

Rhythms of Revolt

European Traditions and Memories of Social Conflict in Oral Culture

Edited by

Éva Guillorel, David Hopkin and William Pooley



An **Ashgate** Book

ROUTLEDGE

Rhythms of Revolt: European Traditions and Memories of Social Conflict in Oral Culture

The culture of insurgents in early modern Europe was primarily an oral one; memories of social conflicts in the communities affected were passed on through oral forms such as songs and legends. This popular history continued to influence political choices and actions through and after the early modern period. The chapters in this book examine numerous examples from across Europe of how memories of revolt were perpetuated in oral cultures, and they analyse how traditions were used. From the German Peasants' War of 1525 to the counter-revolutionary guerrillas of the 1790s, oral traditions can offer radically different interpretations of familiar events. This is a 'history from below', and a history from song, which challenges existing historiographies of early modern revolts.

Éva Guillorel is a lecturer in early modern history at the University of Caen Normandie. She studied history, ethnology, and Celtic languages at the universities of Rennes and Brest, and was awarded her doctorate in 2008. In 2012–2013 she was a British Academy funded Newton Fellow, attached to the University of Oxford, and this book is one of the outcomes of that fellowship.

David Hopkin studied history at Churchill College, University of Cambridge. He was a Junior Research Fellow at Churchill College from 1997 to 1999 and lecturer, then senior lecturer, in the Department of Economic and Social History, University of Glasgow, from 1999. He joined the University of Oxford and Hertford College in 2005.

William G. Pooley is a lecturer in modern European history at the University of Bristol, having previously studied at the Universities of Oxford and Utah State. His research focuses on modern witchcraft and the folklore collections of the long nineteenth century.

This substantial and impressive volume is exceptionally well-constructed, covering a wide range of relevant material. This is an intellectually coherent, interesting and important collection which should make an impact and be consulted for many years to come.

Andrew Hadfield, *University of Sussex, UK*

Rhythms of Revolt: European Traditions and Memories of Social Conflict in Oral Culture

**Edited by
Éva Guillorel, David Hopkin
and William G. Pooley**

First published 2018
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2018 selection and editorial matter, Éva Guillorel, David Hopkin and William G. Pooley; individual chapters, the contributors

The right of Éva Guillorel, David Hopkin and William G. Pooley to be identified as the authors of the editorial material, and of the authors for their individual chapters, has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN: 978-1-138-20504-8 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-31546-785-6 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman
by codeMantra

**My joy, my life! Songs! How I love you! What are these
stale annals I rummage in now before these living,
resounding chronicles!**

Nikolai Gogol to Mikhail Maksimovich, 1833

I deal with *facts*, Miss Granger, not myths and legends.

**Professor Binns, *Harry Potter
and the Chamber of Secrets*, 1998**

This page intentionally left blank

Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	x
<i>List of contributors</i>	xi
Introduction. Oral cultures and traditions of social conflict: an introduction to sources and approaches	1
ÉVA GUILLOREL AND DAVID HOPKIN	
1 Political songs and memories of rebellion in the later medieval Low Countries	43
JAN DUMOLYN AND JELLE HAEMERS	
2 Remembering the Peasants' War in the Vosges: the Song of Rosemont	64
GEORGES BISCHOFF	
3 Competing memories of a Swiss revolt: the prism of the William Tell legend	90
MARC H. LERNER	
4 Songs as echoes of rebellion in early modern Brittany	121
DONATIEN LAURENT AND MICHEL NASSIET	
5 Turning sacrilege into victory: Catholic memories of Calvinist iconoclasm in the Low Countries, 1566–1700	151
ERIKA KUIJPERS AND JUDITH POLLMANN	
6 Orality and popular revolts in Louis XIV's France: what makes the Camisards special?	171
PHILIPPE JOUTARD	

7 Popular memory and early modern revolts in Russia: from Razin to Pugachev	198
MALTE GRIESSE	
8 <i>An Chaoimhniadh Chomhachtaigh agus Séamus an Chaca</i> (worthy knight/worthless shite): James II and his war in Irish vernacular literature and folk memory	217
ÉAMONN Ó CIARDHA	
9 Melody as a bearer of radical ideology: English enclosures, <i>The Coney Warren</i> and mobile clamour	240
GERALD PORTER	
10 Sing out!: political and commemorative uses of Counter-Revolutionary singing in Brittany	265
YOUENN LE PRAT	
11 <i>The Floating Parliament</i>: ballads of the British naval mutinies of 1797	284
ROY PALMER	
12 Lost voices?: memories of early modern peasant revolts in post-emancipation Estonia	308
KERSTI LUST	
13 The enigma of <i>Roddy McCorley Goes to Die</i>: forgetting and remembering a local rebel hero in Ulster	327
GUY BEINER	
Conclusion: popular revolts and oral traditions	359
PETER BURKE	
<i>Select bibliography</i>	373
<i>Index of songs</i>	391
<i>Index</i>	395

Figures

2.1	The itinerary of the peasant bands in 1525, described in the <i>Chant du Rosemont</i>	67
3.1	The old Swiss Confederacy (pre-1798)	94
3.2	<i>A Fine New Song of William Tell by the Helvetian Fortune Tellers</i> , cover page, 1659	107
4.1	The Province of Brittany in the early modern period	126
6.1	The Cévennes region	172
6.2	The obelisk erected in 1887 in Plan de Fontmort	191
7.1	The uprisings of Razin and Pugachev in Russia	201
9.1	‘An Accurate Plan of Charnwood Forest’	250
10.1	Counter-Revolutionary songs in the region of Vannes	277
11.1	<i>The Death of Parker</i>	297
12.1	Peasant revolts in Estonia discussed in the chapter, 1784–1805	312
13.1	County Antrim and surrounding counties at the time of the United Irishmen rebellion, 1798	330
13.2	Illustration of the execution of Roddy McCorley, 1907	336
13.3	Photograph of the poet Ethna Carbery	342
13.4	The reconstructed monument celebrating Roddy McCorley in Moyard House, 2005	351

Acknowledgements

This book grew out of two overlapping projects. The first was Éva Guillorel's Newton International Fellowship held at the University of Oxford from 2011 to 2013, funded by the British Academy. Her project, overseen by David Hopkin, was entitled 'Song and Social Protest in Early Modern Europe: Acts of Rebellion, Performance of Memory'. The second was the French Agence Nationale de la Recherche project 'Cultures des révoltes et révolutions', led by Alain Hugon at the Université de Caen Normandie. The conjunction of these two projects flowered in two workshops. Most of the chapters in this book originated in presentations at one or other of these events: the first – 'Cultures orales, histoires et mémoires des révoltes et contestations populaires (XVe–XVIIIe siècles)' – at Caen in April 2013; the second – 'European Traditions of Revolt: The Memory of Social Conflict in Oral Culture' – at the Maison Française d'Oxford in June 2014. The editors would like to thank all the institutions that funded and supported these events, including: the Modern European History Research Centre of the University of Oxford; The Centre de Recherche d'Histoire Quantitative at the Université de Caen Normandie; the Maison Française d'Oxford and in particular its director, Anne Simonin; the British Academy, the Agence Nationale de la Recherche; and Hertford College, Oxford. We would also like to thank all the participants, and perhaps especially the singers, including Robert Bouthillier and the duo 'ALVA' (Vivien Ellis and Giles Lewin), who set the tone but whose contributions do not really translate to the page. Robert also prepared the musical scores used in this volume, while the maps were prepared by Michel Daeffler, and we thank them, as well as William G. Pooley who undertook the translation of the chapters submitted in French.

Finally we would like to mention the contribution of two participants at both Caen and Oxford, Pat and Roy Palmer: Pat as a singer and 'animatrice', Roy as singer and presenter. Roy died in February 2015, and this book is dedicated to the memory of this remarkable song collector, scholar, and life-long rebel.

Contributors

Guy Beiner is a senior lecturer in the Department of General History at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel. He has held senior research fellowships at Trinity College Dublin, the University of Notre Dame, the Central European University, and most recently at the University of Oxford as a Marie Curie Gerda Henkel Fellow. Amongst his publications on history, memory and oral traditions is the prize-winning book *Remembering the Year of the French: Irish Folk History and Social Memory* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

Georges Bischoff was appointed professor of medieval history in 1997. His early research was on the relationship between the population and the authorities in the western part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire from the start of the fifteenth to the middle of the sixteenth century (1981). He defended his doctorate in 1997 on the high aristocracy of Alsace. His research primarily focuses on the frontier between the Holy Roman Empire and France (Burgundy, Lorraine, Switzerland, and the Habsburg lands) at the end of the medieval period and the start of the early modern period. He has worked on political relationships and institutions, as well as material culture and the imaginary, and has produced many articles and books, including *La Guerre des Paysans. L'Alsace et la génération du Bundschuh* (1493–1525) (Strasbourg, 2010). He is currently working on a book entitled *L'Europe de Marignan*. His work involves collaborating with archeologists and heritage specialists.

Peter Burke is Professor Emeritus of Cultural History and Fellow of Emmanuel College. Educated by the Jesuits and at Oxford (St John's and St Antony's), he taught in the School of European Studies, University of Sussex from 1962 to 1979 as an assistant lecturer and lecturer in History and as Reader in Intellectual History. He moved to Cambridge to become a lecturer in History and subsequently Reader in and then Professor of Cultural History. At Emmanuel College he has served as Librarian and Archivist. He has published twenty-three books, including *The Italian Renaissance* (1972), *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (1978), *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (1992), *The Art of Conversation* (1993), *A Social History of*

Knowledge (2000), *Eyewitnessing* (2000), *What Is Cultural History?* (2004) and *Languages and Communities in Early Modern Europe* (2004) and has been translated into twenty-eight languages.

Jan Dumolyn completed his Ph.D. on medieval Flanders at the University of Ghent in 2001. He is now a senior lecturer in medieval history in the Department of History and the Henri Pirenne Institute for Medieval Studies at the University of Ghent. He has published widely on the socio-economic, political and cultural history of the urban world of the medieval Low Countries, focusing on discourse analysis, communication and medieval collective action. He has recently co-edited *The Voices of the People in Late-Medieval Europe. Communication and Popular Politics* (2014).

Malte Griesse studied in Cologne, Volgograd, Moscow and Paris, where he received his M.A. at the Sorbonne with a study of early modern revolts during civil wars, and where he defended his Ph.D. at the EHESS about the impact of different levels of communication (from the intimate to the public) on the formation of people's opinions and actions. This is reflected in his book *Communiquer, juger et agir sous Staline* (2011), as well as in another book in preparation on the history of the Soviet Union through the eyes of an engaged communist family that has left an enormously rich correspondence. In Paris, Bielefeld and Konstanz he has taught courses on a wide array of subjects ranging chronologically from the sixteenth to the twenty-first century and covering the entire European space – with particular attention to its margins. Since 2013 he has led a research group on 'Early modern revolts as communicative events' at University of Konstanz. The group deals with both communication in revolts and communication on revolts, which entails a focus on the circulation of revolt-narratives across borders. In 2013–2014 he held a one-year fellowship at Harvard University and prepared, amongst other things, a larger publication on revolts in different visual cultures.

Éva Guillorel is a lecturer in early modern history at the University of Caen Normandie and a member of the Centre de Recherche d'Histoire Quantitative. She studied history, ethnology, and Celtic languages at the universities of Rennes and Brest, and was awarded her doctorate in 2008. Her thesis was a demonstration of the value of using folk songs as a source for the social and cultural history of Brittany in the early modern period, and was published in 2010 as *La complainte et la plainte. Chanson, justice, cultures en Bretagne, XVIe–XVIIIe siècles* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes). She has held postdoctoral positions at Harvard (Cambridge, USA), at Laval University (Québec, Canada), and at Hertford College, University of Oxford, where she worked on the project 'Song and Social Protest in Early Modern Europe: Acts of Rebellions, Performance of Memory' in collaboration with David Hopkin. She has recently been researching the memory of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century

Franco-British conflicts in North American oral tradition, as well as the mechanisms through which popular social conflicts in early modern France are remembered in oral cultures. She is now working on the ‘Culture des révoltes et révolutions’ (CURR) project, funded by the French government (2014–2017).

Jelle Haemers lectures on medieval history at the University of Leuven. His research interests include the political history of the late medieval West, social conflicts, and the urban history of the Low Countries. He is an associate editor of *Urban History*, and member of the ‘Young Academy of Belgium’. His publications include the monograph *For the Common Good: State Power and Urban Revolts in the Reign of Mary of Burgundy (1477–1482)* (Brepols, 2009). He has frequently collaborated with Jan Dumolyn, for instance in the co-written article “‘A Bad Chicken Was Brooding’”: Subversive Speech in Medieval Flanders’ (*Past and Present*, 2012).

David Hopkin studied history at Churchill College, University of Cambridge. He was a Junior Research Fellow at Churchill College from 1997 to 1999 and lecturer, then senior lecturer, in the Department of Economic and Social History, University of Glasgow, from 1999. He joined the University of Oxford and Hertford College in 2005. His research is in the social and cultural history of modern Europe and his interests lie in oral culture and popular culture. He explores historical communities through the stories that they told to themselves about themselves. His first book, *Soldier and Peasant in French Popular Culture*, was awarded the Royal Historical Society’s Gladstone Prize in 2003. Since then he has studied other social groups such as fishermen, lacemakers and servants. The oral culture of these groups was the subject of his second monograph, *Voices of the People in Nineteenth-Century France*, which won the Katharine Briggs Prize in 2012. He has also worked on the history of folklore as a discipline, and in 2012 edited *Folklore and Nationalism in Europe during the Long Nineteenth-Century* with Tim Baycroft.

Philippe Joutard is an emeritus professor of history. He taught at the University of Provence and the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales. His early research concentrated on Protestant resistance in the Cévennes in the eighteenth century and the memory of this resistance, using oral history. This research led to several publications, including *La Légende des Camisards, une sensibilité au passé* (Gallimard, 1977). In subsequent work, *Ces voix qui nous viennent du passé* (Hachette, 1983), he explored the light oral history casts on historical phenomena, the subject of a plenary speech at the 10th Congress of the International Oral History Association in Rio de Janeiro in 1998. He has also written on the role of the imagination in creating history, in *L’invention du Mont Blanc* (Gallimard, 1986) and the construction of the French national novel in

a piece entitled 'L'Histoire, une passion française', in A. Burguière and J. Revel (eds), *Histoire de la France. Choix culturels et mémoire* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2000). His most recent book, *Histoire et mémoires, conflits et alliance* (Paris: La Découverte, 2013) concerns the difficult relationship history has to memory, arguing both need one another. He has been on the editorial board of the journal *L'Histoire* since its creation in 1978 and is also part of the Labex (laboratoire d'excellence) project 'Les passés dans le présent'.

Erika Kuijpers is lecturer in history at VU University in Amsterdam, having previously been a post-doc researcher at the University of Leiden. She is the author of *Migrantenstad. Immigratie en sociale verhoudingen in 17e-eeuws Amsterdam* (2005) and has published widely on the history of migration, literacy and pre-modern labour markets. From 2008 to 2013 she worked at Leiden University researching personal memories of the Dutch Revolt, in the context of the VICI research project 'Tales of the revolt: memory, oblivion and identity in the Low Countries, 1566–1700' (see www.earlymodernmemory.org). She co-edited *Memory Before Modernity. Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013) and is now working on a monograph about the way early modern witnesses and victims of war dealt with traumatic memories.

Donatien Laurent is a retired ethnologist with the Centre de recherche bretonne et celtique at the University of Bretagne Occidentale, and continues to take a lead role in the Centre's activities. His research specializes in Breton-language oral traditions. He has conducted numerous expeditions in Brittany since the 1950s to collect songs and tales, and he has studied the results from historical, linguistic and ethnomusicological perspectives. He is perhaps best known for his analysis of the field notebooks of Théodore de La Villemarqué, author of the influential nineteenth-century collection of ballads, the *Barzaz-Breiz*.

Marc H. Lerner works as an associate professor in history at the University of Mississippi. He completed his Ph.D. in European History at Columbia University, New York (2003) and obtained an Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowship at UCLA between 2003 and 2005. His publications include *A Laboratory of Liberty: The Transformation of Political Culture in Republican Switzerland, 1750–1848* (Leiden: Brill, 2012) and several articles on early modern Switzerland. He is currently working on a new book entitled *The International William Tell: A Republican Symbol in the Age of Revolution*.

Kersti Lust is project coordinator at the National Archives of Estonia and Senior Research Fellow at the University of Tartu. She has written extensively on the social and economic history of the Estonian peasantry in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Her main topics include famines, peasant reforms, peasants' attitude towards agricultural innovation

and modernisation, the peasant movement in the revolution of 1905, etc. Her recent publications include ‘The Impact of the Baltic Emancipation Reforms on Peasant–Landlord Relations: A Historiographical Survey’ (*Journal of Baltic Studies*, 2013) and ‘Feeding the Landless in Post-Emancipation Livland during Times of Famine, 1840s–1860s’ (*Slavonic and East European Review*, 2014).

Michel Nassiet is professor of early modern history at the University of Angers and a member of the Institut Universitaire de France. His research examines the French nobility, using social history, demography, and anthropology to address questions of political and gender history (*Noblesse et pauvreté. La petite noblesse en Bretagne, XVe–XVIIIe siècles*, 1993). His recent research concerns inter-personal violence, specifically in the sixteenth century, and uses pardons granted by the king, known as *lettres de rémission* (*La violence, une histoire sociale*, 2011). He is also interested in Breton oral tradition as an historical source.

Éamonn Ó Ciardha is a senior lecturer at the Ulster University, and has taught History, English and Irish at the University of Toronto, the Keough Institute for Irish Studies, University of Notre Dame, Trinity College Dublin, the University of the Saarland, the University of Vienna, and Framingham State University. His researches are primarily focused on Irish Jacobitism (Irish support for the exiled House of Stuart), the Irish outlaw, Irish military history, Irish popular politics and culture, language and literature and Irish book history. In 2002, Four Courts Press published *Ireland and the Jacobite Cause, 1685–1766. A Fatal Attachment* (reprinted 2004), a monograph based on his Cambridge Ph.D. Other outputs include: (with Billy Kelly and Micheál Ó Siochrú) two commemorative volumes of *History Ireland* (2007, 2009) to mark the 400th anniversary of the Flight of the Earls and the Plantation of Ulster; (with David Finnegan and Marie-Claire Peters), *The Flight of the Earls: Imeacht na nIarlaí* (Derry, 2010); (with Micheál Ó Siochrú), *The Plantation of Ulster: Ideology and Practice* (Manchester, 2012), (with Patrick Duffy ed.), *Monaghan: History and Society* (Dublin, 2017), and (with Frankie Sewell and Alan Tittley) *The Irish Book in Irish since 1567* (forthcoming, 2018). He has also served as historical advisor, narrator and ‘talking head’ for a number of historical documentaries on Irish military history, including *Imeacht na nIarlaí: The Flight of the Earls* (2007); *Rapairil/Outlaws* (2009); *Plandáil/The Plantation of Ulster* (2011); *Balláí Dhoirel/Derry’s Walls* (2012), *Wolfland* (2013), *The Siege of Derry* (2013) and *Mapping Ulster* (2013).

Roy Palmer (1932–2015) worked for twenty-five years as a teacher (of French) and headmaster. In parallel and then in succession he engaged in research and writing on traditional songs and street ballads since the 1960s. Among his books are *A Touch on the Times. Songs of Social Change, 1770–1914* (Penguin, 1974); *A Ballad History of England from 1588 to the Present*

Day (Batsford, 1979); *The Sound of History. Songs and Social Comment* (Oxford, 1988); and *Working Songs. Industrial Ballads and Poems from Britain and Ireland, 1780s–1980s* (Herron Publishing, 2010). *Crimea. The Last Ballad War* (Cecil Woolf) is forthcoming.

Judith Pollmann is professor of early modern Dutch history at Leiden University in the Netherlands. She has published widely on the social and cultural history of Reformation and Counter-Reformation and the history of the Dutch Revolt. From 2008 to 2013 she directed a major research project entitled ‘Tales of the revolt: memory, oblivion and identity in the Low Countries, 1566–1700’. She co-edited *Memory Before Modernity. Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013) and her latest book is *Memory in Early Modern Europe, 1500–1800* (Oxford, 2017).

William G. Pooley is a lecturer in nineteenth/twentieth century Western European history at the University of Bristol, having previously studied at the Universities of Oxford and Utah State. His research focuses on the folklore collections of the long nineteenth century. His doctorate at the University of Oxford concerned the history of the body in the Landes de Gascogne and drew on the ethnographic notes of Félix Arnaudin to explore the effects of social and environmental changes on rural bodily experiences and practices, sexuality, work, emotions, and identity. A book based on this research *The Blood-Stained Sand: Body and Landscape in Nineteenth-Century France* is forthcoming. He has published articles and book chapters on witchcraft, gender, family history, cultural transmission and social change, and the songs and stories collected by folklorists such as Jean-François Bladé, Victor Smith, and Félix Arnaudin. He won the Folklore Society President’s Prize in 2009, and in 2010 he was the first recipient of the Fife Fellowship in Folklore at Utah State University. In 2013, he was awarded the Society for the Study of French History Ralph Gibson Bursary and a Scouloudi Junior Fellowship at the Institute of Historical Research. He was *Past and Present* Junior Research Fellow 9 (2015–2016) at the Institute of Historical Research.

Gerald Porter is former Professor of English Literature and Culture at the University of Vaasa, Finland. His research interests are centred on vernacular song culture and oral narratives. His Ph.D. thesis on English occupational songs was published in 1992. He has written extensively on metaphor, resistance and social issues such as cannibalism, child labour, lacemakers’ tells (counting rhymes), laments and displacement. He has edited *Riots in Literature* (with David Bell, 2008) and co-authored *Fragments and Meaning in Traditional Song* (with Mary-Ann Constantine, 2003).

Youenn le Prat studied at the Institut d’Études Politiques de Rennes, and then taught at the École Navale in Brest, and now teaches the *classes préparatoires aux grandes écoles*. He is a founding member of the editorial

board of 'Les Géopolitiques de Brest' and has produced a volume in their book series, entitled *Sorties de guerre* (Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2008). His research focuses on prisoners of war in the early modern period, the memory of Franco-British conflicts, and what oral tradition reveals about the role of this memory in the politicisation of public opinion. His publications include "'Vive la République!": Ar Volonter, récit de combat naval et chant républicain', in F. Postic (ed.), *Bretagnes, du cœur aux lèvres. Mélanges offerts à Donatien Laurent* (Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2009), 'L'anglophobie au prisme des chansons en langue bretonne. Entre mémoire sociale et histoire populaire', in J. Ulbert (ed.), *Ennemi juré, ennemi naturel, ennemi héréditaire* (Hamburg: DOBU-Verlag, 2011), 'La mémoire chantée d'une frontière maritime au XVIIIe siècle: La menace britannique sur les côtes françaises vue d'en-bas', in J. Préneuf, E. Grove and A. Lambert (eds), *Entre terre et mer. L'occupation militaire des espaces maritimes et littoraux* (Paris: Economica, collection Bibliothèque stratégique, 2014).

This page intentionally left blank

Introduction

Oral cultures and traditions of social conflict: an introduction to sources and approaches

Éva Guillorel and David Hopkin

Historians have thought and written a lot about ‘memory’ in recent decades. With the exception of oral historians, their focus has been less on the mental processes through which individual experiences are processed in the brain than on ‘social’ or ‘collective memory’.¹ Social memory may affect individuals but, in order to be available to scholars, it must be actualised in rites and ceremonies, recorded in books and on monuments, or stored in museums and theme parks. There is a dialogue between what we, as individuals remember and these representations of the past, even when the latter reenact or commemorate events that we ourselves have experienced. However, ‘social memory’ encompasses also those things which we have not experienced, so it is quite legitimate to talk about the ‘social memory’ of the First World War despite the fact that, except for a handful of centenarians, it now lies beyond the reach of individual memory. Of course readers of this chapter, like its authors, may have known people who fought in the Great War; they may have, like us, heard their personal reminiscences, and they may, like us, attempt to pass on what they have learned from these testaments. Scholars increasingly use the term ‘post-memory’ for these second or third hand accounts which are nonetheless highly influential on subsequent generations.² However, post-memory primarily occurs within families: we tell these stories because they involve people we knew or to whom we had a connection. What term should we use when the story continues to be passed on, but no one remembers where it came from and where no personal connection is involved?

We want to make the case for the word ‘tradition’; indeed we prefer it to terms such as ‘social memory’ and ‘collective memory’. In many cases the terms are interchangeable. Like ‘social memory’, tradition is malleable, adaptive to circumstances and responsive to external pressures. Like memory, tradition is functional, it serves a purpose for those who maintain and promulgate it. But tradition necessarily implies something that is handed

1 James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford, 1992).

2 Marianne Hirsch, ‘Family Pictures: Maus, Mourning, and Post-Memory’, *Discourse* 15(3) (1992): 3–29.

on, and in that process it has to be externalised. What was in one mind has to be rendered into a form that is simultaneously both communicable to another, and is rememberable by that other. The metaphorical use of the word 'memory' for practices of commemoration, we observe, creates confusion between mental processes that are intrinsically individual and social processes that by definition are not.

We also prefer the word 'tradition' because we want to question one of the founding principles of memory scholarship. Pierre Nora stated in the introduction to his monumental *Lieux de mémoire* that he turned to the 'sites' of memory, the locations where memory was institutionalised, 'because there are no longer any *milieux de mémoire*, settings in which memory is a real part of everyday experience'.³ However, the editors' researches have brought them into contact with communities in which memory of sometimes very distant events does appear to remain part of everyday experience, maintained through oral tradition. Oral traditions are often buttressed by something external: a physical mark in the landscape, a preserved relic, a recurring moment in the ritual year ... but they are not reliant on the institutional framework of Nora's 'lieux de mémoire'. This observation may simply reflect a difference of method: the fieldworker (anthropologist, ethnomusicologist, folklorist ...) versus the library scholar. But Nora's statement was also informed by a cultural and political pessimism which we do not share.

Historians may be reluctant to embrace the word 'tradition' because in recent years it has so frequently appeared in historiographical literature prefaced by the word 'invented'. The antiquarians and folklorists, who collected the traditions on which several of the chapters in this volume rely, stand accused of shaping (in some cases making up) their material to further their own ideological projects in exactly the same way as the churches, political parties and statesmen who loom larger in Hobsbawm and Ranger's original survey of 'the invention of tradition'.⁴ And it is undeniable that all these agents have influenced the circulation and redeployment of oral traditions. Hobsbawm drew a distinction between real and 'invented' traditions, and while he did not explore the difference at any length, he implied that the latter had with the spread of duplicable media such as print. Oral traditions, following this distinction, would seem to be more authentic. However, while oral traditions may be more important to subaltern groups, they must also be created, nurtured, propagated and put to use in exactly the same way that 'invented traditions' are deployed. The distinction between invented and authentic traditions is not terribly useful, and the stigma generated by the term 'invented' obscures more than it reveals.

3 Pierre Nora (ed.), *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past (Vol. I: Conflicts and Divisions)* (New York, 1996), p. 1.

4 Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983).

We also observe that attempts to direct tradition usually depend on the existence of a prepared ground. There are, in the words of Carolyn Hamilton, ‘limits to invention’.⁵ It is a lot easier to reanimate the reputations of heroes if there are already traditions in circulation concerning them, and if the ‘invented’ acts are concordant with what is already told and believed about their lives and acts. And even in those cases where an imposed, external model becomes the best known version of the hero’s story, extensive fieldwork may reveal that, in private, alternative traditions continue to be passed on. It is a characteristic of oral traditions that they exist in diverse forms: usually no one variant dominates and all reveal something either about the events and persons they invoke or the communities in which they circulate.

Let us take as an example the case of Louis Mandrin, a bandit and smuggler who travelled between Switzerland, Savoy and Dauphiné before being captured in 1755. The hunt for Mandrin, his arrest and execution, were matters of public interest and excitement at the time. His reputation was bolstered by any number of newspaper accounts, almanacs, popular prints and broadside ballads that were spread not only across France but much of Europe.⁶ His notoriety survived his decease and continues to this day, not least thanks to many films and a song recorded by several stars of the French music scene and which is still popular among youth organisations. Local authorities have tried to cash in on tourists’ interests in the places associated with Mandrin’s exploits, and one can readily purchase Mandrin souvenirs and popular retellings of his life.⁷ If we thought the phrase useful we might term all this ‘invented tradition’. But in addition to these ubiquitous memorials one can also discover traces of oral traditions that were maintained over centuries and which were only recorded in the twentieth century. Some are local to Mandrin’s main zones of activity, such as Savoy, but others have travelled much more widely. For instance, a sung dialogue between Mandrin and another infamous bandit, Cartouche, which probably originated in a broadside printed in France in 1755, has been recorded dozens of times in the twentieth century from singers in Québec, Ontario and New Brunswick.⁸ In the process of diffusion and

5 Carolyn Hamilton in *Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention* (Cambridge, MA, 1998).

6 Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, ‘Images et représentations sociales de la criminalité au XVIIIe siècle: l’exemple de Mandrin’, *Revue d’Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine* 26 (1979): 345–364; Sylvie Mouysset, ‘Mandrin au miroir des écrits de son temps: intrépide contrebandier ou brigand scélérat?’, in Valérie Sottocasa (ed.), *Les brigands: Criminalité et protestation politique (1750–1850)* (Rennes, 2013), pp. 19–34; Anne-Marie Mercier-Faivre, ‘Le feuilleton Mandrin dans la Gazette d’Amsterdam’, in Lise Andriès (ed.), *Cartouche, Mandrin et autres brigands du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 2010), pp. 293–315.

7 Valérie Huss (ed.), *Louis Mandrin: Malfaiteur ou bandit au grand cœur?* (Grenoble, 2005).

8 36 recordings are listed in Conrad Laforte, *Catalogue de la chanson folklorique française. III. Chansons en forme de dialogue* (Québec, 1982), pp. 91–92.

repetition, generations of singers have reshaped the material so that it now makes sense in its new context, while simultaneously maintaining fidelity to the tradition. This example appears to us to fit the description of ‘milieux de mémoire’, whose continuing force is often underestimated by historians absorbed by the approved, institutionalised and endlessly reproduced media representations that dominate public space. But even in this case one cannot really divide material into ‘invented’ and ‘authentic’ traditions. The cult surrounding Mandrin draws on, and in turn reinvigorates those orally performed traditions, even when they offer an alternative vision of their ‘hero’. It is just that the latter are much harder to find, and therefore receive less notice.

The purpose of this book is to draw attention to oral traditions concerning early modern rebellions. We acknowledge that they can be difficult to work with, but they are not unimportant both as historical documents and as cultural models influencing the behaviour of the communities in which they continue to circulate.

Recovering orality in revolt: the problem of sources

Historians of early modern revolts face a conundrum: they want to investigate rebels’ motivations, their practices and organisation, but are confronted by the fact that the insurgents’ culture was primarily an oral one, which found expression in a repertoire of prophecies, ballads, oaths, jokes and curses ... uttered in the moment and too seldom recorded at the time. The written was often the appanage of the forces of order, and so rebellion took the form of burning written documents such as feudal titles and tax rolls. ‘Away, burn all the records of the realm: my mouth shall be the parliament of England’, said Jack Cade, the leader of the Kentish rebellion of 1450, at least according to Shakespeare.⁹ This may have been meant to caricature plebeian rebels as illiterate and brutish, and it would be an exaggeration to interpret all such destruction as motivated by a superstitious distrust of literacy itself.¹⁰ Nonetheless insurgent crowds understood that, as a tool, writing did not necessarily serve them as well as their opponents. Subaltern and repressed social groups nurtured the arts of oral communication because they had unequal access to other forms of expression.¹¹ Orality was of practical benefit to the subordinate; for example it came with built-in deniability (who can prove what was said? – in an English court of law such evidence could be dismissed as ‘hearsay’). Preference for a largely oral language over one with

9 William Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part 2*, Act 4, Scene 7 (written c. 1592).

10 Roger Chartier, ‘Jack Cade, The Skin of a Dead Lamb, and the Hatred for Writing’, *Shakespeare Studies* 34 (2006): 77–90.

11 Ajay Skaria, ‘Writing, Orality and Power in the Dangs, Western India, 1800s–1920s’, in Dipesh Chakrabarty and Shahid Amin (eds), *Subaltern Studies IX* (New Delhi, 1996), pp. 13–58.

a recognised written form could even become a badge of social identity, most obviously the case in the cants, argots, backslangs and other languages of dissemblance.¹²

Of all oral traditional genres, song is perhaps the most important to the creation and maintenance of social groups that wish to contest the powers that be. As the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* put it in 1773, ‘seditious and designing men never fail to spread ballads among the people, with a view to gain them over to their side’.¹³ No doubt Israeli, Sri Lankan and Turkish authorities would say something similar today about the role of song in the expression of insurgent identities in occupied Palestine, Tamil Eelam and Northern Kurdistan.¹⁴ Song is one of the most declamatory of oral traditional genres, with the power to stir strong emotions. Collective and public singing is associated with moments of political unrest, both now and in the past. The first person voice used in many songs collapses the distinction between the individual and crowd, and between the present performers, the persons from whom they learnt the text, and the characters presented. This makes song an ideal vehicle for the declaration of a social identity continuous from the past to the present. It is not surprising, therefore, that the majority of the chapters in this volume take songs as their prime source.

The seditious power of song is confirmed by the authorities’ attempts to restrict what was being sung on the streets, in the bars and in the market-places. In December 1815 the French Minister of Police, Élie-Louis Decazes, wrote to all French prefects urging them to use their authority against the army of pedlars that criss-crossed the country, and specifying in particular the ‘sellers of chapbooks, almanacs and songs: these little works have always had a great influence on the people and the collection of all popular songs would be a fairly accurate representation of the changing state of public opinion.’¹⁵ The related notions that songs exercised a hold on the popular classes and that therefore they had to be controlled, can be found repeated by municipal, clerical and national authorities in many parts of Europe from

12 Lee Beier, ‘Anti-language or Jargon? Canting in the English Underworld in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries’, in Peter Burke and Roy Porter (eds), *Language and Jargons: Contributions to a Social History of Language* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 67–75.

13 William Smellie, ‘Ballad’, *Encyclopaedia Britannica, or, A Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* (London, 1773), vol. 1, p. 153.

14 See, for example: Moshe Bensimon, ‘The Sociological Role of Collective Singing during Intense Moments of Protest: The Disengagement from the Gaza Strip’, *Sociology* 46 (2012): 241–257; Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam, ‘And Heroes Die: Poetry of the Tamil Liberation Movement in Northern Sri Lanka’, *Journal of South Asian Studies* 28 (2005): 112–153; Stephen Blum and Amir Hassanpour, ‘“The Morning of Freedom Rose Up”: Kurdish Popular Song and the Exigencies of Cultural Survival’, *Popular Music* 15 (1996): 327–343; and Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 1998).

15 Circulaire, Ministre de la police générale, 15 décembre, 1815: ‘Surveillance des colporteurs’, cited in Jacqueline Lesueur, ‘La chanson populaire et les marchands de chansons dans les Vosges au siècle dernier’, *Bulletin de la Société Philomatique Vosgienne* 73 (1970): 101.

the sixteenth century onwards.¹⁶ Such legislation might be aimed at the object of commerce – a printed sheet – but just as often it was directed at the performance, because governments were frightened by the reach and effect of such oral flows of opinion.¹⁷ Rather less well known are governments' attempts to reshape oral culture, such as the not altogether successful Loyalist ballad campaign in Britain during the Napoleonic Wars.¹⁸

More or less hysterical official denunciations of songs are a backhanded acknowledgement of the inflammatory effect of oral genres. However, exercising control did not necessarily require recording precisely what was sung or said. Oral communications may have been vital to the practice of revolt, but for the historian they are often out of reach. Historians of early modern rebellion are obliged to rely on written testimonies, frequently the testimonies generated through processes of repression. These may record rebels' words, albeit mediated, but because in this context speech could kill, one is as likely to encounter silences and evasions, not to mention cultural mistranslations. And just as governments attempted to repress seditious speech, so they acted to prevent seditious traditions growing up around rebellions, or at least they encouraged populations to remember exemplary punishments but not the causes and justifications of revolt. In Italy and the Holy Roman Empire, it was a fairly common practice to pull down the houses of executed rebels so that they could not become the centre of a memory cult.¹⁹ Words and acts that might serve as carriers of rebellious memories were changed or forbidden: 'highland garb' was proscribed after the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, while the Yaik Cossacks who had followed Pugachev in 1773–1774 were renamed the Ural Cossacks by Imperial decree in 1775. A decisive break with the past was intended. Imposed silences surround much more recent events: the king of Romania ordered the destruction of all relevant documents after the bloody suppression of the Peasants' Revolt of 1907, though this seems less like an example of *damnatio memoriae* than an attempt to protect politicians from the repercussions if there were to be a change of government.²⁰

Faced with these voids in the sources, historians have become adept at 'oblique approaches', in Peter Burke's phrase.²¹ They have learnt to 'read against the grain' of the official records. If they do not have the words, then

16 See, for example, Rosa Salzberg and Massimo Rospocher, 'Street Singers in Italian Renaissance Urban Culture and Communication', *Cultural and Social History* 9 (2012): 9–26; and Jean-François Botrel, 'Les aveugles colporteurs d'imprimés en Espagne', *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez* 9 (1973): 417–482.

17 Hence the repeated attempts of the authorities in eighteenth-century Paris and Madrid to restrict street singers to the recitation of an approved, published text, rather than extempore performances.

18 Oskar Cox Jensen, *Napoleon and British Song, 1797–1822* (Basingstoke, 2015).

19 Daniel Bellingradt, 'Organizing Public Opinion in a Resonating Box: The Gülich Rebellion in Early Modern Cologne, 1680–1686', *Urban History* 39 (2012): 553–570.

20 Marin Badea and Ion Ilincioiu (eds), *The Great Romanian Peasant Revolt of 1907* (Bucharest, 1991).

21 Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot: 1994 [1978]), p. 77.

they may be able to decode the repertoire of symbols, or ‘clues’ to use the term current in microhistory, revealed by rebels’ ritual actions.²² Historians have teased out meanings from such opaque gestures as the women’s clothing worn by the Irish Whiteboys,²³ the followers of Ned Ludd,²⁴ the ‘Hosts of Rebecca’²⁵ and the ‘Demoiselles’ of the Ariège²⁶ when effecting their attacks. If what people said has been lost, the record of what they did, their choice of targets, their rites of ridicule and hurt, implicitly conveyed their aims and purposes, perhaps even an ideology.

What historians have not done, at least not so frequently and with many more caveats, is to cite the words of rebels preserved in oral tradition. This is not an oversight; it is a conscious rejection of the truth-value of such sources. Early nineteenth-century historians such as Augustin Thierry and Jules Michelet followed the philosopher Johann Herder in arguing that ‘songs are the archive of the people’. However, the academic discipline of history in France was founded on a repudiation of its romantic forerunners’ methods and enthusiasms.²⁷ In their *Introduction aux études historiques*, a manifesto for ‘methodological history’ and a guide to generations of French research students, Charles Seignobos and Charles-Victor Langlois argued that

writing fixes a statement and assures its faithful transmission: whereas an oral statement is prone to deformation, even in the memory of a contemporary observer, by mixing with other impressions. When passed orally via intermediaries, the statement is further deformed with each transmission, and as these changes occur for a variety of different reasons, it is impossible either to measure or correct such distortions. Oral tradition is, by its very nature, a process of alteration, and therefore fully-fledged sciences can only accept written transmission.²⁸

22 Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, 1965); Edward P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (London, 1991).

23 Michael Beames, *Peasants and Power: The Whiteboy Movements and their Control in Pre-Famine Ireland* (Brighton, 1983).

24 Norman Simms, ‘Ned Ludd’s Mummers Play’, *Folklore* 89 (1978): 166–178.

25 D. J. V. Jones, *Rebecca’s Children: A Study of Rural Society, Crime and Protest* (Oxford, 1989).

26 Peter Sahlins, *Forest Rites: The War of the Demoiselles in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, MA, 1994).

27 Johann Gottfried Herder, ‘Von Aehnlichkeit der mittlern englischen und deutschen Dichtkunst, nebst Verschiedem, das daraus folget’, *Deutsches Museum* 2 (1777): 430. The full quote is ‘Alle unpolizirte Völker singen und handeln; was sie handeln, singen sie und singen Abhandlung. Ihre Gesänge sind das Archiv des Volks, der Schatz ihrer Wissenschaft und Religion, ihrer Theogonie und Kosmogonien der Thaten ihrer Väter und der Begebenheiten ihrer Geschichte, Abdruck ihres Herzens, Bild ihres häuslichen Lebens in Freude und Leid, beym Brautbett und Grabe.’ For romantic historians’ enthusiasm for oral tradition see Charles Rearick, *Beyond the Enlightenment: Historians and Folklore in Nineteenth-Century France* (Bloomington, IN, 1974).

28 Charles Langlois and Charles-Victor Seignobos, *Introduction aux études historiques* (Paris, 1898), p. 151.

The same disapproval of oral traditions held for a long time in Anglophone historiography: Leopold von Ranke's statement that the art of writing is the basis of historical knowledge became an accepted shibboleth in the professionalisation of the historical discipline.²⁹ Academics trained in a Rankean school were taught to value contemporary archives above all later records, especially over elusive and malleable oral records. In a book dealing with the oral traditions surrounding rebellions, we cannot resist pointing out that Ranke was not himself dogmatic on the subject of oral sources: one of his earliest works, a history of the Serbian Revolt of 1804–1815 against the Ottomans, was partly based on the songs supplied by his then neighbour in Vienna, the Serbian philologist, folklorist and ballad collector Vuk Karadžić.³⁰ We acknowledge that, in the words of Peter Burke, Ranke was 'more complicated than the symbol he became': nonetheless that symbol exerted, and continues to exert, a considerable hold over the historical profession.³¹

The project on which this volume is based aims to re-evaluate oral traditions as sources for early modern rebellions. Oral culture may be protean by the standards of the documentary historian, but it is neither completely vaporous nor, in terms of archives, insubstantial. Oral cultures rely on traditions: aesthetic traditions which shape genre expectations; traditions of practice that determine who can speak to whom, and where and when; and traditions in terms of the embodiment of historical knowledge. These traditions may permit mutation but only within limits, which means that as vehicles of information over long periods they have their value. Events that happened generations in the past were recapitulated through oral performance in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and fortunately antiquarians, folklorists, musicologists and ethnologists were then on hand to record them. Scholars have compared these oral traditions with contemporary written records and found that they corroborate each other. Sometimes oral traditions have provided the only detailed account for events that are unexplained in the written record, while for other better-known events they can offer alternative interpretations.³²

When we planned this volume we speculated that this might be especially true for moments of violent social confrontation, not least because in the

29 Joseph Mali, *Mythistory: The Making of a Modern Historiography* (Chicago, 2003), p. 97. Ranke was making a comparison with prehistoric periods when he made this statement.

30 Leopold Ranke, *Die serbische Revolution. Aus serbischen Papieren und Mittheilungen* (Hamburg, 1829). On Vuk's contribution to Ranke's work, and the role of oral sources, see Duncan Wilson, *The Life and Times of Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, 1787–1864: Literacy, Literature and National Independence in Serbia* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 277–279.

31 Peter Burke, 'Ranke the Reactionary', *Syracuse Scholar* 9 (1988): 29.

32 For some particularly well documented cases see Éva Guillorel, *La complainte et la plainte. Chanson, justice, cultures en Bretagne (XVIe–XVIIIe siècles)* (Rennes, 2010), and Edward D. Ives, *The Bonny Earl of Murray: The Man, The Murder, The Ballad* (Urbana, IL, 1997).

early, Romantic, phase of folklore collecting ballads about rebels and bandits, klephts and haiduks, was particularly prized. Claude Fauriel's 1824 *Chants populaires de la Grèce moderne* was an inspiration and model for other collectors for whom oral traditions were, in effect, the basis for the cultural revival of oppressed peoples.³³ Without endorsing such nationalist projects, it seemed at least plausible that such collections might contain examples of historical memories and traditions concerning rebellions, relayed through oral culture, and that these could help to resolve the source conundrum outlined above.

This ambition was encouraged by the experience of anthropologists and historians working in extra-European environments. From New Caledonia³⁴ in the east to Alaska³⁵ in the west, they have found communities that maintained a historical memory of conflict with colonisers, expressed through oral traditions, as well as other non-literary practices such as dance.³⁶ In some cases these amounted to nothing less than a subaltern history of invasion and resistance. One might argue not just a subaltern history but a subaltern historiography, with different schools of interpretation, apprenticeships in the acquisition of historical knowledge, and practices of comparison between different narrations of the same events in order that they could be tested and corrected.³⁷ The very existence of the field of ethno-history demonstrates that neither written texts nor literacy as a skill were necessary to perpetuate a historical sensibility. As historians have construed the behaviour of insurgents with help from folklore and anthropology, we planned to apply expertise from these disciplines to oral traditions concerning revolts.

We do not, of course, propose to reify the distinctions between oral and written forms of communication. Even in the case of those extra-European peoples whose languages, and therefore their historical traditions, had no written form until the arrival of missionaries and colonial administrators, knowledge of those traditions beyond the original audiences has usually relied on interaction with literate outsiders – outsiders in a position of power

33 See Michael Herzfeld, *Ours Once More: Folklore, Ideology, and the Making of Modern Greece* (Austin, TX, 1982) and Tim Baycroft and David Hopkin (eds), *Folklore and Nationalism in Europe in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Leiden, 2012).

34 Alban Bensa, Kacué Yvon Goromoedo and Adrian Muckle, *Les sanglots de l'aigle pêcheur: Nouvelle-Calédonie, la guerre kanak de 1917* (Toulouse, 2015).

35 Nora Marks Dauenhauer, Richard Dauenhauer and Lydia T. Black (eds), *Anóoshi Lingít Aaní Ká: Russians in Tlingit America. The Battles of Sitka, 1802 and 1804* (Seattle, WA, 2008).

36 For example the 'Dances of Conquest' discussed by Nathan Wachtel, *The Vision of the Vanquished: The Spanish Conquest of Peru through Indian Eyes, 1530–1570* (New York, 1977).

37 Guy Beiner elaborates the concept of 'folk historiography' alongside 'folk history' in *Remembering the Year of the French. Irish Folk History and Social Memory* (Madison, WI, 2006).

and an ability to communicate, if not impose, their own version of historical events. The relationship of indigenous oral traditions to imported forms of knowledge, and their relative epistemological value, is at the heart of ongoing acrimonious debates such as the Australian History Wars.³⁸ And comparisons between Aboriginal Australia and early modern Europe can only go so far. In most of the cases discussed in the chapters that follow, the authors have not heard the traditions narrated directly; rather they are reliant on a written transcription of an oral performance that occurred decades or even centuries ago. Such is the case with the political songs of Flemish towns studied by Jan Dumolyn and Jelle Haemers, or the Swiss traditions surrounding William Tell discussed by Marc Lerner. That transcription may have been only one of many interactions between written, spoken and other communicative mechanisms in the shaping of that tradition, as Erika Kuijpers and Judith Pollmann demonstrate in their chapter on Dutch narratives concerning iconoclastic assaults. Early modern Europeans often spoke a different language from the official language of the state or the vernacular of their lords, perhaps a language that had no generally accepted written form, but they lived in a society where written communication was a part of their existence.

Romantics of the nineteenth century conceived of oral tradition as a pristine source of new facts, uncontaminated by other forms of historical knowledge. Thus it might provide the material for an alternative, democratic history imagined by Jules Michelet.³⁹ Our less grandiose expectation was to find some hitherto neglected sources which could supply, if not an alternative history, then at least a supplementary history, or a corrective to existing narratives, and one which might bring to the fore those social groups who have less ability to shape official accounts. This hope seemed justified not only by the experience of ethnohistorians in the postcolonial world, but also by the experience of the handful of European early modernists who had engaged directly with oral historical traditions. In particular, the example of Philippe Joutard's encounter in the 1960s with oral traditions concerning the Camisards of the early eighteenth century in the Protestant villages of the Cévennes, led us to believe that one only had to seek to find.⁴⁰

Keeping quiet about sedition: silences in the oral archive

In practice, the pursuit has been harder than we anticipated. Partly no doubt, this difficulty arises from the processes of repression and enforced silence described above. Even when compliance is not achieved, such policies might drive seditious talk and rebel traditions into concealed channels

38 Bain Attwood, *Telling the Truth about Aboriginal History* (London, 2005).

39 Jules Michelet, 'De la méthode et de l'esprit de ce livre', *Histoire de la Révolution française* II (Paris, 1847), pp. 526–575.

40 Philippe Joutard, *La légende des Camisards: Une sensibilité au passé* (Paris, 1977).

and disguised speech. They may only be performed privately and in elliptical forms. In Turkey today it is very difficult to openly discuss the Armenian genocide, but one can find this history evoked in the lullabies sung to children by mothers descended from the Armenians of eastern Anatolia. Historical knowledge is being transmitted, albeit in forms that are opaque to outsiders.⁴¹ Traditions of revolt might be similarly elusive, but not extinct.

Nonetheless, it seems that some rebellions have left a very powerful legacy of traditions while others do not appear to have done so. In addition to the Camisards one might cite the Jacobite rebellions in the British Isles,⁴² or the great Cossack uprisings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁴³ However, other events which, by their body count or historical significance, might lead one to expect a similar degree of memorialisation, have generated no sustained, public and documented tradition. The priorities of memorialisation in oral culture may strike some historians as strange. Where are the oral traditions concerning the Va-nu-pieds, the Croquants, or even the Swing rioters? It may simply be that these events have yet to find their Joutard. On the other hand, there may have been social processes of forgetting and silencing at work. Meanwhile, relatively small events, which at the time made almost no impact on the written record, can spawn enduring oral traditions, as will be demonstrated in the chapter below by Donatien Laurent and Michel Nassiet.

Because of these difficulties, the chapters that follow are quite heterogeneous, and while some consider events that fall squarely into the category 'early modern revolts' others stretch the bounds of the term revolt (riot, mutiny ...) while also testing the limits of what counts as early modern. We will return to both these questions of definition and periodisation below. Here, however we wish to examine why there are voids in the oral archives, just as there are in the written archives. Answering this question will take us deep into the methodological issues raised by engagement with this kind of source.

To explore the question we will start with a well-known problem, one discussed in detail later in this book by Gerald Porter: why are there so few surviving songs of social protest against enclosure in England? Acts of enclosure regularly generated anger and violence across the early modern and into the modern period, and the discontents caused by enclosure also fuelled much larger rebellious events, such as the Luddite movement. Yet it is difficult to find much trace of this in the most documented genre of English oral culture, folksong. A potential answer might be that, although enclosure generated a lot of momentary heat, once the battle for the commons

41 Melissa Bilal, 'The Lost Lullaby and Other Stories about Being an Armenian in Turkey', *New Perspectives on Turkey* 34 (2006): 67–92.

42 Murray Pittock, 'Scottish Song and the Jacobite Cause', in Ian Brown, Thomas Clancy and Susan Manning (eds), *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature: Enlightenment, Britain and Empire (1707–1918)* (Edinburgh, 2007), pp. 105–109.

43 Carl Stief, *Studies in Russian Historical Song* (Copenhagen, 1953).

was lost, the communities concerned gave up any desire to remember what was once theirs and what they had done to defend them. In an oral culture, when knowledge becomes irrelevant, or counter-productive, it can be easily forgotten by the simple expedient of not being repeated. However, judicial records show us that early modern communities had a tenacious memory for wrangles over boundaries, access and matters pertaining to common land and common right, and they invested effort in practices to ensure the maintenance of this knowledge; so this argument seems implausible.⁴⁴ A more probable hypothesis, then, is that song, as a genre, is simply the wrong place to look. Enclosure riots were too local and particular to generate a widely shared corpus of songs. Songs were more concerned with affairs of the heart than with social contestation, with individual rather than collective emotions on display. There is something to both these points but, compared with France at least, English folksong displayed a historicist sensitivity, with a taste for ballads citing dateable actions and agents.⁴⁵ And, as a genre, it did not shy away from social conflict. Plenty of individual rebels – smugglers, highwaymen, female soldiers, and a surprisingly large number of Irish revolutionaries – found their place in the English song repertoire.⁴⁶ Singers were clearly not unwilling to countenance the idea of revolt in song.

Acquaintance with the scholarship of English folksong raises at least three other possibilities. Herder may have called songs ‘the archive of the people’, but he did specify of ‘unpoliced peoples’. However, the British government, like its European peers, went to some lengths to repress some songs and encourage others. The social reformer Frances Place recalled that during the Revolutionary Wars, ‘if anyone was found singing any but loyal songs, he or she was carried before a magistrate’.⁴⁷ This belief seems to have been widespread though actual cases are hard to document. Roy Palmer’s study of songs concerning the Nore Mutiny in this volume offers an example of a song that people believed to be proscribed, and whose performance risked retribution, though he found no evidence that this was actually so. Similar fears may have inhibited the public performance of

44 Andy Wood, *The Memory of the People: Custom and Popular Senses of the Past in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2013). See also Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500–1700* (Oxford, 2002), ch. 5.

45 Roy Palmer, *The Sound of History: Songs and Social Comment* (Oxford, 1988).

46 Graham Seal, *The Outlaw Legend: A Cultural Tradition in Britain, America and Australia* (Cambridge, 1996); Dianne Dugaw, *Warrior Women and Popular Balladry, 1650–1850* (Cambridge, 1989). Irish rebel songs were quite a popular genre: the song collector Roy Palmer, a contributor to this volume, recorded Harold Wirdnam and his wife singing *We’re Off to Join the IRA* in 1989, even though neither had any obvious connection to Ireland and he was a professional soldier in the British army! Roy Palmer English Folk Music Collection, British Library, 1989: <http://sounds.bl.uk/World-and-traditional-music/Roy-Palmer-collection/025M-C1023X0108XX-1300V0>.

47 Quoted by Vic Gammon in ‘The Grand Conversation: Napoleon and British Popular Balladry’, *RSA Journal* 137 (1989): 665–674.

Jacobite and Irish rebel songs.⁴⁸ Without a culture of public performance, one might reason that oral historical traditions are doomed. However, as the Nore Mutiny example makes clear, fear of repression may actually encourage practices of subaltern remembrance. Jacobites, Fenians and others could find enough ‘sequestered social sites’, to borrow the phrase of the anthropologist James Scott, where traditions could be maintained; why not anti-enclosure protestors?⁴⁹

It may be that the sites where subversive discourses were allowed full sway were out-of-bounds to folksong collectors, and this accounts for the under-representation of songs of protest in the archive. Most nineteenth-century song collectors were social tourists in the milieu in which they collected their material. A vicar and squire such as Sabine Baring-Gould, a daughter of a general such as Janet Blunt, or a bicycling Oxford student like George Butterworth – these were not necessarily the kind of people to whom villagers could open up and reveal their secret words of class antagonism, nor the kind of people to invite into places of social détente where villagers could perform for their own kind.⁵⁰ The same is true in other parts of Europe such as Brittany, where the pioneers of folksong collecting were almost all conservative landed proprietors and aristocrats, and who took their texts from their employees and the beggars who came to their door for charity.⁵¹ Singers, in England and Brittany, censored themselves in front of their ‘betters’, and the latter further censored their words as they transcribed them for print. As collectors often had a political or musicological axe to grind, the songs they sought reflected their own tastes rather than what was most popular among singers and their everyday audiences. Numerous variants might be blended to form a homogeneous, single text, thus ironing out the nuances of the singers’ intentions. Sexual and other references judged inappropriate for the imagined audience of a folksong collection as it gathered round the parlour piano could be bowdlerised.⁵² Some scholars have not hedged their judgements of English folksong collectors, their ideological motivations, their cultural misunderstandings, and their appropriations of the material they accumulated, all of which tended to obscure the social

48 William Donaldson, *The Jacobite Song: Political Myth and National Identity* (Edinburgh, 1988); Julie Henigan, *Literacy and Orality in Eighteenth-Century Irish Song* (London, 2012).

49 James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT, 1992).

50 Brief biographies of these three and many more folk song collectors can be found on the online site ‘The Full English’, hosted by the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library: www.vwml.org/vwml-projects/vwml-the-full-english/vwml-full-english-collectors.

51 Fañch Postic (ed.), *La Bretagne et la littérature orale en Europe* (Mellac and Brest, 1999).

52 For a detailed consideration of the effects of the collector and collecting methods on the shape and contents of a song collection, see Éva Guillourel, *Barzaz Bro-Leon: Une expérience inédite de collecte en Bretagne* (Rennes and Brest, 2012), pp. 75–107.

message of the songs which they collected, and discouraged other songs from even being heard.⁵³

The central importance of the interaction between informant and collector explains why, in the chapters that follow, a good deal of attention is paid to the latter. But we do not believe that these considerations rule such sources out of court. One can, for example, exaggerate the social distance operating on these occasions. The relationship of the singer to song-collector was not exactly like that between landowner and agricultural labourer, even when the collector was the singer's employer: the labourer might have had to tug his forelock when collecting his wages, but outside particular social situations, such as harvest suppers, he could not be forced to sing. That required a certain intimacy and acceptance. Undoubtedly some singers self-censored songs expressing overt political sentiments for fear of offending patrons, but others were quite happy to shock, mock and otherwise discomfort their interlocutors. It seems plausible that collectors did not always understand such messages, just as the authorities did not necessarily understand the symbolism of rioters' cross-dressing, but nonetheless they wrote the words down. And not all folksong collectors were social tourists: the term does not seem appropriate for the labourer and railway worker Alfred Williams, or for the Breton schoolteacher François-Marie Luzel, whose father was farmer.⁵⁴

A third possibility goes to the heart of the topic set out in our title, calling into question the very existence of a distinctive oral tradition, at least for those regions in which literacy was advanced and plebeians and patricians shared the same language, if not the same language register, as was the case in England.⁵⁵ This argument maintains that it would have been impossible for folksong collectors to discover evidence of an independent oral tradition because the songs they recorded were in reality the product of an urban print culture, distributed from central nodes of production by pedlars and market-place singers. In this scenario the prevalence of smugglers, highwaymen and female soldiers in the folksong repertoire had little to do with a rural cult of social banditry and other forms of rebellion; it was the backwash of urban melodrama.⁵⁶ These heroes had first appeared on stage and were converted into print by commercial merchants of culture. People may have learnt songs from oral performance, and repeated them too, but

53 Dave Harker, *Fakesong: The Manufacture of British 'Folksong', 1700 to the Present Day* (Milton Keynes, 1985); Georgina Boyes, *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology and the English Folk Revival* (Manchester, 1993).

54 On Alfred Williams, see the website of the Alfred Williams Heritage Society: www.alfredwilliams.org.uk/folkhero.html. On Luzel, see Françoise Morvan, *François-Marie Luzel: Enquête sur une expérience de collecte folklorique en Bretagne* (Rennes, 1999).

55 Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture*; Adam Fox and Daniel Woolf (eds), *The Spoken Word: Oral Culture in Britain, 1500–1850* (Manchester, 2002).

56 For a detailed case study, see Nathan Garvey, "'Folkalising' Convicts: A "Botany Bay" Ballad and its Cultural Contexts', *Journal of Australian Studies* 38 (2014): 32–51.

without the underpinning of print, nothing that resembled a tradition could survive. Rather than a distinct, autonomous and subaltern oral culture, folksongs were the products of a homogenised mass culture. The countryside was dependent on the city, and the popular classes were dependent on cultural capitalists: in other words a vision of urban and, for want of a better term, ‘bourgeois’ hegemony.⁵⁷

In this scenario, comparisons with post-colonial ethno-history of the kind outlined above cannot apply. The combination of commercial popular culture with the growth of assertive institutions of social and cultural disciplining in the nineteenth century such as schools, the army and the police, entailed the end of an autochthonous oral tradition. As the rural population migrated to the cities to become factory hands, practices of singing at work were banned by employers, fearful of song’s power to agitate and mobilise.⁵⁸ According to this argument, whatever may have been the case in the early modern period, oral traditions of resistance could not survive into the mid-nineteenth and twentieth centuries when the folklorists and ethnologists, on whom we mostly depend for our evidence, became active.

The case of England may not be typical. In many parts of Europe, including much of the Romanov, Habsburg and Ottoman empires (though a similar situation pertained in parts of France and the United Kingdom too), the official language of the state, of the elites and of the cities, was at odds with that of the rural masses, discouraging the development of a commercial print culture; meanwhile levels of literacy, particularly among speakers of languages that received no official sanction, were not high enough to sustain such an enterprise. Yet the oral cultural expressions of even those populations with limited exposure to written literature in their own tongue nonetheless demonstrate engagement with print culture. As Joutard himself demonstrates for the oral traditions of the Occitan-speaking Camisards he documented, they were intertwined with the circulation of print.⁵⁹ Print networks could spread far and deep among communities where the bulk of the population was illiterate, and their influence is demonstrable even before we consider the role of intermediate institutions such as the Churches.

However, acknowledging this influence is not the same as asserting its dominance. It is a contingent fact of survival that early modern historians

57 One might argue that this was the problem with Eric Hobsbawm’s over enthusiastic use of bandit ballads to illustrate his concept of ‘social banditry’ in *Bandits* (London, 1969). As he had not engaged in significant source criticism, the songs he quoted as the voice of rural communities that supported bandits were, in many cases, composed decades later and hundreds of miles away by urban writers for urban audiences. In the preface to fourth (2001) edition of *Bandits* Hobsbawm admitted his mistake, describing ballads as ‘a very slippery source’. This we argue was an overreaction to the criticism his thesis had received.

58 Marek Korczynski, Michael Pickering and Emma Robertson, *Rhythms of Labour: Music At Work in Britain* (Cambridge, 2013), ch.7: ‘Silenced’.

59 See also Patrick Cabanel, ‘La Guerre des Camisards entre histoire et mémoire: la perpétuelle réinvention du témoignage’, *Dix-huitième siècle* 39 (2007): 211–227.

have devoted most of their attention to the printed expressions of European popular culture – chapbooks, almanacs, cheap woodcut prints and broadside ballads.⁶⁰ These are the documents that are known to have circulated in the period that they are studying: they can be assumed to be relevant. Historians have become adept at reading ‘between the lines’ of these sources too, examining the processes of appropriation and reuse through which elements of a dominant culture, diffused through print, might be refashioned to subaltern ends.⁶¹ This material sits in archives and libraries, it is quantifiable and comparable, and in every way amenable to the types of analysis that historians are taught to apply. But only a minority of historians are trained in fieldwork, that is in the collection of and interpretation of oral material. Unfamiliarity with the methodology is compounded, in the case of historically multilingual territories where the languages of oral traditions differ from those of scholarship, by lack of competence in regional languages. Éamonn Ó Ciardha argues in this volume that Gaelic sources are under-represented in historical research, even though they could enable a complementary analysis to that proposed in the existing Anglocentric literature.

But such considerations do not resolve the problem posed above: where are the oral traditions of resistance to enclosure in England? One possibility is that they are in the archive, but in forms that have so far escaped attention, because they are presented in ways that are too different to the kinds of texts with which historians are familiar. The characteristics of oral traditions, the elements that make them receptive to memorisation and verbal performance, may disguise their qualities as historical sources. We need to grapple with these characteristics if we are to uncover rebel voices.

Interpreting oral traditions

Oral cultural texts feel strange to historians trained to decipher written records. They often appear fragmentary or unfinished, and, unlike print runs, their popularity is difficult to quantify. If historians are to make sense of them, then they will need the help of those scholars, folklorists and anthropologists, who have worked *sur le terrain* with live-and-kicking oral traditions and have developed the methodological tools to interpret them.

60 To cite only some of the earliest and best known studies: Robert Mandrou, *De la culture populaire aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles: la Bibliothèque bleue de Troyes* (Paris, 1964); Geneviève Bollème, *Les almanachs populaires aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles; essai d'histoire sociale* (Paris, 1969); Rudolf Schenda, *Volk ohne Buch: Studien zur Sozialgeschichte der populären Lesestoffe, 1770–1910* (Frankfurt-a-M, 1970); William A. Coupe, *The German Illustrated Broadsheet in the Seventeenth Century: Historical and Iconographical Studies* (Baden-Baden, 1967); Leslie Shepard, *The Broadside Ballad: A Study in Origins and Meaning* (London, 1962).

61 See, for example, Roger Chartier, ‘Culture as Appropriation: Popular Cultural Uses in Early Modern France’, in Steven L. Kaplan (ed.), *Understanding Popular Culture* (Berlin, 1984), pp. 229–253.

We need their guidance because songs, and other oral traditional genres, can be opaque. We have already invoked ‘indirect’ methods, but obliquity is not just a methodology when dealing with oral culture, it is a characteristic in the texts themselves. A spade is not necessarily called a spade; a metaphor, a circumlocution, a kenning is often preferred. Some things were not said openly, they were only ever alluded to.⁶² Youngsters might overhear a reference to an event, which implied a much larger narrative, but the narrative was not delivered as a whole, like a school lesson; it had to be reassembled in each generation from odd inferences. Peasant and lower-class autobiographers mention these types of ‘accidental’ encounters with the history of rebellions and their suppression, and acknowledge the powerful effect it had on them, such as the ‘obscure but deeply rooted memories’ of the ‘Bonnets Rouges’ of 1675 that shaped the landscape for Pierre Jakez Hélias in 1920s Brittany.⁶³ They knew this was dangerous stuff, and so even being given a chink of knowledge was a form of initiation. Not narrating a story might seem to guarantee its disappearance, but we suspect that many readers will recognise from their own families that the secrets surrounded by meaningful looks and the odd knowing word are the ones best remembered.

It feels almost as if taboos surrounded the discussion of certain subjects, such as revolts. And if we turn to the anthropological literature we can find examples where the term is applicable. The Maroons of Surinam, for example, maintain histories of the slave rebellions that emancipated them from the coastal plantations and enabled them to form separate tribal identities in the forested interior. However, when the anthropologist Richard Price attempted to write these histories, he had to assemble them from fragments, snippets of conversation usually held in secret and on liminal occasions. The Maroons whom he interviewed treated the stories with enormous caution – the words themselves were dangerous, they evoked powerful ancestors.⁶⁴ Even if we cannot point to similar rituals of circumspection in Europe – not even in the case of memories which lay under a formal interdiction – there are parallels. On occasions where the extirpation of rebel memories seems, at least to the enquiring authorities, to have been completely successful, they suddenly re-surface in odd phrases, a personal or collective nickname, or a toponym.⁶⁵ Taboos, by their nature, evoke the very thing which they attempt to conceal.

62 Barre Toelken, *Morning Dew and Roses: Nuance, Metaphor and Meaning in Folksongs* (Urbana, IL, 1995).

63 Pierre Jakez Hélias, *Le cheval d'orgueil: mémoires d'un Breton du pays bigouden* (Paris, 1975), p. 479. Historical geographers have argued that the political map of Brittany from the Revolution to the late twentieth century is partly explained by memories of this revolt: Jean Meyer and R. Dupuy, ‘Bonnets rouges et blancs bonnets’, *Annales de Bretagne* 82 (1975): 405–426.

64 Richard Price, *First-Time: The Historical Vision of an Afro-American People* (Baltimore, MD, 1983).

65 Vincent Challet, ‘Peasants’ Revolts Memories: *Damnatio Memoriae* or Hidden Memories?’, in Lucie Doležalová (ed.), *The Making of Memory in the Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2010), pp. 397–410.

Early collectors frequently drew analogies between oral traditions and the monumental vestiges of the past: ‘fragments’ in the words of James MacPherson, famed for his discovery of Ossianic poetry in Highland oral song; ‘reliques’ in the words of Thomas Percy, his English rival.⁶⁶ From the surviving relics one could infer a lost whole, just as the archaeologist could reconstruct lost buildings from their buried remnants.⁶⁷ But what was considered fragmentary by collectors was not necessarily perceived as incomplete by narrators and singers, for the allusions were sufficient to convey meaning, whereas a full statement might be dangerous.⁶⁸ In communities where the descendants of winners and losers, the beneficiaries and victims of enclosure or forfeiture of property, not only had to see each every day but continued in an unequal social relationship as lord and tenant or employer and employee, stories of rebellion and lost entitlements would raise very powerful emotions. Being presented with an incontrovertible narrative of injustice in the past would all but force one to seek justice in the present. Anger, jealousy, guilt, reverence for one’s forebears, these feelings are difficult to control once invoked. To survive in such a society, one cannot live in a constant state of rage and hope; better then only to speak of these things at demarcated times and in demarcated settings.

Alternatively one might convert them into genre forms like jokes or songs, which invited different reactions but which also facilitated their memorisation and transmission.⁶⁹ Take for example the joke, which has regularly turned up in newspapers, stand-up routines, novels, memoirs and economic treatises on private property since the late nineteenth century. An English lord discovers a poacher snaring game on his land:

LORD: How dare you come on my land, sir?
 POACHER: Your land! How do you make that out?
 LORD: Because I inherited it from my father.
 POACHER: And pray how did he come by it?
 LORD: It descended to him from his ancestors.
 POACHER: But tell me how they came by it?
 LORD: Why, they fought for it and won it of course.
 POACHER (Taking off his coat): Then by – I’ll fight you for it.⁷⁰

66 James MacPherson, *Fragments of Ancient Poetry, Collected in the Highlands of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1760); Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (London, 1765).

67 Nelly Blanchard, *Barzaz-Breiz: une fiction pour s’inventer* (Rennes, 2006), pp. 59–79.

68 Mary-Ann Constantine and Gerald Porter, *Fragments and Meaning in Traditional Song: From the Blues to the Baltic* (Oxford, 2003).

69 On the aesthetics of ‘the art of memory’ see Philippe Joutard, *Histoire et mémoires, conflits et alliance* (Paris, 2013), pp. 14–15.

70 There are many versions of this comic interaction: this one was taken from the *South Wales Daily News* for 1 November, 1897, p. 3. Authorship is sometimes credited to Henry George (1839–1897), an American land reformer.

This story is hardly a treatise on the concept of the Norman Yoke and the English Game Laws, and indeed one reason why this joke has endured is that its moral can be applied to all kinds of other situations (farmer and rambler, white settler and displaced indigene ...); nor does it invite the listener to do anything very serious about the outrageously unequal distribution of landownership in England. But a point has been made, and, because of its form, remembered.

Oral culture is allusive: traditions may not be about what they appear to be about. We do not here refer to the practice of encoding subversive messages in apparently innocuous form, like the chapattis (loaves of unleavened bread) that were passed hand-to-hand and village-to-village over large stretches of India in the months preceding the Great Indian Rebellion of 1857, much to the puzzlement and alarm of British officials.⁷¹ That such coded practices occurred we do not doubt, though we have our suspicions concerning some reinterpretations. For example, there was a trend to see every Irish song, whatever the overt subject, as a cryptic rebel anthem. So all-embracing was this reappropriation that it even took up cod Irish imitations, satires aimed at perceived Irish characteristics of sentimentality and provincialism which had been performed on the Victorian stage in Britain (but not disdained in Ireland either). The song *Nell Flaherty's Drake*, for example, the lament of a poor Irish widow for a beloved duck, which on the surface appears to be a comedic ballad, has been taken up by Irish nationalist singers as a disguised reference to the executed revolutionary Robert Emmet.⁷² That it was originally intended to be so we think unlikely, but a song sung by a Nationalist singer to a Nationalist audience, effectively becomes a rebel anthem through its recontextualisation. The meaning of a song lies not in the words, but in the communicative intention of the singer and the reception of the audience. The song *We'll Meet Again*, originally a wartime song of lovers parting, takes on a very different meaning when sung in court to a supergrass by the men he has helped to convict (as in Stephen Frears's film *The Hit*).

Songs, and also other oral genres, have the power to evoke associations, engender emotions and mobilise crowds to actions that have little to do with their actual content. The song *Els Segadors* (The Reapers), now the official national anthem of Catalonia, started life as a work song celebrating the

71 Mike Dash, 'Pass It On: The Secret That Preceded the Indian Rebellion of 1857': [www.smithsonianmag.com/history/pass-it-on-the-secret-that-preceded-the-indian-rebellion-of-1857-105066360/?no-ist?](http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/pass-it-on-the-secret-that-preceded-the-indian-rebellion-of-1857-105066360/?no-ist)

72 Julia Anne Stevens, 'Political Animals: Somerville and Ross and Percy French on Edwardian Ireland', in Brian Cliff and Nicholas Grene (eds), *Synge and Edwardian Ireland* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 110–115. The assumption that the song is a covert political protest is regularly repeated, for instance on the National Library of Scotland's *The Word on the Street* website: <http://digital.nls.uk/broadsides/broadside.cfm/id/15144>. No evidence that the composer or original audiences in the 1850s and the 1860s understood it as such is ever provided.

strength and ardour (and not just in the field) of gangs of migrant reapers. It is not a specifically Catalan song; versions exist also in Spanish, Portuguese and Occitan. A more militant version was certainly popular during ‘The Reapers War’, the Catalan Revolt of 1640–1652, though the version banned through much of the twentieth century, an explicit call for Catalan freedom, only dates from the Catalan *Renaixença* of the late nineteenth century. Yet even this reworking still retains elements of the earlier, occupational song.⁷³

The opposite is also true: the content of a song or a story may be unequivocally about rebellions, but that does not mean that the text itself conveys a rebel message. In 1938 the Auvergne lexicographer Albert Dauzat published some texts from his grandfather’s manuscript songbook. They included one entitled *Alleluia*, which offered a detailed description, naming leaders and victims and locations, of the Parisian ‘Journée de Barricades’ (26 August 1648) during the Fronde. Dauzat could not offer an explanation for the continued popularity of this particular rebel song over 200 years (and more than 300 miles from the Palais Royal), but it was known in other parts of France as well. Presumably the singers were not partisans of the Parlement of Paris: perhaps it was the sense of involvement in national affairs, of knowledge of ‘les grands’ and where they lived in the capital that gave this song its appeal.⁷⁴ Likewise we suspect that many British readers could sing, or at least whistle *The Skye Boat Song*, *Lillibullero*, *Men of Harlech* and perhaps even *Trelawney* without having any Jacobite, Orangeist, Welsh or Cornish nationalist sympathies. Songs from divided pasts do not necessarily provoke divisions in the present; sometimes they become the foci of a shared nostalgia, of legitimate but unthreatening regional sentiment. Or they can be completely reappropriated: the ballad concerning the death of Jean Jan, originally a homage to a Breton Royalist hero killed by Republican soldiers and diligently spread through the region by clerical interests, was subsequently taken up by Socialists and sung during electoral campaigns with the aim of mocking the Catholic right.⁷⁵

Oral cultures do use dissimulation and circumlocution, habits which may originate in fear of retribution or of antagonising one’s interlocutors. However the allusive style is a marked feature of oral cultures even when no obvious threat pertains: hence, no doubt, the pleasure of the riddle – an oral genre that seldom makes the transition into written culture. It is worth noting that ‘small’ oral traditional genres – such as riddles, skipping

73 Josep Massot i Muntaner, Salvador Pueyo and Oriol Martorell, *Els Segadors: Himne nacional de Catalunya* (Barcelona, 1983). We are grateful to our colleague Joana Fraga for explaining the history of this song to us.

74 Albert Dauzat, ‘Contribution à la littérature orale de la Basse-Auvergne’, *L’Auvergne littéraire* 92 (1938): 41–42.

75 Éva Guillorel, ‘Folksongs, Conflicts and Social Protest in Early Modern France’, in Dieuwke van der Poel, Louis Peter Grijp and Wim van Anrooij (eds), *Identity, Intertextuality, and Performance in Early Modern Song Culture* (Leiden, 2016), pp. 302–304.

rhymes, *blasons populaires*, traditional threats (such as bogeymen), lullabies, toasts and proverbs – which have often attracted less attention from antiquarians and folklorists, nonetheless contain rebel traditions. On the Hebrides, twentieth-century lullabies, reutilising elements from the lament tradition, allude to the feud between clans Campbell and MacGregor in 1570.⁷⁶ Lullabies reference Oliver Cromwell’s invasion as well as the 1798 Rebellion in twentieth-century Ireland.⁷⁷ However, such indications can be so veiled and attenuated that only an insider, with knowledge of the persons and events referred to, can make sense of them. Who but a local could understand the traditional cry, addressed to inhabitants of Arbori in Corsica, of ‘Arburi, Arburi, vintidui!’, a reference to the twenty-two members of the family of the Corsican rebel knight Raffè de Leca executed after the Genoese captured the castle of Castaldu (near Arbori) in 1456?⁷⁸

Historians of oral culture are, therefore, obliged to interpret metaphors and penetrate disguises. The message may lie less in the words of a song than in the tune: melodies such as *Derry down*, as Gerald Porter demonstrates in this volume, were often reutilised for songs of contestation.⁷⁹ The tune for Dauzat’s song of the Fronde, derived from a hymn *O filii et filiae*, was likewise regularly adopted for songs of political contestation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁸⁰ A tune alone could issue a challenge, as observers in London felt in October 1887 when they watched a parade of 50,000 unemployed whistling the *Marseillaise*.⁸¹ However, that does not mean that every occasion on which these tunes were heard carried an implicit threat. When Peter Houlihan was arrested in Dublin in 1844 for singing *Who Fears*

76 Martin MacGregor, “‘Surely One of the Greatest Poems Ever Made in Britain’: The Lament for Griogair Ruadh MacGregor of Glen Strae and its Historical Background”, in Edward J. Cowan and Douglas Gifford (eds), *The Polar Twins: Scottish History and Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh, 1999), pp. 114–153.

77 Beiner, *Remembering the Year of the French*, pp. 90–104; Seán Ó Súilleabháin, ‘Oliver Cromwell in Irish Oral Tradition’, in Linda Dégh, Henry Glassie and Felix J. Oinas (eds), *Folklore Today: A Festschrift for Richard M. Dorson* (Bloomington, IN, 1976), pp. 473–483.

78 Paul Arrighi, ‘Esprit de clocher et surnoms collectifs en Corse’, *Arts et Traditions Populaires* 4 (1956): 289–308.

79 For a comparable example of meaning conveyed, or at least evoked, by reappropriation of a popular melody, see Paul Dennant, ‘The “Barbarous Old English Jig”: The “Black Joke” in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries’, *Folk Music Journal* 10 (2013): 298–318.

80 Claude Grasland, ‘Chansons et vie politique à Paris sous la Régence’, *Revue d’Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine* 37 (1990): 537–570.

81 This element of the marches that culminated in the original ‘Bloody Sunday’ on 11 October 1887 was much commented on at the time in the newspapers. Whistling the *Marseillaise* also turns up in novels as a means of introducing a seditious note in class relations, but for some real-life instances see Simon Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia, PA, 1997), ch. 5. A French newspaper, *Le Voleur illustré*, reported on 23 July 1891 that an Alsatian farmer was prosecuted by the German authorities for whistling the *Marseillaise*, only to claim in court that he was whistling the *March of the Brunswick Hussars* (effectively the same tune). However, we suspect this story is a *canard*.

to *Speak of '98?* (a reference to the United Irishmen's Rebellion of 1798), the defendant claimed he merely intended the local constable, whose collar number happened to be 98B.⁸² To understand what meaning was conveyed by a song on any particular occasion, or rather what meanings for there may have been more than one, one must pay as much attention to the context as to the text. Unfortunately, some historians have tended to pick on texts and derived meaning from the words alone without consideration of the occasion and audience for whom they were intended. This can lead to unsatisfying interpretations.⁸³

Mutability of meaning is an unsettling trait, and it goes some way to explaining why oral cultural sources have been neglected, even disdained, by historians. There are other reasons: even in the case of oral testimonies collected soon after the events concerned, historians worry about hearsay, uncorroborated claims, or the often overt attempt to twist the story towards some propagandistic end. A song about the execution of a rebel *feels* more tendentious than the judicial record or a newspaper account. Of course in this instance we are simply being manipulated by rhetorical practices that convey the impression of objectivity and discernment in the latter. There is no *a priori* reason to think that the song composed at the time is less accurate than other sources narrating the same event. Each type of source has its own genre rules, and while it is true that execution ballads resemble each other across time and country, the same is true of newspaper accounts too.⁸⁴ For example, the Flemish ballad sung by the Bruges lacemaker Catherine Beyaert in the 1860s describing the execution of the rebel Duke of Monmouth in 1685, tallies at almost every point with contemporary accounts.⁸⁵ The difference is that, as a genre, the appreciation of songs seldom relies on their accuracy. While they may have documentary value, that is not usually the reason why people perform songs. Songs are more often associated with pleasure than with knowledge exchange. Even in the twelfth century, after the chronicler Henry of Huntingdon had included the song of *The Battle of Brunanburh* in his *Historia Anglorum* he felt the need to add 'Having interposed these words for the sake of refreshment, let us return to history'.⁸⁶ Beyaert did not

82 Katie Barclay, 'Singing, Performance, and Lower-Class Masculinity in the Dublin Magistrates' Court, 1820–1850', *Journal of Social History* 47 (2014): 746–768.

83 See, for example, the remarks on French oral traditional songs in Jean-Louis Flandrin, *Les amours paysannes (XVIIe–XIXe siècle)* (Paris, 1975), p. 15.

84 Tom Cheesman, *The Shocking Ballad Picture Show: German Popular Literature and Cultural History* (Oxford, 1994); Una McLivenna, 'The Power of Music: The Significance of Contrafactum in Execution Ballads', *Past and Present* 229 (2015): 47–89.

85 Adolf Lootens and Jean-Marie-Eusèbe Feys, *Chants populaires flamands avec les airs notés et poésies populaires recueillies à Bruges* (Bruges, 1879), pp. 75–79. Lootens does not name his source, but it is almost certain that the singer of this song, and all the others, was his mother.

86 Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum* (c. 1154), quoted in Karl Reichl, *Singing the Past: Turkic and Medieval Heroic Poetry* (Ithaca, NY, 2000), p. 50.

sing her song as a lesson in the history of the British Isles in the seventeenth century; she sang it as a way of passing the time while making lace, having learnt it decades before in a lace school. Justifying the public death of this Protestant hero was, perhaps, a badge of her stalwart Catholic identity, but she also revelled in the gruesome details, the five blows of Jack Ketch's axe.⁸⁷ Our difficulty is that too often we have little information concerning both the performer and the performance, and without this contextual information one can only speculate on what was being communicated and to whom.

The aesthetics of memory: conservation, transmission, circulation and reinterpretation

One might readily accept that an oral text circulating at the time of the events to which it refers, and noted soon after, has evidential value for historians, but in this volume we are putting our faith on songs that, in order to survive into a period where they were judged worthy of recording, had to be repeated and repeated across generations. Yet we know that memory is fickle, and much may be forgotten, suppressed, misheard and misinterpreted.

Perhaps more pertinent are the very mechanisms through which experience and events are transformed, in oral cultures, into memorable texts, into literature in other words. These mechanisms are so regular, and so widely distributed, that they have even been termed by specialists 'laws': the law of 'two to a scene'; the law of 'tripling' (things come in threes – 'three ships come sailing by' ...); – these threes invoke another law, that of 'repetition with progressive ascent'; the law of 'contrast' (the differences between protagonists will be massively inflated); the law of 'concentration on a leading character' ... there are many others.⁸⁸ If such laws are universal, how can they represent the historically particular? Singers and narrators of oral traditions also draw on a learnt set of stock images, plot devices, familiar metaphors, to construct their songs. All heroines have slender waists, all lips are full, all cheeks are rosy, all candles are golden, all orphans are wretched, all seas are deep, and so on.⁸⁹

Let us take, as an example, an oral epic poem; epics are a rare genre in Europe but because of their perceived aesthetic qualities they have drawn

87 Gruesomeness is a feature of lacemakers' songs: see David Hopkin, 'Lacemakers and Old Songs, in Olney and Elsewhere', *The Cowper and Newton Journal* 5 (2015): 3–18.

88 Axel Olrik, *Principles for Oral Narrative Research* (Bloomington, IN, 1992), pp. 41–61. His 'Eposche Gesetze der Volksdichtung' were first published in 1909.

89 The classic account of how oral texts can be constructed from such regular patterning and commonplaces is Albert B. Lord's study of the Serbian heroic song tradition: *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, 1960). For an application (not uncriticised) of this oral-formulaic theory to Scottish balladry, see David Buchan, *The Ballad and the Folk* (London and Boston, MA, 1972). For an examination of the use of clichéd motifs in French song see Jean-Michel Guilcher, *La chanson folklorique de langue française: La notion et son histoire* (Paris, 1989), pp. 108–137.

far more attention from scholars than the more common legends and anecdotes. Edigu was a late medieval rebel against the Khan of the Golden Horde, and the founder of the Nogai Horde which at one time laid claim to large stretches of southern Russia and central Asia. He is claimed as an ancestor by a number of contemporary ethnic groups. Edigu's rule is known to historians from Russian and other chronicles; he is also the subject of an oral epic, over 6,000 lines in length, which has been recorded in the twentieth century (for the first time in 1903) from communities dispersed along a line between Bulgaria and the borders of China. According to the leading scholar of Turkic epic poetry, Karl Reichl, the texts are not uniform, but they do share some characteristics. Our summary comes from the version performed by Jumabay Bazarov, a Karalkalpak singer, in the 1980s and 1990s, and recorded by Reichl. Although the epic is about Edigu (or in this case Edige), it starts not with the hero but with his great-great grandfather, a shepherd, who found a skull with an inscription written on it. He ground this up and hid it, but his daughter, thinking it was flour, tasted it, and became pregnant. Her son was Barkaya. When he was young the Khan of the region had a terrible dream in which he was torn to pieces by dogs, which neither he nor his viziers could interpret: word was sent out throughout the land to find a man who could discover the dream's meaning (implicitly it had to be a man with no father). Barkaya told the Khan that the dream meant that his viziers were plotting with his wife to kill him. Barkaya then went hunting: he spied some swans alighting on a lake, but then removing their swan skins and becoming maidens to bathe. Barkaya fell in love with one of them and hid her swan pelt. As she could not fly away with her sisters she agreed to marry him, and the pair had a child. However, one time when Barkaya came home he found the boy crying on his own: his wife had rediscovered the swan pelt and flown away, for ever. The crying boy would prove to be Edigu's father, who in turn would marry a fairy. This is an example of the law of tripling: three generations of miraculous births: it is also an example of 'copia', or redundancy, another characteristic, if not a law, of oral traditions.⁹⁰ Anyone familiar with European medieval literature (or the Bible) will recognise several motifs in the story so far: Barkaya's genealogy is similar to that related in Welsh medieval manuscripts for Myrddin Emrys (Merlin Ambrosius) and the bard Taliesin, both of whom also interpret dreams for their lords; swan maidens appear in the Norse Poetic *Edda* and in the ancestry of Godefroy de Bouillon, first ruler of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem, as well as in folktales.⁹¹

As a source for the historical Edigu, this oral epic poses manifest problems. It is not just that historians are unlikely to admit the supernatural elements,

90 Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London, 1982).

91 Reichl, *Singing the Past*; Karl Reichl, *Edige: A Karalkalpak Heroic Epic as Performed by Jumabay Bazarov* (Helsinki, 2007).