, who sought in them commendable roots to American culture; to first-wave revivalists, intent on reviving a healthy national art in the face of the degeneracy of industrialisation; to post-war revivalists, who believed in reuniting with a creative heritage assailed by commercial greed. Their pastness and popular association have also consistently endowed them with an *essential* quality: they are a fountain of youth because they are the essence of humanity; of the race; of the nation; or of the people.

Fixed in print here and there, the ballad lies ever elsewhere, retains the elusiveness of the word in its oral form and the potent suggestiveness of song, in which the spoken word is pushed to its most expressive. It is always ready to receive the projections of those who are drawn to it. The ballad is shaped by those projections, defined by expectations. The choice exemplary ballads of successive generations reflect them: from the martial “Chevy Chase” to the sentimental “Babes in the Woods”, to the admirably contained and noble “Sir Patrick Spens”, to “Tam Lin” and its exotic magic.

But those who think they can limit it to their own expectations have another think coming. By the end of the 1970s, the revival had run out of steam. Gatekeeping and refusal to “go with the flow” and embrace the innovations of electrification on the part of folk club purists led to what Colin Irwin calls folk’s unflattering “image of incest ballads sung with fingers planted firmly in the ear, singer-songwriters parading their hopeless love affairs and, of course, the dreaded Morris dancers” (quoted in Burns 82). While it is more lively in Scotland and Ireland, where it is sustained by nationalist sentiment, interest in traditional music has very much dwindled in England. And yet it is not quite dead. Not only are first-timers like Fairport Convention, Steeleye Span or Martin Carthy still performing, but a new generation has picked up the torch, leading some to speak of a

third folk revival (Burns chapter 6). By leaving behind the qualms of the purist traditionalists regarding the authenticity of innovation, these performers have formed a new relation to their "heritage", the way to which had been opened by folk-rock precursors. If Shirley Collins complained of the comparative lack of academic rigour of folk performers in the 1990s, reproaching them with being "too lazy to look for traditional songs"—by contrast with Ashley Hutshings, ever perusing the Vaughan Williams Library at Cecil Sharp House—(quoted in Sweers, *Electric Folk* 226), and younger singers do instead often draw from the repertoires of post-war revivalists like Martin Carthy or Nic Jones, this could arguably be looked on as nothing more than the expected development of transmission. From this point of view, the revival can be said to have succeeded in renewing the chain of transmission, even if that means drifting further away from its source (Bellowhead's rather audacious "Wind and Rain" (10) would be sure to send MacColl into apoplexy, were he alive to hear it).

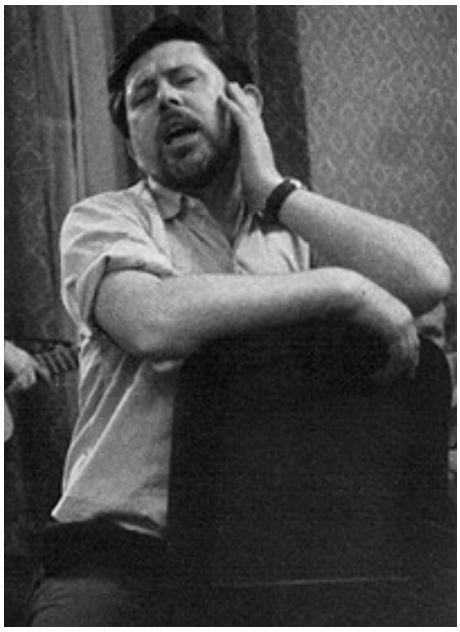

Figure 7: Ewan MacColl singing with fingers planted firmly in the ear, a habit picked up from his father, and meant to help him better hear himself sing. Late 1950s-early 1960s.

To this day, a select cohort of enthusiasts are perpetuating Child's heritage, discussing "Child ballads" and their performance lovingly. The appellation remains evocative, among a select band of connoisseurs, of dramatic stories of human interest and captivating supernatural lore. The rehabilitation of broadside ballads and other types of folksongs has not overthrown Child ballads as the aristocrats of the folksong world; their aristocracy is built into the very concept of "Child ballads", the "definitive collection" of the best England and Scotland have to offer in terms of traditional song. They may have become obsolete to the serious academic; but their ghost is present still, as whoever (however few they be) takes up the matter of folk ballads in the British isles has to consciously work their definition around and beyond them. A monolith in their little folksong niche, the Child ballads stand.

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# FIGURES

Cover illustration: Photomontage of Shuel, Brian. Diz Disley and Martin Carthy at the Troubadour folk club in Earls Court, Londond. 1962. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/oct/15/british-folk-music-scene-1963; and a portrait of Francis J. Child. Undated. Reproduced in Hale, Edward Everett. *James Russell Lowell and his Friends.* 1898. Retrieved from https://archive.org/details/jamesrusselllowe48311gut/48311-h/images/ill_f_186_large.jpg.

Figure 1: Photograph of Francis J. Child, c. 1890. Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

Figure 2: Genthe, Arnold. Photograph of Cecil J. Sharp. 1916. Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

Figure 3: Lloyd and MacColl performing at the Ballads and Blues Club in the 1950s. Reproduced in MacColl, Ewan, *Journeyman: An Autobiography*.

Figure 4: Kerr, Janet. Cover of Nic Jones's *Ballads and Songs* album. 1970.

Figure 5: Berney, Grahame. Cover art for Steeleye Span's *Below the Salt* album. 1972.

Figure 6: A typical east Norfolk "singing pub" and its clientele, the Lion at Somerton. c. 1930. Christopher Heppa's private collection. Reproduced in Heppa, Christopher, 'Harry Cox and His Friends: Song Transmission in an East Norfolk Singing Community, c. 1896-1960', p. 572

Figure 7: Photograph of Ewan MacColl at the Enterprise Public House, Long Acre, London, with Peggy Seeger, Dean Gitter and Charles Parker (detail). Late 1950s-early 1960s.

# ANNEX: A GARLAND OF BALLADS

## "The Heir of Lin" (267)

From Percy's Folio Manuscript; reproduced from Wales and Furnivall 1867, 1:175-179, including corrections marked [] and expansions of contractions in italics.

Off all the lords in faire Scottland
a song I will begin:
amongst them all there dweld a Lord
w*hi*ch was the vnthrifty Lo*rd* of linne.

his father & mother were dead him froe,
& soe was the head of all his kinne;
he did neither cease nor bl[i]nne
to the cards & dise *tha*t he did run,

to drinke the wine that was soe cleere,
with every man he wold make merry.
and then bespake him Iohn of the Scales,
vnto the heire of Linne sayd hee,

sayes, "how dost thou, Lo*rd* of Linne,
doest either want gold or fee?
wilt thou not sell thy lands soe brode
to such a good fellow as me?"

"ffor . . I . . " he said,
"my land, take it vnto thee;
I draw you to record, my lord[e]s all:"
with *tha*t he cast him a good-se peny,

he told him the gold vpon the bord,
it wanted neuer a bare penny.
"*tha*t gold is thine, the land is mine,
the heire of Linne I wilbee."

"heeres gold inoughe," saithe the heire of Linne,
"both for me & my company."
he drunke the wine *tha*t was soe cleere,
& with euery man he made Merry.

with-in 3 quarters of a yeere
his gold & fee it waxed thinne,
his merry men were from him gone,
& left him himselfe all alone.

he had neuer a penny left in his purse,
neuer a penny but 3,
& one was brasse, & another was lead,
& another was white mony.

"Now well-aday!" said the heire of Linne,
"now welladay, & woe is mee!
for when I was the lord of Linne,
I neither wanted gold nor fee;

"for I haue sold my lands soe broad,
& haue not left me one penny!
I must goe now & take some read
vnto Edenborrow, & begg my bread."

he had not beene in Edenborrow
no 3 qwarters of a yeere,
but some did giue him, & some said nay,
& some bid "to the deele gang yee!

"for if we shold hang any Land selfeer,
the first we wold begin with thee."
"Now welladay!" said the heire of Linne,
no[w] welladay, & woe is mee!

"for now I have sold my lands soe broad,
*tha*t mery man is irke w*i*th mee;
but when *tha*t I was the Lo*rd* of Linne,
then on my land I liued merrily;

"& now I have sold my land soe broade
*tha*t I haue not left me one pennye!
god be with my father!" he said,
"on his land he liued merrily."

Still in a study there as he stood,
he vnbethought him of [a] bill
[he vnbethought him of a bill]
w*hi*ch his father had left w*i*th him,

bade him he shold neuer on it looke
till he was in extreame neede,
"& by my faith," said the heire of Linne,
"then now I had neuer more neede."

he tooke the bill, & looked it on,
good comfort *tha*t he found there;
itt told him of a Castle wall
where there stood 3 chests in feare:

2 were full of the beaten gold,
the 3 was full of white mony.
he turned then downe his baggs of bread,
& filled them full of gold soe red.

then he did neuer cease nor blinne
till Iohn of the Scales house he did winne.
when *tha*t he came to Iohn of the Scalels,
vpp at the speere he looked then:
there sate 3 lords vpon a rowe,
and Iohn o the Scales sate at the bords head,
[and Iohn o the Scales sate at the bords head,]
because he was the Lo*rd* of Linne.

and then bespake the heire of Linne,
to Iohn o the Scales wiffe thus sayd hee:
sayd, "Dame, wilt thou not trust me one shott
*tha*t I may sitt downe in this company?"

"now, christs curse on my head," shee said,
if I doe trust thee one pennye."
then be-spake a good fellowe,
w*hi*ch sate by Iohn o the Scales his knee,

Said, "haue thou here, thou heire of linne,
40 pence I will lend thee,—
some time a good fellow thou hast beene,—
& other 40 if neede bee."

thé druken wine *tha*t was soe cleere,
& euery man thé made merry;
& then bespake him Iohn o the Scales,
vnto the Lo*rd* of linne said hee:

said, "how doest thou, heire of Linne,
since I did buy thy Lands of thee?
I will sell it to thee 20$^{li}$: better cheepe
nor euer I did buy it of thee."

"I draw you to recorde, lord[e]s all;"—
w*i*th that he wast him gods penny;
then he tooke to his baggs of bread,
& they were full of the gold soe redd,

he told him the golg then over the borde;
it wanted neuer a broad pennye:
"*tha*t gold is thine, the land is mine,
& the heire of Linne againe I wilbee."

"Now welladay!" said Iohn o the Scales wife,
"welladay, & woe is me!
yesterday I was the lady of Linne,
& now I am but Iohn o the Scales
wiffe!"

saies "haue thou heere, thou good fellow,
40 pence thou did lend me,
[40 pence thou did lend me,]
& 40$^{l}$: I will giue thee,
Ile make thee keep*er* of my forrest,
both of the wild deere & the tame."

but then bespake the heire of Linne,
these were the words, & thus said hee,
"christs curse light vpon my crowne
if ere my land stand in any Ieopardye!"
ffins.

Percy's revised version, from *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* vol. 2, 1767 (second edition), pp. 126-135. Considerably expanded, reworked, at once modernized and archaized—generously peppered with quaint archaic *e*'s and bold accents.

*This old ballad is given from a copy in the editor's folio MS; some breaches and defects in which, rendered the insertion of a few supplemental stanzas necessary. These it is hoped the reader will pardon. ...*

PART THE FIRST.

Lithe and listen, gentlement,
To sing a song I will beginne:
It is of a lord of faire Scotland,
Which was the unthrifty heire of Linne.

His father was a right good lord,
His mother a lady of high degree;
But they, alas! were dead, him froe,
And he lov'd keeping companie.

To spend the daye with merry cheare,
To drinke and revell every night,
To card and dice from eve to morne,
It was, I ween, his hearts delighte.

To ride, to runne, to rant, to roare,
To alwaye spend and never spare,
I wott, an' it were the king himselfe,
Of gold and fee he mote be bare.

Soe fares the unthrifty lord of Linne
Till all his gold is gone and spent;
And he mun sell his landes so broad,
His house, and landes, and all his rent.

His father had a keen stewarde,
And John o' the Scales was called hee:
But John is becoma a gentel-man,
And John has gott both gold and fee.

Sayes, Welcome, welcome, lord of Linne,
Let nought disturb thy merry cheere,
Iff thou wilt sell thy landes soe broad,
Good store of gold Ile give thee heere.

My gold is gone, my money is spent;
My lande nowe take it unto thee:
Give me the golde, good John o' the Scales,
And thine for aye my lande shall bee.

Then John he did him to record draw,
And John he gave him a gods-pennie;
But for every pounde that John agreed,
The land, I wis, was well worth three.

He told him the gold upon the board,
He was right glad his land to winne:
The land is mine, the gold is thine,
And now Ile be the lord of Linne.

Thus he hath sold his land soe broad,
Both hill and holt, and moore and fenne,
All but a poore and lonesome lodge,
That stood far off in a lonely glenne.

For soe he to his father hight:
My sonne, when I am gonne, sayd hee,
Then thou wilt spend thy lande so broad,
And thou will spend thy gold so free:

But sweare me nowe upon the roode,
That lonesome lodge thou'lt never spend;
For when all the world doth frown on thee,
Thou there shalt find a faithful friend.

The heire of Linne is full of golde:
And come with me, my friends, sayd hee,
Let's drinke, and rant, and merry make,
And he that spares, ne'er more he thee.

They ranted, drank, and merry made,
Till all his gold it waxed thinne;
And then his friendes they slunk away;
They left the unthrifty heire of Linne.

He had never a penny left in his purs
Never a penny left but three,
The tone was brass, and the tone was lead,
And tother it was white monèy.

Nowe well-away, sayd the heire of Linne,
Nowe well-away, and woe is mee,
For when I was the lord of Linne,
I never wanted gold or fee.

But many a trustye friend have I,
And why shold I feel dole or care?
Ile borrow of them all by turnes,
Soe need I not be never bare.

But one, I wis, was not at home,
Another had payd his gold away;
Another call'd him thriftless loone,
And bade him sharpely wen his way.

Now well-away, sayd the heire of Linne,
Now well-away, and woe is me!
For when I had my landes so broad,
On me they liv'd right merrilee.

To beg my bread from door to door
I wis, it were a brenning shame:
To rob and steal it were a sinne:
To work my limbs I cannot frame.

Now Ile away to lonesome lodge,
For there my father bade me wend;
When all the world shuld frown on mee,
I there shold find a trusty friend.

## Part the Second.

Away then hyed the heire of Linne
O'er hill and holt, and moor and fenne,
Untill he came to lonesome lodge,
That stood so lowe in a lonely glenne.

He looked up, he looked downe,
In hope some comfort for to winne,
But bare and lothly were the walles:
Here's sorry cheare, quo' the heire of Linne.

The little windowe dim and darke
Was hung with ivy, brere, and yewe;
No shimmering sunn here ever shone;
No halesome breeze here ever blew.

No chair, ne table he mote spye,
No chearful hearth, ne welcome bed,
Nought save a rope with renning noose,
That dangling hung up o'er his head.
And over it in broad lettèrs,
These words were written so plain to see:
"Ah! gracelesse wretch, hast spent thine all,
"And brought thyselfe to penurìe?

"All this my boding mind misgave,
"I therefore left this trusty friend:
"Let it now sheeld thy foule disgrace,
"And all! thy shame and sorrows end."

Sorely shent wi' this rebuke,
Sorely shent was the heire of Linne,
His heart, I wis, was near to brast
With guilt and forrowe, shame and sinne.

Never a word spake the heire of Lin
Never a word he spake but three:
This is a trusty friend indeed,
"And is right welcome unto mee."

Then round his necke the corde he drewe,
And sprang aloft with his bodìe:
When lo! the ceiling burst in twaine,
And to the ground came tumbling hee.

Astonyed lay the heire of Linne,
Ne knewe if he were live or dead,
At length he looked, and sawe a bille,
And in it a key of gold so redd.

He took the bill, and lookt it on,
Strait good comfort found he there:
It told him of a hole in the wall,
In which there stood three chests in fere.

Twe were full of the beaten golde,
The third was full of white monèy;
And over them in broad lettèrs
These words were written so plaine to see:
"Once more, my sonne, I sette thee clere
"Amend thy life and follies past;
"For but thou ament thee of thy life,
"That rope must be thy end at last."

And let it bee, said the heire of Linne;
And let it bee, but if I amend:
For here I will make mine avow,
This reade shall guide me to the end.

Away then went the heire of Linne;
Away he went with a merry cheare:
I wis, he neither stint ne stayd,
Till John o' the Scales house he came neare.

And when he came to John o' the Scales,
Up at the speere then looked hee;
There sate three lords at the bordes end,
Were drinking of the wine so free.

And then bespake the heire of Linne
To John o' the Scales then louted hee:
I pray thee now, god John o' the Scales,
One orty pency for to lend mee.

Away, away, thou thriftless loone;
Away, away, this may not bee:
For Christs curse on my head, he sayd,
If ever I trust thee one pennie.

Then bespake the heire of Linne,
To John o' the Scales wife then spake he:
Madame, some almes on me bestowe,
I pray for sweet faint Charitìe.

Away, away, thou thriftless loone,
I swear thou gettest no almes of mee;
For if we shold hang any losel heere,
The first we wold begin with thee.

Then bespake a good fellòwe,
Which sat at John o' the Scales his bord:
Sayd, Turn againe, thou heire of Linne;
Some time thou wast a well good lord:

Some time a good fellow thou hast been,
And sparedst not thy gold and fee,
Therefore Ile lend thee forty pence,
And other forty if need bee.

And ever, I pray thee, John o' the Scales,
To let him sit in thy companee:
For well I wot thou hadst his land,
And a good bargain it was to thee.

Up then spake him John o' the Scales,
All wood he answer'd him againe:
Now Christs curse on my head, he sayd,
But I did lose by that bargàine.

And here I proffer thee, heire of Linne
Before these lorde so faire and free,
Thou shalt have it backe again better cheape,
By a hundred markes, than I had it of thee.

I draw you to record, lords, he said.
With that he gave him a gods pennèe:
Now by my say, sayd the heire of Linne,
And here, good John, is thy monèy.

And he pull'd forth three bagges of gold,
And layd them down upon the bord:
All woe begone was John o' the Scales,
Soe shent he cold say never a word.

He told him forth the good red gold,
He told it forth with mickle dinne.
The gold is thine, the land is mine,
And now Ime againe the lord of Linne.

Sayes, Have thou here, thou good fellòwen
Forty pence thou didst lend mee:
Now I am againe the lord of Linne,
And forty pounds I will give thee.

Now welladay! sayth Joan o' the Scales:
Now welladay! and woe is my life!
Yesterday I was lady of Linne,
Now Ime but John o' the Scales his wife.

Now fare thee well, sayd the heire of Linne;
Farewell, good John o' the Scales, said hee:
When next I want to sell my land,
Good John o' the Scales, Ile come to thee.

## Martin Carthy's "Famous Flower of Serving Men"

as sung on *Shearwater*

My mother did me deadly spite
For she sent thieves in the dark of night
Put my servants all to flight
They robbed my bower they slew my knight

They couldn't do to me no harm
So they slew my baby in my arm
Left me naught to wrap him in
But the bloody sheet that he lay in

They left me naught to dig his grave
But the bloody sword that slew my babe
All alone the grave I made
And all alone the tears I shed

And all alone the bell I rang
And all alone the psalm I sang
I leaned my head all against a block
And there I cut my lovely locks

I cut my locks and I changed my name
From Fair Eleanor to Sweet William
Went to court to serve my king
As the famous flower of serving men

So well I served my lord, the king
That he made me his chamberlain
He loved me as his son
The famous flower of serving men

Oh oft time he'd look at me and smile
So swift his heart I did beguile
And he blessed the day that I became
The famous flower of serving men

But all alone in my bed at e'en
Oh there I dreamed a dreadful dream
I saw my bed swim with blood
And I saw the thieves all around my head

Our king has to the hunting gone
He's ta'en no lords nor gentlemen
He's left me there to guard his home
The famous flower of serving men

Our king he rode the wood all around
He stayed all day but nothing found
And as he rode himself alone
It's there he saw the milk white hind

Oh the hind she broke, the hind she flew
The hind she trampled the brambles through
First she'd mount, then she'd sound
Sometimes before, sometimes behind

Oh what is this, how can it be?
Such a hind as this I ne'er did see
Such a hind as this was never born
I fear she'll do me deadly harm

And long, long did the great horse turn
For to save his lord from branch and thorn
And but long e'er the day was o'er
It tangled all in his yellow hair

All in the glade the hind drew nigh
And the sun grew bright all in their eye
And he sprang down, sword drew
She vanished there all from his view

And all around the grass was green
And all around where a grave was seen
And he sat himself all on the stone
Great weariness it seized him on

Great silence hung from tree to sky
The woods grew still, the sun on fire
As through the woods the dove he came
As through the wood he made his moan

Oh, the dove, he sat down on a stone
So sweet he looked, so soft he sang
"Alas the day my love became
The famous flower of serving men"

The bloody tears they fell as rain
As still he sat and still he sang
"Alas the day my love became
The famous flower of serving men"

Our king cried out, and he wept full sore
So loud unto the dove he did call
“Oh pretty bird, come sing it plain”

“Oh it was her mother’s deadly spite
For she sent thieves in the dark of the night
They come to rob, they come to slay
They made their sport, they went their way

“And don’t you think that her heart was sore
As she laid the mould on his yellow hair
And don’t you think her heart was woe
As she turned her back away to go

“And how she wept as she changed her name
From Fair Eleanor to Sweet William
Went to court to serve her king
As the famous flower of serving men”

Oh the bloody tears they lay all around
He’s mounted up and away he’s gone
And one thought come to his mind
The thought of her that was a man

And as he rode himself alone
A dreadful oath he there has sworn
And that he would hunt her mother down
As he would hunt the wildwood swine

For there’s four and twenty ladies all
And they’re all playing at the ball
But fairer than all of them
Is the famous flower of serving men

Oh he’s rode him into his hall
And he’s rode in among them all
He’s lifted her to his saddle brim
And there he’s kissed her cheek and chin

His nobles stood and they stretched their eyes
The ladies took to their fans and smiled
For such a strange homecoming
No gentleman had ever seen

And he has sent his nobles all
Unto her mother they have gone
They’ve ta’en her that’s did such wrong
They’ve laid her down in prison strong

And he’s brought men up from the corn
And he’s sent men down to the thorn
All for to build the bonfire high
All for to set her mother by

All bonny sang the morning thrush
All where he sat in yonder bush
But louder did her mother cry
In the bonfire where she burned close by

For there she stood all among the thorn
And there she sang her deadly song
“Alas the day that she became
The famous flower of serving men”

For the fire took first all on her cheek
And then it took all on her chin
It spat and rang in her yellow hair
And soon there was no life left in

## Nic Jones's "The Outlandish Knight" (4)

as sung on *Ballads and Songs*

An Outlandish Knight came from the North lands
And he's courted a lady fair
And he said he would take her to those northern lands
And there he would marry her

"Go fetch me some of your father's gold
And some of your mother's fee
And two of the fine horses from out of the stable
Where there stand thirty and three"

So she mounts all on her milk white steed
And he on the dapple grey
And they rode until they came unto the seaside
Three hours before it was day

"Light off, light off, your milk white steed
And deliver it unto me
For six pretty maidens have I drownéd here
And the seventh will surely be thee

"And take off, take off your silken clothes
And deliver them unto me
For I do fear that they are too fine
To rot all in the salt sea"

"If I must take off my silken clothes
Then turn your back to me
For it is not fitting that such a rogue
A naked woman should see

"And cut away the brambles so sharp
Those brambles from off the brim
For I do fear they will tangle my hair
And scratch my tender skin"

So he's turned his back all on that maid
And he's bent low over the brim
And she's taken him round his slender waist
And she's tumbled him into the stream

He dropped high he's dropped low
Until he came to the side
"Catch hold of my hand me fair pretty maid
And then I will make you my bride"

"Lie there, lie there you false-hearted man
Lie there instead of me
For six pretty maidens have you drownéd here
And the seventh hath drowned thee"

And she's mounted on her milk white steed
She's led the dappled grey
She's rode till she's come to her father's house
Three hours before it was day

The parrot hung in the window so high
And he's heard what the lady did say
"Oh what ails thee, what ails thee my pretty lady?
You've tarried so long away"

And the King he was in his bedroom so high
And he's heard what the parrot did say
"What ails thee, what ails thee my pretty Polly?
You're a-prattling so long before day"

"It's no laughing matter" the parrot did say,
"So loudly I called to thee
For the cat she has got in the window so high
I fear she's the death of me"

"Well turned, well turned, me pretty Polly
Well turned, well turned for me
Your cage will be made of the glittering gold
And the door of the best ivory"

## Fairport Convention's "Matty Groves" (81)

as sung on *Liege & Lief*

A holiday, a holiday, and the first one of the year.
Lord Darnell's wife came into church, the gospel for to hear.

And when the meeting it was done, she cast her eyes about,
And there she saw little Matty Groves, walking in the crowd.

"Come home with me, little Matty Groves, come home with me tonight.
Come home with me, little Matty Groves, and sleep with me till light."

"Oh, I can't come home, I won't come home and sleep with you tonight,
By the rings on your fingers I can tell you are Lord Darnell's wife."

"What if I am Lord Darnell's wife? Lord Darnell's not at home.
For he is out in the far cornfields, bringing the yearlings home."

And a servant who was standing by and hearing what was said,
He swore Lord Darnell he would know before the sun would set.

And in his hurry to carry the news, he bent his breast and ran,
And when he came to the broad mill stream, he took off his shoes and swam.

Little Matty Groves, he lay down and took a little sleep.
When he awoke, Lord Darnell he was standing at his feet.

Saying "How do you like my feather bed? And how do you like my sheets?
How do you like my lady who lies in your arms asleep?"

"Oh, well I like your feather bed, and well I like your sheets.
But better I like your lady gay who lies in my arms asleep."

"Well, get up, get up," Lord Darnell cried, "get up as quick as you can!
It'll never be said in fair England that I slew a naked man."

"Oh, I can't get up, I won't get up, I can't get up for my life.
For you have two long beaten swords and I not a pocket-knife."

"Well it's true I have two beaten swords, and they cost me deep in the purse.
But you will have the better of them and I will have the worse."

"And you will strike the very first blow, and strike it like a man.
I will strike the very next blow, and I'll kill you if I can."

So Matty struck the very first blow, and he hurt Lord Darnell sore;
Lord Darnell struck the very next blow, and Matty struck no more.

And then Lord Darnell he took his wife and he sat her on his knee,
Saying, "Who do you like the best of us, Matty Groves or me?"

And then up spoke his own dear wife, never heard to speak so free.
"I'd rather a kiss from dead Matty's lips than you and your finery."

Lord Darnell he jumped up and loudly he did bawl,
He struck his wife right through the heart and pinned her against the wall.

"A grave, a grave!" Lord Darnell cried, "to put these lovers in.
But bury my lady at the top for she was of noble kin."

## Fairport Convention's "Tam Lin" (39)

as sung on *Liege & Lief*

"I forbid you maidens all that wear gold in your hair
To travel to Carterhaugh, for young Tam Lin is there

None that go by Carterhaugh but they leave him a pledge
Either their mantles of green or else their maidenhead"

Janet tied her kirtle green a bit above her knee
And she's gone to Carterhaugh as fast as go can she

She'd not pulled a double rose, a rose but only two
When up then came young Tam Lin, says, "Lady, pull no more"

"And why come you to Carterhaugh without command from me?"
"I'll come and go", young Janet said, "and ask no leave of thee"

Janet tied her kirtle green a bit above her knee
And she's gone to her father as fast as go can she

Well, up then spoke her father dear and he spoke meek and mild
"Oh, and alas, Janet", he said, "I think you go with child"

"Well, if that be so", Janet said, "myself shall bear the blame
There's not a knight in all your hall shall get the baby's name

For if my love were an earthly knight, as he is an elfin grey
I'd not change my own true love for any knight you have"

So Janet tied her kirtle green a bit above her knee
And she's gone to Carterhaugh as fast as go can she

"Oh, tell to me, Tam Lin", she said, "why came you here to dwell?"
"The Queen of Fairies caught me when from my horse I fell

"And at the end of seven years she pays a tithe to hell
I so fair and full of flesh and fear it be myself

"But tonight is Halloween and the fairy folk ride
Those that would let true love win at Mile's Cross they must bide

"So first let pass the horses black and then let pass the brown
Quickly run to the white steed and pull the rider down

"For I'll ride on the white steed, the nearest to the town
For I was an earthly knight, they give me that renown

"Oh, they will turn me in your arms to a newt or a snake
But hold me tight and fear not, I am your baby's father

"And they will turn me in your arms into a lion bold
But hold me tight and fear not and you will love your child

"And they will turn me in your arms into a naked knight
But cloak me in your mantle and keep me out of sight"

In the middle of the night she heard the bridle ring
She heeded what he did say and young Tam Lin did win

Then up spoke the Fairy Queen, an angry queen was she
Woe betide her ill-far'd face, an ill death may she die

"Oh, had I known, Tam Lin", she said, "what this night I did see
I'd have looked him in the eyes and turned him to a tree"

## Fairport Convention's "Sir Patrick Spens" (58)

from their 1969 BBC "Top Gear" session

The King sat in Dunfermline town
Drinking of the blood red wine.
"Where can I get a good sea captain
To sail this mighty ship of mine?"

Then up there spoke a bonny boy
Sitting at the King's right knee,
"Sir Patrick Spens is the very best seaman
That ever sailed upon the sea."

The King has written a broad letter
And sealed it up with his own right hand,
Sending word unto Sir Patrick
To come to him at his command.

"An enemy then this must be
Who told a lie concerning me,
For I was never a very good seaman
Nor ever do intend to be."

"Last night I saw the new, new moon
With the old moon in her arm,
And that is the sign since we were born
That means there'll be a deadly storm."

They had not sailed upon the sea
A day, a day, but barely three,
When loud and boisterous grew the wind
And loud and stormy grew the sea.

Then up there came a mermaiden,
A comb and glass all in her hand,
"A health to you, my merry young men,
For you'll not see dry land again!"

"Oh, long may my lady look
With a lantern in her hand
Before she sees my bonny ship
Come sailing homewards to dry land."

Forty miles off Aberdeen
The water's fifty fathoms deep.
There lies good Sir Patrick Spens
With the Scots lords at his feet.

## Dick Justice's "Henry Lee" (68)

as sung on the 1929 recording used in the Folkways *Anthology of American Folk Music*

"Get down, get down, little Henry Lee, and stay all night with me.
The very best lodging I can afford will be fare better'n thee."
"I can't get down, and I won't get down, and stay all night with thee,
For the girl I have in that merry green land, I love far better'n thee."

She leaned herself against a fence, just for a kiss or two;
With a little pen-knife held in her hand, she plugged him through and through.
"Come all you ladies in the town, a secret for me keep,
With a diamond ring held on my hand I'll never will forsake."

"Some take him by his lily-white hand, some take him by his feet.
We'll throw him in this deep, deep well, more than one hundred feet.
Lie there, lie there, loving Henry Lee, till the flesh drops from your bones.
The girl you have in that merry green land still waits for your return."

"Fly down, fly down, you little bird, and alight on my right knee.
Your cage will be of purest gold, in deed of property [?]."
"I can't fly down, or I won't fly down, and alight on your right knee.
A girl would murder her own true love would kill a little bird like me."

"If I had my bend and bow, my arrow and my string,
I'd pierce a dart so nigh your heart your wobble would be in vain."
"If you had your bend and bow, your arrow and your string,
I'd fly away to the merry green land and tell what I have seen."

## “Long Lankin” (93)

from *The Penguin Book of English Folk Songs* pp. 60-61 (“Sung by Sister Emma, Clewer, Berks”)

Said my lord to my lady, as he mounted his horse:
“Beware of Long Lankin that lives in the moss.”

Said my lord to my lady, as he rode away:
“Beware of Long Lankin that lives in the hay.

“Let the doors be all bolted and the windows all pinned,
And leave not a hole for a mouse to creep in.”

So he kissed his fair lady and he rode away,
And he was in fair London before the break of day.

The doors were all bolted and the windows all pinned,
Except one little window where Long Lankin crept in.

“Where’s the lord of this house?” said Long Lankin.
“He’s away in fair London”, said the false nurse to him.

“Where’s the little heir of this house?” said Long Lankin.
“He’s asleep in his cradle”, said the false nurse to him.

“We’ll prick him, we’ll prick him all over with a pin,
And that’ll make my lady to come down to him.”

So he pricked him, he pricked him all over with a pin,
And the nurse held the basin for the blood to flow in.

“O nurse how you slumber, O nurse how you sleep.
You leave my little son Johnson to cry and to weep.

“O nurse how you slumber, O nurse how you snore.
You leave my little son Johnson to cry and to roar.”

“I’ve tried him with an apple, I’ve tried him with a pear.
Come down, my fair lady, and rock him in your chair.

“I’ve tried him with milk, and I’ve tried him with pap.
Come down, my fair lady, and rock him in your lap.”

“How durst I go down in the dead of the night
Where there’s no fire a-kindled and no candle alight?”

“You have three silver mantles as bright as the sun.
Come down my fair lady, all by the light of one.”

My lady came down, she was thinking no harm.
Long Lankin stood ready to catch her in his arm.

Here’s blood in the kitchen. Here’s blood in the hall.
Here’s blood in the parlour where my lady did fall.

Her maiden looked out from the turret so high,
And she saw her master from London riding by.

“O master, O master, don’t lay the blame on me.
‘Twas the false nurse and Lankin that killed your lady.”

Long Lankin was hung on a gibbet so high
And the false nurse was burnt in a fire close by.