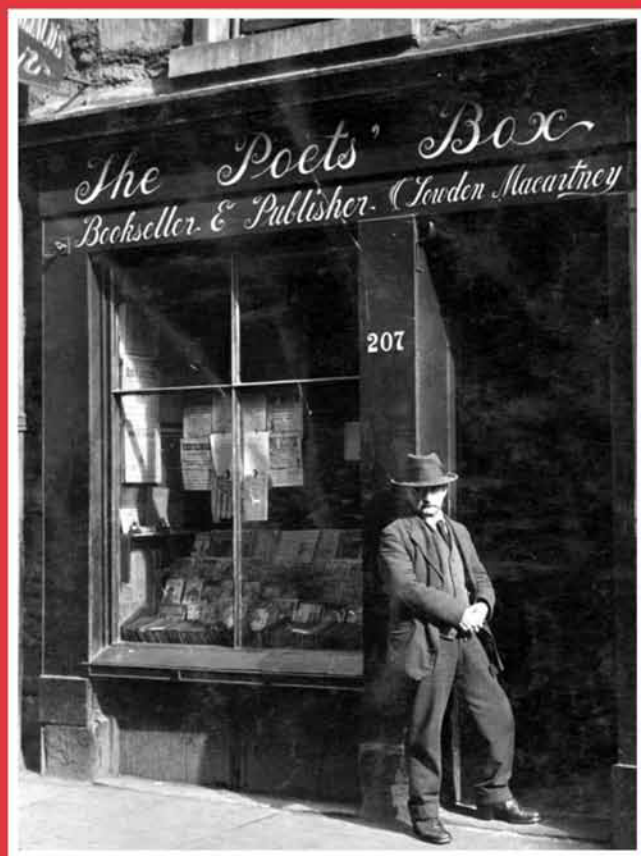


EDITED BY
DAVID ATKINSON
AND STEVE ROUD



STREET BALLADS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN, IRELAND, AND NORTH AMERICA

The Interface between Print and Oral Traditions



STREET BALLADS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN, IRELAND, AND NORTH AMERICA

In recent years, the assumption that traditional songs originated from a primarily oral tradition has been challenged by research into ‘street literature’ – that is, the cheap printed broadsides and chapbooks that poured from the presses of jobbing printers from the late sixteenth century until the beginning of the twentieth. Not only are some traditional singers known to have learned songs from printed sources, but most of the songs were composed by professional writers and reached the populace in printed form. *Street Ballads in Nineteenth-Century Britain, Ireland, and North America* engages with the long-running debate over the origin of traditional songs by examining street literature’s interaction with, and influence on, oral traditions.

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Street Ballads in
Nineteenth-Century Britain,
Ireland, and North America
The Interface between Print and Oral Traditions

Edited by

DAVID ATKINSON
and
STEVE ROUD

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Notes on Contributors

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Martin Graebe is a singer, songwriter, and researcher into traditional song. He is an authority on the life and work of pioneering song collector Sabine Baring-Gould, who was the first to collect the songs sung by the ordinary people of Devon and Cornwall. Martin's own songs include many that have become 'standards' in the modern folk repertoire and have been recorded by a number of well-respected performers. As a singer he now works in partnership with Shan Graebe. Their repertoire includes many songs taken from the Baring-Gould manuscripts, as well as songs that Martin has written. Their second CD together, *Dusty Diamonds*, was released in 2008.

Anna Kearney Guigné is an independent folklorist specializing in ethnomusicology. She gained her PhD from Memorial University of Newfoundland, where she is a fellow of the School of Graduate Studies and an adjunct professor in the School of Music. She is the author of *Folksongs and Folk Revival: The Cultural Politics of Kenneth Peacock's Songs of the Newfoundland Outports* (2008), and is currently working on a new publication based on the unpublished portion of Peacock's song collection. Among her other publications are a new introduction to Gerald S. Doyle's *Old Time Songs and Poetry of Newfoundland* (2004), a new foreword (with Neil V. Rosenberg) to Elisabeth Greenleaf and Grace Yarrow Mansfield's *Ballads and Sea Songs of Newfoundland* (2004), and a chapter in *Post-Colonial Distances: The Study of*

Popular Music in Australia and Canada. She was artistic director for the North Atlantic Fiddle Convention (NAFCo) in 2008 and co-edited the volume *Crossing Over: Fiddle and Dance Studies from around the North Atlantic 3* (2010). In 2011 she curated the exhibition ‘Maud Karpeles (1885–1976): A Retrospective of her Newfoundland Fieldwork, 1929 and 1930’.

Ffion Mair Jones is a Research Fellow at the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies. She is author of a study of the work of Glamorgan stonemason and poet Iolo Morganwg, and co-editor of the three-volume edition of his correspondence. She has written numerous articles on Welsh ballads, and her *Welsh Ballads of the French Revolution* was published by the University of Wales Press in 2012. She is also interested in the Welsh ballad’s sister art-form, the interlude or folk play, and has edited a play on the British civil wars of the seventeenth century and, more recently, a play responding to the tumultuous events of the French Revolution.

John Moulden is the former principal (head teacher) of an integrated (interdenominational) primary school, who now devotes himself to song research. After substantial research into the oral song tradition, especially in connection with the extensive Sam Henry ‘Songs of the People’ collection, and into songs in ephemeral print, he completed a PhD thesis titled ‘The Printed Ballad in Ireland: A Guide to the Popular Printing of Songs in Ireland, 1760–1920’, in 2006. A singer and a frequent lecturer at song festivals in Ireland and abroad (his 2007 Library of Congress lecture ‘North American Influence on a North Ireland Song Collection’ is available online), he has had many articles published in academic and popular journals and intends to continue performing, writing, and researching into his dotage.

Roy Palmer has been writing since the 1970s on folklore, folk song, and street ballads. The most recent of his books is *Working Songs: Industrial Ballads and Poetry from Britain and Ireland, 1780s–1980s* (Tadmorden: Herron Publishing, 2010); his long essay, *Crimea: The Last Ballad War* (London: Cecil Woolf), is due out in 2014. During a long period of living in Birmingham, where he became head of a comprehensive school, he explored the city library’s extensive holdings of street ballads, then sought further examples of the imprints elsewhere in the country. Since 1981 he has been a member of the editorial board of the *Folk Music Journal*. In 2004 he received both the Gold Badge of the EFDSS and the Open University’s honorary degree of MUniv.

Tom Pettitt is a Research Professor (affiliate) under the University of Southern Denmark’s Institute of Cultural Sciences, and is concurrently a Senior Research Associate at its Centre for Medieval Literature. His research explores English and European folk traditions of narrative, song, and drama, and their relationships with conventional literary and theatre history. In addition to specific projects, this

work is currently coalescing around the idea of a ‘Gutenberg Parenthesis’ in media history, which suggests the relevance of medieval and folk traditions in a world that is in many ways restoring conditions obtaining before the rise of the printed book.

Steve Roud is a retired local studies librarian and now a freelance writer and researcher in folklore studies. Previous publications include *A Dictionary of English Folklore* (2000), *The English Year* (2006), *Lore of the Playground* (2010), and the *New Penguin Book of English Folk Songs* (2012). He is also the compiler of several online resources including the Roud Folk Song Index and Broadside Index, and is currently working closely with both the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library and the Bodleian Library to get major folk song and street literature collections catalogued and available online.

Peter Wood has been involved in folk music for more than fifty years, and has lived and sung on Tyneside for the last forty of them. He has worked as a solo singer and with several groups, including The High Level Ranters and The Keelers. He was also part of Pinch of Salt, a sub-group of The Keelers formed to record settings of the sea poems of Cicely Fox-Smith. Since retirement as a lecturer in Genetics, he has written an article on the evolution of the song ‘John Barleycorn’ for *Folk Music Journal* (2004), a book on *The Elliots of Birtley* (2008), as well as various magazine articles. Recently he has written on Tyneside songs, out of which has come his current interest in Newcastle chapbooks and broadsides.

Chris Wright is an ethnologist and traditional singer, originally from Dundee and now based in Edinburgh. He has a long-standing interest in The Poet’s Box, a nineteenth- and twentieth-century Dundee broadside publisher, and has been researching its influence on oral tradition for several years. He has been uniquely placed to assess this influence through his cataloguing for the landmark Kist o Riches project of tens of thousands of field recordings made by the School of Scottish Studies in Edinburgh. He has also collected traditional songs from his native area and is the founder and organizer of The World’s Room traditional singers’ club in Edinburgh.

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Note on Terminology, Sources, Abbreviations, Collections, and Citations

Terminology

A number of the terms used in this volume will benefit from some clarification, even if exact definition is not always possible:

Broadside – a single sheet of paper printed on one side, with text in verse or prose, frequently illustrated with a woodcut image. Examples exist of broadsides printed on both sides, sometimes referred to as ‘broadsheets’, but these are relatively rare. Songs printed in broadside format were known as ‘ballets’ or ‘ballads’ from an early date.

Chapbook – a small book comprising a single sheet of paper folded into a booklet, most commonly of between eight and 24 pages and of correspondingly small dimensions, issued without stitching, binding, or added cover. Chapbooks provided a common format for both prose and verse, especially in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; where songs were printed in chapbooks they were generally very similar in kind to those printed on broadsides. Chapbooks were often sold by itinerant peddlars or ‘chapmen’, the name from which the term ‘chapbook’ is, apparently, derived by a back-formation.

Garland – the word ‘garland’ (first used by Thomas Deloney in the late sixteenth century) is used in titles to describe some early collections of songs, or long songs in several parts, in both broadside and chapbook format. Later, the term continued to appear in chapbook titles, and is sometimes used more or less synonymously with ‘chapbook’.

Slip song – a single song printed on a narrow piece of paper, often formed by cutting a larger broadside into two or more strips.

Songster – a particularly ambiguous word, used by modern scholars to designate a small, paper-covered book of songs, usually more substantial than a chapbook. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the term was applied both to these small songbooks and to some larger ones (such as *The Universal Songster*, eventually issued in three substantial volumes containing nearly 5,000 songs).

Sources

At the time of writing, the pioneer site for digitized broadsides created by the Bodleian Library has just undergone a complete overhaul, offering access to digital images of over thirty thousand ballads from the Bodleian's collections: <<http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/>>.

Digital images from other major collections, including the Euing, Pepys, and Roxburghe Ballads, can be accessed via the English Broadside Ballad Archive (EBBA) hosted by the University of California, Santa Barbara: <<http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/>>.

The proprietary databases Early English Books Online (EBBO) and Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO), currently accessible only via an institutional subscription, also contain large numbers of digital images of broadsides and chapbooks. Libraries such as the British Library and the National Library of Scotland hold large numbers of broadsides and chapbooks, which are not all contained within specific named collections. A selection of the National Library of Scotland's broadsides are online: <<http://digital.nls.uk/broadsides/>>.

The Full English Digital Archive, which contains digital images of numerous folk song collections and several broadside collections (Lucy Broadwood, Frank Kidson, Cecil Sharp, Ralph Vaughan Williams), the Roud Folk Song Index and Broadside Index, and the Street Literature Printers' Register, which lists broadside and chapbook printers' names, addresses, and dates, are all hosted by the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library: <<http://www.vwml.org.uk/>>.

The English Short Title Catalogue (ESTC) provides an invaluable source for identifying and dating specific broadside and chapbook items up to c.1800: <<http://estc.bl.uk/>>.

The British Book Trade Index (BBTI) currently at <<http://www.bbti.bham.ac.uk/>> and Scottish Book Trade Index (SBTI) at <<http://www.nls.uk/catalogues/scottish-book-trade-index>> cover a wide range of print trade personnel and are useful for dating broadsides and chapbooks.

Abbreviations, Collections, and Citations

Reference numbers

Child numbers: reference numbers for items in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, ed. Francis James Child, 5 vols (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1882–98), searchable in the Roud Folk Song Index and Broadside Index

ESTC: reference numbers for items in the English Short Title Catalogue <<http://estc.bl.uk/>>

Full English Digital Archive: reference numbers for items accessible via <<http://www.vwml.org.uk/>>

Roud numbers: reference numbers for items in the Roud Folk Song Index and Broadside Index <<http://www.vwml.org.uk/>>

Collections

Bodleian Library, Broadside Ballads Online: <<http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/>>

Cecil Sharp Broadside Collection: via Full English Digital Archive <<http://www.vwml.org.uk/>>

Euing Ballads: via English Broadside Ballad Archive <<http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/>>

Frank Kidson Broadside Collection: via Full English Digital Archive <<http://www.vwml.org.uk/>>

Madden Collection: Cambridge University Library, Sir Frederic Madden's Collection of Broadside Ballads (microfilm copies available at the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library and elsewhere)

Pepys Ballads: via English Broadside Ballad Archive <<http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/>>

Roxburghe Ballads: via English Broadside Ballad Archive <<http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/>>

The bibliographic citation of broadside and chapbook ballads can rapidly become extremely complicated. The following approach has been devised with the intention both of achieving a degree of consistency throughout this book, and of creating a reasonably simple system that can be applied to further discussions of street literature.

The titles of broadside ballads are given in italics and punctuated and capitalized according to standard conventions without any attempt to reproduce the (sometimes idiosyncratic) original typography (e.g. *Bateman's Tragedy; or, The Perjur'd Bride Justly Rewarded; The Distressed Ship-Carpenter*). Broadside ballads are treated in this manner even where there is more than one ballad printed on a sheet (which are sometimes 'slip songs' intended to be separated, although that is not always the case). The titles of chapbooks are italicized (e.g. *The Rambler's Garland*). Where it is necessary to cite the title of an individual item from a chapbook, it is given in Roman type within quotation marks (e.g. 'The Distressed Ship Carpenter', in *The Rambler's Garland*) – in practice, however, it is frequently possible to avoid

such citations simply by referring to the chapbook and the relevant page numbers. The titles of ballad ‘types’ at large, and also of oral versions, are given in Roman type within quotation marks. Although there are occasions where the application of such a system does require some fine judgement, it is generally workable and intuitive, and the resultant discussion is sufficiently clear.

Broadside and chapbook imprints are cited in a standard bibliographic form (place of publication: bookseller/printer, date). A majority of extant broadsides and chapbooks are undated, and the dates provided within square brackets are mostly derived from the English Short Title Catalogue (ESTC) for items up to *c.*1800, the Street Literature Printers’ Register, and the Bodleian Library catalogue. Where appropriate, such dates take account of the street address and/or other information found in the imprint, but this is generally not cited so as to avoid an unseemly proliferation of bibliographic information. Wherever possible, in order to assist identification, exemplars of the items cited are identified by ESTC number and/or reference to a copy in one or more of the major library collections (within square brackets).

Note: All web addresses were accessed prior to publication on 19 March 2014 and were valid at that date.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Steve Roud

Street literature, including the broadside and chapbook ballads that are the subject of this volume, has been attracting an increasing amount of scholarly attention in recent years. Cultural, social, and literary historians have mined it for evidence of attitudes to crime, politics, religion and belief, gender roles, popular imagery, and the spread of literacy, and it has become valued as offering one of the best ways to get close to the voice of the man, and woman, in the street and to gain an insight into the popular mentalities of the past.¹ This new attention is more than welcome, but it has largely focused on the earlier period of such printing, from the late sixteenth to the mid-eighteenth century, a period for which not only is there a fair amount of primary material but that material is pretty much under bibliographic and critical control, being relatively well documented, catalogued, reprinted, and, increasingly, available online.² The same, however, cannot be said for the later

¹ See, for example, Jonathan Barry, 'Literacy and Literature in Popular Culture: Reading and Writing in Historical Perspective', in *Popular Culture in England, c.1500–1850*, ed. Tim Harris (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 69–94; Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot: Wildwood House, 1988 [1978]); Bernard Capp, 'Popular Literature', in *Popular Culture in Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. Barry Reay (London: Routledge, 1988 [1985]), pp. 198–243; Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England 1500–1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000); R. A. Houston, *Scottish Literacy and the Scottish Identity: Illiteracy and Society in Scotland and Northern England 1600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Christopher Marsh, *Music and Society in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), esp. chapters 5, 6; Barry Reay, *Popular Cultures in England, 1550–1750* (London: Longman, 1998), pp. 36–70; Margaret Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and its Readership in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Margaret Spufford, 'The Pedlar, the Historian and the Folklorist: Seventeenth Century Communications', *Folklore*, 105 (1994), 13–24; David Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture: England 1750–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

² For resources, see the note prefacing this volume. The best general account of the broadside ballads from this earlier period remains Hyder E. Rollins, 'The Black-Letter Broadside Ballad', *PMLA*, 34 (1919), 258–339. More recent research into early modern ballads is exemplified by work in fields such as gender, criminality, sexuality, and politics. See, for example, Sandra Clark, *Women and Crime in the Street Literature of Early Modern*

eighteenth and especially the nineteenth century, when the seemingly chaotic printing trade produced a huge mass of material which has survived in great numbers but in scattered and largely uncatalogued collections. Street literature printers and distributors often operated under the radar of the legitimate book trade and the subject is difficult to research adequately. For a number of aspects of the trade in this period, we have many more questions than answers.³

In its current phase, the study of this later street literature is a prime example of a field in which investigation at the micro level is still necessary before medium and higher level theories will become feasible, and much of our knowledge is to be gained from a perusal of the items themselves.⁴ The names and addresses of the printers, the individual songs and subjects covered, the woodcuts included, the quality and style of the printing, and the quality of the paper are all very important, and every item is a potential revelation. Our constant worry is not knowing how representative of the genre any individual thing is, because we do not know what proportion has survived or what remains to be discovered. Until all the collections and individual surviving items have been located, identified, catalogued, and indexed, we will always be in the half-light, if not actually in

England. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003); Dianne Dugaw, *Warrior Women and Popular Balladry, 1650–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Vic Gammon, ‘Song, Sex, and Society in England, 1600–1850’, *Folk Music Journal*, 4.3 (1982), 208–45; Angela McShane Jones, ‘“Rime and Reason”: The Political World of the Broadside Ballad, 1640–1689’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, 2004); Joy Wiltenburg, *Disorderly Women and Female Power in the Street Literature of Early Modern England and Germany* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992). For further studies, see the bibliography of ballad criticism on the English Broadside Ballad Archive website.

³ Standard accounts of street literature covering this later period include Robert Collison, *The Story of Street Literature: Forerunner of the Popular Press* (London: Dent, 1973); Victor E. Neuburg, *Popular Literature: A History and Guide* (London: Woburn Press, 1977); Leslie Shepard, *The Broadside Ballad: A Study in Origins and Meaning* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1962); Leslie Shepard, *The History of Street Literature: The Story of Broadside Ballads, Chapbooks, Proclamations, News-sheets, Election Bills, Tracts, Pamphlets, Cocks, Catchpennies, and Other Ephemera* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1973). For Scotland, see Edward J. Cowan and Mike Paterson, *Folk in Print: Scotland’s Chapbook Heritage, 1750–1850* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2007). For two of the most important London printers of street literature, John Pitts (1765–1844) and James Catnach (1792–1841), see Leslie Shepard, *John Pitts: Ballad Printer of Seven Dials, London, 1765–1844* (London: Private Libraries Association, 1969); Charles Hindley, *The Life and Times of James Catnach, (Late of Seven Dials), Ballad Monger* (London: Reeves and Turner, 1878); Charles Hindley, *The History of the Catnach Press, at Berwick-upon-Tweed, Alnwick and Newcastle-upon-Tyne, in Northumberland, and Seven Dials, London* (London: Charles Hindley, 1886). A selection of items from London printers is in Charles Hindley, *Curiosities of Street Literature* (London: Reeves and Turner, 1871).

⁴ See, for example, James Hepburn, *A Book of Scattered Leaves: Poetry of Poverty in Broadside Ballads of Nineteenth-Century England*, 2 vols (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2000–01).

the dark. Nevertheless, an encouraging amount of fundamental work is under way or being planned, and broadsides, chapbooks, and other forms of street literature for the period are being catalogued and made available by the thousands. There were numerous forms of street literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but this volume focuses on one significant category – the broadsides and chapbooks that presented songs to the purchasing public – and one particular area of interest – the interplay between the trade in printed songs and the vernacular, primarily oral, singing traditions that are nowadays subsumed under the term ‘folk song’. In the world of folk song scholarship, this has always been a contentious area, but it is only recently that we have had the tools to tackle it with any degree of confidence.

Outside of that relatively closed world, it might come as something of a surprise that we are still wrangling with the oral/print debate. Writers on popular culture and literacy have mapped out the broad contours of an inexorable, albeit patchy, development of English society from oral to written culture. For example, after summarizing the extent of literacy in society from the sixteenth century onwards, David Vincent comments: ‘Amidst the story-telling and the folk-songs, alongside the customs and rituals, reading and writing had entered the fabric of popular culture.’⁵ Thomas Laqueur puts it more bluntly: ‘For all its maypoles and rough music, its bear baitings and St. Monday drunks, its ancient feasts and more ancient folkways, the popular culture of seventeenth and eighteenth century England was fundamentally literate and thus inexorably bound to the processes and culture of a society beyond the village community.’⁶ Vincent continues: ‘The undefiled oral culture was a victim not of the steam engine but of the Reformation. Whilst it is important to retain the distinction between oral and written means of creating and transmitting ideas, the two modes of communication had been an active presence in the mental universe of the labouring poor for generations before the period of this study.’⁷

Particularly relevant here is Adam Fox’s book on *Oral and Literate Culture in England* (2000), because he cites specific examples of the influence of print on what were later assumed to be purely oral traditions. Fox demonstrates how some local traditions were started, and then perpetuated, by printed materials – and this applies not just to well-known narratives about figures such as Jack the Giant Killer, Robin Hood, and King Arthur, but even at a micro level to local legends linked to geographical features:

Popular tales about the past are constantly being invented and reinvented, changing over time to meet new circumstances and to help make sense of the shifting environment. So much of that tradition recorded by folklorists in rural England during the nineteenth century which was believed to be the bequest of

⁵ Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture*, p. 12.

⁶ Thomas Laqueur, ‘The Cultural Origins of Popular Literacy in England 1500–1850’, *Oxford Review of Education*, 2 (1976), 255–75 (p. 255).

⁷ Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture*, pp. 12–13.

centuries or even millennia was actually of quite recent inception. And most of what was regarded as the pure fruit of oral transmission, unadulterated by the contaminating influence of the written word, was in fact the hybrid product of generations of cross-fertilization between oral, scribal, and printed sources. In this context, as in others, writing was not the threat to oral culture so often assumed by the post-Enlightenment mind. Rather, literary influences fed into the semi-lettered repertoire of the people, nourishing, sustaining, and making anew.⁸

Fox's evidence shows that the progress from oral to literate culture was neither smooth nor predictable. The very stories that he uses to demonstrate the important part played by print would later enter into local oral tradition and continue there to be noted down by later writers and collectors of folklore. It may be possible in certain instances to reveal how a written source created a tradition, but it is not usually feasible to show the relative parts that oral and written traditions played in its subsequent perpetuation, growth, or decline. Indeed, the paradox is that it is only when a tradition was noted 'from a living source' that it can be seen to have had any effect on people at all. Without that evidence, it is quite conceivable that the written account did not, in fact, enter the public consciousness, and the appearance of the same tradition in a later printed work might simply be the result of the new author copying from the old, perhaps decades later, with no one else having taken any notice of it. Neither can we assume an unbroken oral tradition, because the living witness might have read the book just the day before.

Thus it is clear that there never was a strict dichotomy between oral and written, even while the broad trend of development from the former to the latter is clear. Accordingly, the oral/written interface remains a ground of contention, just as it has for the last three or four centuries. In what was probably the first published use of the term 'oral tradition', at the beginning of the seventeenth century the puritan bishop Joseph Hall invoked it to denigrate the oral traditions, legends, and customs of the Church of Rome, in contrast to the scriptural (i.e. written) basis of his own faith: 'As for orall traditions, what certaintie can there be in them? What foundation of truth can be layed upon the breath of man? How doe they multiply in their passage, and either grow, or dye upon the breath of man?'⁹ The same spirit of controversy would remain apparent when thinkers of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment started to advance the idea of oral tradition as a secular phenomenon, underlying the epic poetry of 'primitive' societies.¹⁰

⁸ Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture*, p. 258.

⁹ Joseph Hall, *The Olde Religion* (1628); quoted in Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture*, p. 6.

¹⁰ Nicholas Hudson, "'Oral Tradition': The Evolution of an Eighteenth-Century Concept", in *Tradition in Transition: Women Writers, Marginal Texts, and the Eighteenth-Century Canon*, ed. Alvaro Ribeiro, SJ, and James G. Basker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 161–76; Nicholas Hudson, 'Constructing Oral Tradition: The Origins of the Concept in Enlightenment Intellectual Culture', in *The Spoken Word: Oral Culture in*

Indeed, Nicholas Hudson concludes that the very idea of oral tradition is an essentially literate phenomenon: '[I]t is a society emerging from orality into literacy which is positioned to perceive this difference most distinctly, for such a society has experienced this transition within living memory and will still retain a large body of oral culture in its midst.'¹¹ The debate has continued – to cut a long story short – as romantic folklorists came to regard growing literacy as a bad thing, or at least a sad thing, accompanied by the inevitable loss of what they thought was old and important and valuable; whereas political radicals and working-class social rationalists believed that oral culture, with its traditional tales, superstitious beliefs, and general acquiescence in the status quo acted as a brake on social improvement. Literacy for this latter group was a major weapon in the fight for improvement and social justice; while for social conservatives it was at best a necessary and at worst an unnecessary social evil, spreading both radical ideas and the devalued culture of 'penny dreadfuls' and the like.

It is therefore premature to dismiss the oral/print debate as simply a little local difficulty between neighbouring researchers in the field of folk song, which only those deeply involved in the subject need worry about. For the cultural historian at large, it could be argued that the real value of the late Victorian and Edwardian folk song movement was simply that it helped identify those songs, out of the huge mass of popular and art songs produced by previous generations, that were popular enough to be taken up and passed on informally – i.e. orally – by 'the people'. In many ways, the potential dichotomy of oral vs. print goes to the very heart of folk song scholarship. As many who get hot under the collar about the matter perceive, if folk song can be shown to be contiguous with printed street literature, that threatens to undermine not only more than a hundred years of definition of folk song, but its very existence as a discrete genre encapsulated in the much-used phrase 'the voice of the people'.

To understand the argument in more detail, we must first sketch out the history of folk song collecting and research, primarily in England, but similar patterns have existed in the other parts of Britain and in Ireland. After two major revivals (the so-called 'first' English folk song revival of the late Victorian/Edwardian period, and the 'second' folk revival which followed the Second World War), the heavy involvement of politically motivated enthusiasts, the intermittent interest of the pop music industry, the rise of youth culture, and the powerful emotional pull of recurrent bouts of nationalism, rural romanticism, and environmentalism, the word 'folk' has been stretched so far in all directions as to become virtually meaningless. Depending on their age, the average reader will usually connect the word with guitar-playing protest singers, bearded and tankard-holding folk club floor-singers, pop groups that perform with acoustic instruments, folk groups that

Britain, 1500–1850, ed. Adam Fox and Daniel Woolf (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 240–55.

¹¹ Hudson, 'Constructing Oral Tradition', p. 250.

perform with electric instruments, community choirs, and/or anything vaguely 'Celtic'. None of these post-war manifestations is at all relevant to our discussion.

In this volume we are talking about the song traditions discovered (some revisionists would argue, invented) by late Victorian/Edwardian enthusiasts, among them Sabine Baring-Gould, Lucy Broadwood, Frank Kidson, Cecil Sharp, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Percy Grainger, George Butterworth, and a group of their colleagues and followers.¹² These pioneer collectors discovered a wealth of songs in the minds and mouths of mostly elderly and mostly rural working people, which seemed to operate according to different rules from both the art music and the popular music of the time. The collectors were highly excited by the tunes, and to a lesser extent the words, of these songs and they began to note them down, polish them up for publication, write about them in their journals, and so forth. The Folk-Song Society was formed in 1898, and the English Folk Dance Society in 1911 (merging in 1932 to form the English Folk Dance and Song Society, which is still very active in the field of the folk arts). They amassed a huge archive of material which survives in publications and manuscripts, and these constitute our primary source of information on traditional songs and singing practices in this period of the past.

Few of the collectors spent much time on academic questions of definition and origin, with the notable exception of Cecil Sharp in *English Folk-Song: Some Conclusions* (1907),¹³ nonetheless, they mostly held to an overarching theory that was based on the assumption that there was a corpus of pure 'folk' songs that had been handed down through countless generations by a non-creative, 'unlettered' peasantry.¹⁴ Unquestioningly adopting the doctrine of 'cultural survivals' which already underpinned the late Victorian interest in the new discipline of 'folklore', they argued that as a result of this 'faithful' transmission, folk songs embodied the musical soul of the nation, which had nearly been lost but was sorely needed in order to rescue English music from the twin dragons of German classical music and the burgeoning pop music of the music halls and variety theatres.¹⁵ The new enthusiasts not only published their findings (in tidied-up form) in songbooks

¹² For a general account, see E. David Gregory, *The Late Victorian Folksong Revival: The Persistence of English Melody, 1878–1903* (Lanham, MD, Toronto, and Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2010). The strong revisionist position is advanced by Dave Harker, *Fakesong: The Manufacture of British 'Folksong', 1700 to the Present Day* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985); Georgina Boyes, *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology and the English Folk Revival* (Leeds: No Masters Co-operative, 2010 [1993]).

¹³ Cecil J. Sharp, *English Folk-Song: Some Conclusions* (London: Simpkin; Novello, 1907).

¹⁴ See Vic Gammon, 'Folk Song Collecting in Sussex and Surrey, 1843–1914', *History Workshop Journal*, no. 10 (1980), 61–89.

¹⁵ See Meirion Hughes and Robert Stradling, *The English Musical Renaissance 1840–1940: Constructing a National Music*, 2nd edn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001); Richard Sykes, 'The Evolution of Englishness in the English Folksong Revival, 1890–1915', *Folk Music Journal*, 6.4 (1993), 446–90.

aimed at a middle-class, piano-playing audience, and in the more scholarly *Journal of the Folk-Song Society*, but they also incorporated them into newly composed classical pieces. Crucially, and successfully, they lobbied to get folk songs into the school curriculum; in particular, Baring-Gould and Sharp's *English Folk Songs for Schools* (1906) kept the genre of 'folk song' in the public eye for generations of children.¹⁶

Five of the papers in this volume are concerned with places other than England. The picture in Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and even in North America, was broadly similar to that in England, with print and oral traditions in continual interplay, although the timing was, of course, quite different. In North America, systematic folk song collecting did not get under way until after the First World War; while in Scotland, ballad enthusiasts had been actively collecting 'from the people' over a hundred years earlier. In the Edwardian period, however, the period of the great collecting boom in England, only Gavin Greig and James B. Duncan were in the field north of the border. In Scotland, too, as Chris Wright makes clear, the broadside trade lasted well into the twentieth century, in the shape of the Dundee Poet's Box. In Wales, as Ffion Jones demonstrates, and also in Ireland and Highland Scotland, the whole question of folk song is further complicated by the presence of different languages and differing nationalist agendas.

If the early collectors' theory of folk song as the bedrock of the nation's music holds any water, then it was the *music* that mattered, and, as noted above, nearly all of the collectors were most interested in the tunes. The words of the songs were far more problematic. Some did indeed include motifs and language that seemed archaic, and many of those were hived off as 'ballads' and studied (by others) primarily as literary, as opposed to musical, survivals, following the pattern set by Francis James Child's monumental edition of *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*.¹⁷ The real problem, however, was that most of the singers had a wide range of songs in their repertoires, including popular songs of the day (or at least of the time when they were young), and they often did not distinguish between different types of songs. The words of the vast majority of their songs were patently not particularly old, and neither were they particularly interesting in aesthetic terms. There was a great deal of doggerel, the plots were facile and stylized, and they were often rather more sexually explicit than was comfortable for the middle-class morality of the day.

It soon became abundantly clear that many of the singers had learned at least some of their songs directly from printed broadsides and chapbooks, and even if they had learned a song from another singer there was no guarantee that print had not played a significant role in its transmission in the past. Modern scholars estimate that as much as 90 per cent of the 'traditional' repertoire appeared on

¹⁶ S. Baring-Gould and Cecil J. Sharp, *English Folk-Songs for Schools* (London: Curwen, [1906]).

¹⁷ Francis James Child, ed., *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 5 vols (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1882–98).

nineteenth-century broadsides and in other cheap printed material.¹⁸ In other words, the idea of a purely ‘oral’ tradition of folk song was becoming increasingly untenable. There is always the possibility – some would say the probability – of ‘contamination’ by a printed source somewhere along the song’s journey of transmission.

The late Victorian/Edwardian collectors and commentators were highly ambivalent about broadsides and other print media (one important exception to this general statement would be Frank Kidson, who was alert to the importance of print in relation to folk song).¹⁹ Child, too, notoriously referred to the great broadside collections as ‘veritable dung-hills, in which, only after a great deal of sickening grubbing, one finds a very moderate jewel’.²⁰ On the one hand, the collectors regarded the bulk of broadside songs with distaste, as too redolent of the lowest common denominator of popular culture; but on the other, they needed printed materials for two key reasons. The first was as a source for ‘complete’ texts, which were necessary to plug the gaps and repair the damage brought about by oral transmission, so that they could publish the songs they had collected. There is something ironic about this, since it represented a complete reversal of their deepest-held feelings about the songs. By their actions, they were demonstrating that oral tradition was a rather poor conduit for song transmission, and that print actually handled them much better. Their second use for broadsides pointed up another problem with oral tradition, which is that it rarely leaves any solid evidence; accordingly, if one wishes to claim a long history for a particular song,

¹⁸ This sort of figure was first advanced in Robert S. Thomson, ‘The Development of the Broadside Ballad Trade and its Influence upon the Transmission of English Folksongs’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 1974), p. 274; Rainer Wehse, ‘Broadside Ballad and Folksong: Oral Tradition versus Literary Tradition’, *Folklore Forum*, 8 (1975), 324–34 [2–12] (p. 333 [11]). It is confirmed by researchers currently working on the material (personal communication).

¹⁹ See, for example, Sharp, *English Folk-Song: Some Conclusions*, p. 101; S. Baring Gould and H. Fleetwood Sheppard, *Songs & Ballads of the West* (London: Methuen, [1891–95]), p. viii. Baring-Gould elaborated his views about broadsides in a letter to the ballad editor Francis James Child: Cambridge, MA, Harvard University, Houghton Library, MS Eng 863, Appendix no. 5, Sabine Baring-Gould to Francis James Child, 23 August 1890 <<http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/22250626>>.

²⁰ Sigurd Bernhard Hustvedt, *Ballad Books and Ballad Men: Raids and Rescues in Britain, America, and the Scandinavian North since 1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1930), p. 254. For an authoritative account of Child’s attitude, see Mary Ellen Brown, ‘Child’s Ballads and the Broadside Conundrum’, in *Ballads and Broadsides in Britain, 1500–1800*, ed. Patricia Fumerton and Anita Guerrini, with Kris McAbee (Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 57–72. The ambivalence manifested by Child and the folk song collectors can be seen emerging as early as the eighteenth century. See Paula McDowell, ‘“The Art of Printing Was Fatal”: Print Commerce and the Idea of Oral Tradition in Long Eighteenth-Century Ballad Discourse’, in *Ballads and Broadsides in Britain, 1500–1800*, ed. Patricia Fumerton and Anita Guerrini, with Kris McAbee (Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 35–56.

it is nearly always necessary to rely on datable printed sources if one is not to fall back on vague assumptions and guesses. The very existence and evident ubiquity of the broadside trade thus threatened to shake the foundations of the theoretical construct that the collectors were so carefully endeavouring to promote.

Then there is the question of who wrote the songs that appeared in both the 'folk' and the broadside milieux. Were they composed by the ploughboys and milkmaids who feature in their texts, or by literate people of a higher social class? There is no simple answer to this question, because of the heterogeneous nature of both folk and print repertoires, and because neither tradition is good at providing details of authorship or origin. Some classes of song can be identified, however. Thus some of our traditional songs – especially those with romanticized pastoral settings, such as 'The Spotted Cow' (Roud 956) and 'Searching for Lambs' (Roud 1437) – probably originated in the pleasure gardens of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Others emanated from the theatrical world, where songs were routinely included in plays, featured heavily in the ballad operas, pantomimes, and other 'musicals' of the time, and were performed as interludes and afterpieces. All of these genres were created by literate, mostly professional, writers and musicians. Perhaps nearer to the 'people' were the early music hall artists and tavern singers; but they, too, soon turned into a professionalized group of writers for the commercial popular music world. Many of the verses that appear on broadsides were probably not designed to be sung at all but were regarded as 'poetry', or perhaps 'recitations'.²¹ Printers evidently ransacked volumes of minor poets for material. In some regions, amateur and semi-professional poets and songwriters produced local songs, usually concerning everyday occurrences in the community and often composed in dialect. These writers were sometimes 'of the people', in that they were miners, mill-workers, and so forth. Peter Wood and Anna Guigné's contributions to the present volume touch on these.

Nevertheless, there are thousands of songs that appeared in the street literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that cannot be confidently identified as having originated in any of the foregoing contexts, and they were mostly penned by broadside writers (who are often referred to by the somewhat derogatory term of 'broadside hacks'). These were men, and perhaps a few women, who provided (either on their own initiative or on commission) texts for the printers to publish, in return for payment. We know little about these writers, but one or two have been identified and are being documented, and they often turn out to be educated people.²² Thus the overall picture, hazy as it may be, is that at least a substantial proportion, and probably a huge majority, of both folk songs and broadside songs were written by professionals or semi-professionals of somewhat higher social

²¹ Right up until the early twentieth century, reading characteristically meant reading out loud, be it alone or in a social setting; the recitation of pieces of poetry was a common practice in the home as well as the school.

²² The most sustained attempt to date to identify broadside writers is in Hepburn, *A Book of Scattered Leaves*.

status – or at least of a better level of education – than their eventual singers; and if this is so, then most of these songs would first have reached ‘the people’ through some form of print.

The response of the folk song collectors to these problems was threefold: firstly, to accentuate even further the primacy of the tunes and to dismiss the texts as relatively unimportant; secondly, to downplay the influence of print by overemphasizing the ‘illiteracy’ of the people from whom they collected the songs;²³ and thirdly, to postulate, on largely aesthetic grounds, the superior quality of ‘traditional’ as opposed to printed versions, even while plundering the broadsides for missing verses. A version of this position remained more or less the orthodoxy throughout much of the twentieth century.²⁴ The later part of the century, however, saw a great deal of new research into the folk song world, and the definitions, perspectives, and practices of the earlier generations of enthusiasts came under intense scrutiny. One important feature of the new scholarship is that the definition of ‘folk song’ has been broadened and now admits a much wider range of songs than the early collectors would have countenanced. To a certain extent, this is a natural progression. A healthy living tradition is always replenished and revitalized by the inclusion of new forms, and many songs that were patently ‘pop songs’ for the collectors’ generation can be deemed, fifty years

²³ See, for example, Baring Gould and Fleetwood Sheppard, *Songs & Ballads of the West*, p. viii; *Journal of the Folk-Song Society*, 1.4 (1902), 139–40; Sharp, *English Folk-Song: Some Conclusions*, pp. 3–4.

²⁴ In the 1950s, the International Folk Music Council institutionalized a definition of folk song – ‘Folk music is the product of a musical tradition that has been evolved through the process of oral transmission’ – that derives directly from Cecil Sharp’s *English Folk-Song: Some Conclusions* of 1907. See *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*, 7 (1955), 23. The formula is repeated in standard works on folk song. See A. L. Lloyd, *Folk Song in England* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1967), p. 15; Maud Karpeles, *An Introduction to English Folk Song* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 5. For a more recent, rather more nuanced, account, see Philip V. Bohlman, *The Study of Folk Music in the Modern World* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 14–32. A special case is that of David Buchan, *The Ballad and the Folk* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), which applies the Parry–Lord theory of ‘oral-formulaic re-creation’ to Scottish ballads collected at the end of the eighteenth century. In brief, the argument is that the ballad singer, like the singer of epic tales, does not memorize an entire text but re-creates or ‘improvises’ anew at each performance, drawing on a common stock of stories, episodes, structural techniques, and a formulaic vocabulary and ‘grammar’ which are peculiar to oral artistry, and that the impress of this process can be traced in distinctive verbal and structural patternings in ballad texts. The current consensus, however, is that this was at best an attempt to harness a theory that was hugely influential in its time to a corpus of material for which it was not designed. See Albert B. Friedman, ‘The Oral-Formulaic Theory of Balladry – A Re-rebuttal’, in *The Ballad Image: Essays Presented to Bertrand Harris Bronson*, ed. James Porter (Los Angeles: Center for the Study of Comparative Folklore & Mythology, University of California, Los Angeles, 1983), pp. 215–40.

on, to have earned their ‘traditional’ stripes. But it is more than this. Precisely because we ourselves do not feel so uncomfortable with, or threatened by, the notion of traditional singers having been exposed to external musical influences, modern researchers are far more likely to be interested in finding out the totality of people’s singing experience, rather than trying to limit it to just one particular segment – especially if that segment cannot be effectively defined.

The pure ‘oral tradition’ may have been shown to be a myth (although some like to hold on to it still), but the precise extent and nature of the interplay between oral and printed is still highly contested ground. As already indicated, the knowledge that some 90 per cent of ‘traditional’ folk songs appeared on broadsides is suggestive, but it is not actual proof of the primacy of print. It is conceivable that the print and oral song traditions lived side by side with little interplay, or even that oral tradition was the more vibrant strand and that the printers simply plundered it for commercial gain.

Broadly speaking, researchers today can be placed on a simple linear continuum, with the hardcore ‘orals’, who believe that print had a negligible effect on oral tradition, to the right, and the ‘printeds’, who believe the opposite, to the left (no political analogy intended). Most of us hover around the middle, but there is no doubt that the centre of this model has in recent years gradually shifted to the left, and is still moving that way. Most leading researchers now admit that the broadside press had a strong influence on traditional song repertoires;²⁵ but the exact degree and nature of that influence is still a matter of contention, and is the main reason for the present volume. The ‘orals’ stand accused of being romantics, desperately attempting to hold on to a discredited theory to underpin their desire for an unspoilt rural folk in a ‘Merrie England’ setting. The ‘printeds’, on the other side, stand accused of wantonly trying to pin a living tradition to a board, like Victorian butterfly collectors, and of stacking the deck by insisting on hard evidence which they know that oral tradition cannot provide.

Indeed, despite the ‘printeds’ making much of the running in current folk song research, the concept of oral tradition is not dead yet, and there are some areas in which print influence cannot be adequately demonstrated. Some widely known songs in the traditional repertoire seem to have survived perfectly well without the help of broadside versions. For example, some of the most widely collected of the Child ballads, such as ‘The Maid Freed from the Gallows’ (Child 95), ‘Lord Randal’ (Child 12), and ‘Hugh of Lincoln’ (Child 155), have very few, if any, known broadside printings. Other very well-known songs are in a similar position. Print influence also largely fails to account for the survival of folk song into the twentieth century. The Edwardian collectors were convinced that genuine folk song was virtually dead and that their elderly informants were

²⁵ The primary dissenting voice is that of Christopher James Bearman, ‘The English Folk Music Movement, 1898–1914’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Hull, 2001). Bearman’s thesis is in part an explicit reaction against Thomson, ‘Development of the Broadside Ballad Trade’.

the last true practitioners, but dedicated enthusiasts continued to find singers and songs even after the Second World War. However, the broadside trade in England was already in terminal decline in the late nineteenth century (although it survived a little longer in Scotland), before many of these later singers were even born, and therefore cannot be cited as a major influence on singing over fifty years later.²⁶

Supporters of oral tradition also cite the supposedly ‘non-literate’ culture in which most working people existed in the nineteenth century, where many could not read at all and few had anything above functional literacy. Modern research suggests that this is an unduly romanticized picture of a century during which substantial progress was being made towards a state of nominal universal literacy.²⁷ Moreover, it does not require high-level reading skills to cope with a printed song text, nor does it need every individual singer to be able to read. As already mentioned, reading in earlier periods normally meant reading aloud, and there is evidence of singers getting someone else to read a song text to them in the same way as they would ask someone who knew a song to sing it to them. Even a group as seemingly wedded to oral tradition as the Scottish Travellers appears to have owed a considerable debt to printed broadsides, as demonstrated by Chris Wright in this volume.

The ‘orals’ also argue that there was a two-way traffic of influence. They strongly challenge the assumption of the primacy of print, and argue that printers often took material that was already in oral circulation. This is much more easily stated than demonstrated, but in the present volume Roy Palmer and Peter Wood offer some evidence of how this may have been the case with regard to ‘local’ songs. There is some further evidence, such as a comment by William Chappell concerning broadside copies of ‘The Seeds of Love’ (Roud 3): ‘The Seven Dials copies are very corrupt, and I am informed that they are frequently reprinted from the dictation of ballad singers who require a fresh supply for sale, instead of from earlier copies.’²⁸ It would be useful to know how reliable Chappell’s informant was, as this has the ring of an *ex post facto* explanation contrived to resolve a particular anomaly. Plausible as it sounds, it is unlikely that this was a general or normal practice. There is contrary evidence in the form of surviving printers’ stock books, which were clearly kept as a record of song texts for future use. The fact that most broadside songs, even when produced by different printers, are extremely similar in wording likewise tells against the idea that they were reprinted from dictation.

²⁶ No one, so far as we know, has researched how vernacular singing was influenced by the availability of cheap booklets of songs sold in shops such as Woolworth’s, series of new and old songs regularly published in newspapers and magazines, and the ‘community songbooks’ published by numerous organizations, all of which continued well into the 1930s. But see Dave Russell, ‘Abiding Memories: The Community Singing Movement and English Social Life in the 1920s’, *Popular Music*, 27 (2008), 117–33.

²⁷ Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture*, p. 1.

²⁸ W. Chappell, *The Ballad Literature and Popular Music of the Olden Time*, 2 vols (London: Chappell, 1859), p. 522.

Another area of contention is variation across versions of a text. It is an integral part of most definitions of folk song that because the songs are passed on informally in live performance, variation must always take place. No singer can exactly replicate the performance of the person from whom they learned a song; indeed, no singer can sing the same song exactly the same each time. The existence of variant forms is therefore taken as an indication, if not quite actual evidence, of the 'traditional' status of an item. It also follows that, apart from purely subjective or aesthetic notions, no particular version of a song is more authentic or authoritative than any other. The key point here is that once a song has entered oral tradition, knowledge of origin and authorship is usually quickly lost, and there is no 'original' against which subsequent versions can be compared and found wanting.

Printed forms, such as broadsides, have always been regarded as a textually stabilizing influence, and throwing them into the folk song model seems to negate some of the arguments for the perceived advantages of oral transmission. Clearly, if a number of singers across the country are learning the song from exactly the same fixed text, then a higher degree of standardization will be introduced, and if a singer owns a printed text they can refer back to it at any given time to refresh their memory and fill in any gaps. In fact, though, broadsides do not affect the model as powerfully as would first appear. Some broadsides were 'collected' and kept by singers, but the vast majority were extremely ephemeral. Nor did potential singers have a wide choice as to the songs they could buy. For urban purchasers it may have been possible to visit a printer's shop and ask for a particular song, but most itinerant sellers would have no more than a few different sheets on offer. Finally, once one singer passed the song on to another, then it immediately re-entered oral tradition and began the process of variation all over again.

Moreover, scholars of printed media now contest that variation is an infallible test of 'orality', pointing out the degree to which successive printings of the same song can in fact introduce variants.²⁹ Mistakes are made, elements are deliberately altered (such as the localization of place names), changes are wrought by the technology or dictated by physical constraints (such as a stanza being omitted or inserted in order to fit the page), and so on. The idea that variation is a mark of oral transmission is therefore too simplistic, although there may be some mileage in looking more closely at the kinds of variation to see whether category differences can be identified. Take, for example, a song such as 'The Mountains High' (Roud 397), produced by a variety of broadside printers in the mid-nineteenth century. In different printings, the main character is named variously as 'Reynardine', 'Rinordine', or 'Ryner Dyne'. If these texts were copied from each other, it is difficult to see why the printers would have varied a spelling in this way unless they had another model (i.e. a prior knowledge of how to pronounce it) in mind.

²⁹ Dianne M. Dugaw, 'Anglo-American Folksong Reconsidered: The Interface of Oral and Written Forms', *Western Folklore*, 43 (1984), 83–103.

Again, there is a real stumbling block to the assertion of complete print dominance in the matter of the *tunes*. While there is now plenty of evidence, documentary and anecdotal, of singers learning songs from print, there is none, or very little, for them learning the tunes in the same way. This is not to argue that there were no musically literate people in working communities, but street literature hardly ever included music notation. The idea that broadsides routinely included directions for the tunes to which the songs should be sung is somewhat inaccurate: it is certainly true for seventeenth-century broadsides, but by the nineteenth century only a minority did so. We know that some ballad sellers sang their songs in order to attract attention, and that some would sing you the tune once you had bought the words, both cases amounting to oral means of transmission. Some purchasers would simply fit the words of a broadside to a well-known tune; but if this were the normal way of learning a new song, we would expect the tunes to which particular songs are sung to vary a great deal from performer to performer. In fact, this is not the case, and the general stability of tunes over time and space argues strongly for face-to-face, person-to-person transmission.

It does not seem likely that we will ever come up with blanket answers to the questions raised here, because there are simply too many variables to contend with. It is unlikely, for example, that in the eighteenth or nineteenth century there was any place in Britain completely beyond the direct reach of printed material, but the ease of access to street literature must have varied considerably according to geographical location and personal situation. A living-in farm servant on a remote farm would need to wait for the occasional trip to a local fair, or the intermittent visit of a chapman, to get new printed songs, whereas an urban dweller would have not only peripatetic ballad sellers but also stationers with permanent street stands or even shops and printing houses open daily, as well as access to commercial song venues.

Broadsides and chapbooks were some of the cheapest of items to purchase and the printers were often at the lowest level of the trade. Nevertheless, even at this level there were important developments taking place during the period under consideration. Potentially the most far-reaching of these was the change in the intellectual copyright regime that occurred in the latter part of the eighteenth century and afterwards, which, according to William St Clair in *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (2004), had a fundamental impact on the nature of cheap literature in England.³⁰ St Clair's claims remain contested and controversial, and their possible impact on the ballad market is considered by David Atkinson in this volume. Technological changes affecting papermaking and printing, including the introduction of stereotyping, would also have consequences for the production of street literature, although these have yet to be explored in any detail.³¹

³⁰ William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), chapter 17.

³¹ James Catnach is said to have introduced improvements in paper and printing into the broadside trade after he moved to London in 1813/14, and subsequently adopted the