FOLK MUSIC OF BRITAIN — AND BEYOND

Frank Howes

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Volume 5

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published in 1969 by Methuen & Co Ltd

This edition first published in 2016
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

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-138-94398-8 (Set)
ISBN: 978-1-315-66734-8 (Set) (ebk)
ISBN: 978-1-138-95343-7 (Volume 5) (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-138-12228-4 (Volume 5) (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-315-65961-9 (Volume 5) (ebk)

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Folk Music of Britain —and Beyond

Frank Howes

Methuen & Co Ltd
11 New Fetter Lane · EC4

To my sister Marie,
who sang many of these songs

First published 1969

Printed in Great Britain
by The Camelot Press Ltd.,
London and Southampton

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Preface

In 1907 Cecil Sharp published *English Folk Song: Some Conclusions*, the first book in English about folk music as a branch of the art of music, as church music, opera and chamber music are departments of the art. And it remained for half a century the only book of substance. In 1967 Mr A. L. Lloyd published his *Folk Song in England*, which came out in time for me to learn something from it, although by then this book was far advanced. In particular I learned of the industrial songs which were to some extent the equivalents of the pre-Industrial Revolution folk-songs of the peasantry.

What I have just said is broadly but not quite literally true. Thus as far back as 1866 Carl Engel had published his *The Study of National Music*, and after Cecil Sharp's epoch-making book, a number of useful small or sectional studies appeared. The Bibliography is small enough to be given here:

Frank Kidson and Mary Neal, *English Folk Song and Dance*, Cambridge, 1915

Violet Alford, *English Folk Dances*, Black, 1923

Iolo Williams, *English Folk Song and Dance*, Longmans, 1935

Douglas Kennedy, *England's Dances: Folk Dancing To-day and Yesterday*, Bell, 1949

Douglas Kennedy, *English Folk Dancing To-day and Yesterday*, Bell, 1964

A. L. Lloyd, *The Singing Englishman*, Workers' Music Association, 1944

Reginald Nettel, *Folk Dancing*, Arco, 1962

These are the chief sources of information open to the enquirer and in their time they served a valuable purpose, but they did not, for various reasons, look at the subject as a branch of

musical history – folklore yes, social history yes to some extent, description for the record certainly. Curiously enough the story is the same for the carol, which had a remarkable and contemporary revival. This too had to wait till 1958 to get its story told with adequate scholarship – by Dr Erik Routley in *The English Carol.*

In this book I have tried to take as comprehensive a view as I can of the phenomenon, folk-song, more from the point of view of a musician, than a sociologist, a field worker, an anthropologist or, though literary criticism is involved in balladry, a literary critic. I have used the comparative method proper to anthropology. Hence my title. If one is to study folk-music one had best begin with one's own. So English folk-song is the introduction to folk-song in general; I start from the British Isles, but I have not the knowledge, so huge is the sheer quantity of the material, even to attempt to be comprehensive in my comparisons, so I have excused myself and my limited choice with the phrase 'And Beyond'.

If there have been so few comprehensive studies of folk music – though they are beginning to appear in America, such for instance as Dr Bruno Nettl's *Folk and Traditional Music of the Western Continent* (1965) – this is not to ignore the vast amount of scholarship that has been applied to the subject and is available to the student in print if he knows where to look for it. Looking no further afield than our own folk-song revival we have the *Journal of the Folk-Song Society* (1898–1931) and its successor the *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society* published annually. Then when the English example began to be copied in the United States and Canada the study, which meant primarily the collection and preservation of folk-songs still current in oral tradition but also secondarily publishing them with a critical apparatus of rigorous scholarship, produced a vast accumulation of knowledge and made it available for practical use and for study. I remember receiving a year or two ago two huge volumes, which I took to be another large collection from an American university press, of English and Ameri-

can ballads and songs, but which revealed itself, when the last wrapper was removed, as a *bibliography* of such collections! The amount of material to be studied is in fact devastating to contemplate. This was one factor in my deciding to attempt some sort of synoptic view, some sort of deductive generalization from the masses of facts, to try to do for this branch of music what the early botanists decided they must do to cope with Nature's prodigal fertility.

I realize the vanity of the attempt, but I have come to the conclusion that it was time the subject should find an academic home for itself. It has been a field in which individuals, usually amateur rather than professional musicians, have done pioneer work of the highest excellence, but if we are ever to consolidate the study, to make it available to musicians, to musicologists and to humane learning in general, it should be treated like any other branch of humane learning and properly studied, which means that its approaches should be teachable, its researches co-ordinated. I should like to hope that if some university or conservatoire should find a place in its curriculum for folk music and its newly grown-up cousin, ethnomusicology, this book might serve as an introductory text-book. But in the meantime when there is a new and widespread interest in folk-song, an urban revival, derived it would seem from American gramophone records, it may serve to convey some elementary knowledge about the subject.

My indebtedness to others will be apparent to every reader – some specific acknowledgements are made below. Indeed I doubt if there is a single original discovery in the entire book. So perhaps I had better offer some justification for my hardihood in writing it. If I am frankly autobiographical I shall be providing one example of the way this elusive yet earthy thing, folk music, captures its devotees.

The first folk-song I remember hearing was 'Matthew, Mark, Luke and John' at the prize-giving of the Oxford High School for Girls when I was in my teens. I liked it but found it odd, for, being in the Phrygian mode, it sounded like none of the music

I had ever heard, for I was brought up on Mendelssohn. My father sang *Elijah* and played the *Songs without Words* and I began to play bits of *Hear my Prayer* on the organ. I also began to hear at sing-songs, socials and local amateur concerts in those pre-radio days some of Sharp's discoveries like 'O No, John' and 'Whistle, daughter whistle', and a little later folk-songs sung unaccompanied by Dorothea Webb at the University Musical Club, which sounded rather naked to my unaccustomed ear. Real acquaintance came from Walter Ford, my sister's singing teacher, who was an early member of the Folk Song Society. My sister began to sing folk-songs and I to play the piano accompaniments of them. So the start was right – first-hand acquaintance with the stuff of folk music, though I had not heard a traditional singer sing them in the traditional style. They made an immediate and quasi-biological appeal to us both and for twenty years we performed them in concert, broadcast and lecture programmes.

In 1927 when I was a junior music critic on *The Times*, my colleague, Arthur Fox-Strangways, asked me if I would take on the editorship of the *Folk Song Journal*. Lucy Broadwood, who had been its tutelary prophetess for thirty years, wanted to give up the editorship – indeed she died two years later. The Folk-Song Society, at a loss for a successor, accepted Fox-Strangways's assurance that the new young man down at *The Times* seemed to have the heart of the matter in him and at any rate knew the techniques of journalism well enough to pilot a periodical through the press, though my qualifications were questioned – rightly, by Frederick Keel, a previous editor. So I took it on with very little real knowledge of the subject. Indeed I remember saying to Dr Vaughan Williams that I relied on the Editorial Board for everything beyond proof correction. To which he replied in his downright way 'If you don't edit it, nobody will'. So I did – for nineteen years, serving at the same time on the committees of the bodies responsible for its production.

In the thirties the flow of books from American universities

began. Phillips Barry's *British Ballads from Maine* was the first of these collections, which, following Sharp's discoveries in Kentucky, were made by the English faculties of universities all over the United States. Indigenous ballads like 'John Henry' and 'Frankie and Johnnie' and native folk-songs of diverse origins, Amerindian, Creole, Negro, were discovered in the process of getting such collections together. Most of these I reviewed in *The Times Literary Supplement*, *The Musical Times* or *Music and Letters*. In the forties I proposed, in papers read to the Royal Anthropological Society in London and the University Anthropological Society in Oxford, that the music of a human community was as proper a subject for anthropological study as cranial measurements, agricultural implements or marriage customs. Ethnomusicology, which according to Jaap Kunst, who established it in Holland, was originally the creation of two Englishmen, A. J. Ellis and A. J. Hipkins, has here and now a nucleus of scholars to keep it in cultivation. After the Second War the International Folk Music Council was founded at the instance of Dr Maud Karpeles, Sharp's heiress who continued his work, and its annual Journal has opened up comparative study. Meantime the nationalist movements, fundamentally a by-product of the romantic movement of the last century, have had a second efflorescence in Bartók and Kodály in Hungary, Janáček in Slovakia, Falla in Spain, Khachaturian in Russia and Vaughan Williams in England, all of whom in some degree fertilized their own composition with what they had absorbed from their native folk-song. As a music critic I was well placed to observe these developments. And so when the pressures of daily journalism were relaxed the internal pressures of all this varied experience of folk music have become too strong to be contained and have issued in this book, which I offer as a conspectus of its subject more than half a century on from my hearing of the 'White Paternoster'.

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Acknowledgments

The majority of my musical examples are taken from copyright sources, not all of which I have been able to trace, but I thank here and now the following publishers, organizations and individuals for their permission to quote tunes, of which the sources are named in the Appendix:

First, the English music publishers, Novello & Co. (especially for Sharp's tunes), Boosey & Hawkes, J. Curwen & Sons, Stainer & Bell, Oxford University Press and B. Feldman & Co.; Cambridge University Press. Second, the following foreign publishers: Harvard University Press, University of North Carolina Press, Oslo University Press, Martinas Nijhoff and E. J. Bull of Holland, Artia of Prague and Editio Musica of Budapest. Third, organizations such as the English Folk Dance & Song Society and the Academia di Science, Letteri e Arti of Palermo – I have to thank the Palermo Academy and the Czech Foreign Trade Corporation for giving me, unasked, volumes of Sicilian and Czechoslovakian folk-songs respectively. Fourth, individuals, among them colleagues of many years' standing, Dr Maud Karpeles, Mrs Vaughan Williams, Mrs Rodney Gallop, Mr Ian Copley, Miss Mona Douglas, Mr Kenneth Stubbs, Dr Otto Anderson, Miss Peggy Seeger.

I have to thank, as it were *in absentia*, some publishers who have gone out of business or whose addresses I have been unable to discover and some organizations whose publications have been sent to me at different times for favour of possible review in *The Times*. Some of Lucy Broadwood's tunes I have been able to use by courtesy of her family and the fact that their ownership was transferred through me when I edited the *Folk-Song Journal* to the English Folk Dance & Song Society. Some of my enquiries have not been answered; some answers took

the form of disclaimers. In two cases I have forgotten where I found the tunes and in some others it has seemed hopeless to search owing to deaths, removals, and to a kind of infinite regress of responsibility.

I have thanks to render of a different kind to Professor Raymond Firth and Miss Norma MacCleod, late of the London School of Economics, to Mrs Noyes, the Librarian of Cecil Sharp House, to Miss Ethel Bassin of Edinburgh, and in general to all my friends with whom I have worked for forty years in the movement for preserving our English folk music.

CHAPTER ONE

The Name and Nature of Folk-Song

When A. E. Housman gave the Leslie Stephen lecture at Cambridge in 1933 he entitled it *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, and he spent the first half of it discussing the name because he was by no means sure that the name of poetry conveyed its true nature to many people who used it. The sort of confusion he had in mind was the difference between poetry and versification and prose and what the eighteenth century called wit. In the second part of the lecture he came to talk of the nature of poetry and made the famous declaration that it was a sensation in the pit of the stomach, a pretty mixture of mockery and truth. But he had in the course of these two logical exercises – logic is concerned both by derivation of the word and in modern philosophy with the meaning of words – thrown up a good many instances of poetry and out of them revealed by induction what poetry was. Opposed to the empirical method of induction is the method of analysis: what is a folk-song?

An old song, someone says, a song of anonymous authorship someone else amplifies, known to and sung by the illiterate someone else adds. But we are not likely to arrive by sheer dissection at clear logic-proof definition without examining a great many folk-songs, and we may indeed find that they are old, anonymous and non-literate. However much the French, the Germans and the Americans may prefer the method of logical analysis the English mind generally prefers to discover the nature of anything by examining its history, its evolution: a

thing is what it is by reason of the way it got there. This historical method has been applied to folk-poetry and music and a nice old confusion it raised: the question of origin has been a battle-field for a couple of centuries and has thrown up the theory of communal authorship, the denial of the possibility of any such thing and the assertion that an individual is at the bottom of it, the theory that so far from welling up from underneath it came down from the educated classes, a theory of spontaneous generation and a theory of corruption of an original creation. The question of origin cannot be shirked. Most writers on the subject tackle it at once.

Thus Cecil Sharp in his *English Folk-song: Some Conclusions* deals with it in his second chapter; his first is on definition, so that he too is after the name and nature of the thing. Bruno Nettl in his *Folk and Traditional Music of the Western Continents*, which was written sixty years later, deals with it on his fourth page. In his small *An Introduction to Folk-Music in the United States* he devotes his first chapter to definition with a survey of the theories of origin. A. L. Lloyd in *The Singing Englishman* (1944) duly, that is to say before very long but not so soon as Nettl, goes into the question of origin. But folk-song of its very nature does not lend itself to history very conveniently – it is almost dateless and such dates as there are have to be deduced from internal evidence. If a folk-song has got into print – and some do, countries varying a good deal in what gets into print when – then there is of course some documentation. William Chappell in his *Popular Music of the Olden Time* (1859) got hold of some folk-songs from Elizabethan times on to the eighteenth century and relied exclusively on paper, not vocal, sources. The Scots were active in printing their traditional songs and ballads a century before the English. But in general folk-song is too fluid, too evasive, too much like rivers that plunge underground and surface unpredictably to have its history written. Also we have to beware of that old logical fallacy of identifying origin with nature. Things are not always what they were: they change, and origin may not contain the essence. Actually in folk-song

the question of origin is vital, but it does not completely explain the nature of folk-song.

So let us begin with the name. 'Folk' is an old norse word that has survived in English and Scotch, but is archaic in the one and poetic in the other, though it is still used in colloquial speech in such a phrase as 'Our young folks are gone'. But it was sufficiently in current use to make it available when it was wanted in the nineteenth century as an equivalent of the German *Volk*: folk-song is a direct translation of the German *Volkslied*, which was used by Herder in 1773. Sharp found it so used in a dictionary in 1889 and the *Oxford English Dictionary* gives 1846 for the first use of 'folk-lore' (*Volkskunde*).[1] Folk-tale and folk-dance follow soon and naturally into the language. But 'folk music' had to wait. Carl Engel writing in 1866 has a footnote on his first page which reads: 'The Germans call it *Volksmusik*, a designation which is very appropriate and which I should have rendered "folk music" had this word been admissible.' The value of the word, even when it is used pejoratively in the hideous adjective 'folksy', is that it conveys a meaning distinct from the kindred words 'popular' and 'traditional'. It is, however, still liable to be mis-applied, in spite of Sharp's protest and clear distinction, to songs that achieve a currency big enough to be very generally known in a particular community, 'folk' then having its early meaning of 'the whole people' and the song having universal currency among them. Such widely known songs, however, are not folk-songs: they are popular, and may even be 'pop', which signifies the songs with a lowest common denominator of merit that will most quickly catch the favour of the thoughtless.

What folk-song means is popular by origin, not by destination. This distinction is very widely accepted, though a Belgian, M. Albert Marinus, read a paper to the conference of the International Folk Music Council in 1953 headed *Chanson*

[1] It is accepted that the word was invented by William J. Thoms and used by him in *The Athenaeum* in 1846 to signify customs and beliefs among the common people of a civilized community.

populaire – Chanson folklorique, in which he said it was hard to hold down the meaning of words to their scientific significance. But the very existence of so un-Gallic a term as 'folklorique' in French shows how useful the invention of 'folk-lore' as an English word had become. M. Marinus, while deploring the casual philology of the man who coined the word, admits its all-conquering utility: 'Le mot bien que fortement discuté gagna le continent, puis le monde'. Certainly a glance down the index of the *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* yields *la musique folklorique*, *le folklore musical*, *folclore musical Brasileiro*, *Folclorico Paulisto*, *Folclore Fluminense*, *la musica folklóristica in Italia*, *Makedonski muzicki folklor* (Yugoslav), *Česka etnographie a folkloristica v letech* (Czech), *Instrumentos musicales folklóricos de España*, *Norsk Folkemusikk* and *Slåtter og Folketonar*. The Germans naturally stick to *Volksmusick*, *Volkslied* and *Volkskunde*.

The word then, either in the form of the prefix 'folk' as we and the Germans use it or in the form 'folklore' capable of being used as an adjective as the Latin and Slav people prefer it, has found international currency and has come to stay. And however much it is misused in describing some song that sweeps a community and is then said to be a part of folk culture, it is best to insist on the retention of the word in its scientific signification, a song that somehow comes out of the people, not a song that spreads among them, still less one that is deliberately composed to catch their ears. 'It's a long way to Tipperary', the soldiers' song of the First War, had a currency and an emotional power that caused it to be described as a folk-song in the sense that it belonged to us all, us the folk. But it was not a folk-song. Its composer was known, though few people knew his name till his death was announced. He was a certain Jack Judge (1878–1938), a music-hall artist who wrote the song, words and music, in 1912, i.e. before the outbreak of war. Similarly the marching-song 'Pack up your troubles in your old kitbag' was the work of two brothers, Felix and George Powell. These were sung by soldiers and civilians alike, but 'Lilli Marlene', the chief song thrown up by the Second War, was a German product that

spread across the battle lines to English troops but did not penetrate civil life very far.

Songs like these which achieve an enormous vogue, being known to the unmusical, are, because of their universality, called folk-songs, though wrongly, probably because their proper epithet 'popular' might be thought to imply that they were widely but not universally known. But these usages in spite of M. Marinus and his perfectly correct contention that language is fluid and will not stay put must be resisted. For the distinction between them is too valuable to lose by sheer carelessness of nomenclature. R. L. Greene in his important book[2] on the English carol puts it this way: 'The phrase "popular poetry" (e.g. as in the English and Scottish popular ballads) has often been used indiscriminately to describe two kinds of composition between which the line of demarcation, sharp enough in theory, is often difficult to draw in practice. The two categories are perhaps most clearly indicated in English by the respective labels "popular by origin" and "popular by destination", the former being applied to what is called in careful German usage *Volkspoesie*, the latter to *volkstümliche Poesie*'. But *volkstümlich* adds a further complication, for applied to German lieder it means 'in a style of calculated simplicity', originally in reaction from elaborate coloratura arias. Brahms wrote both *Kunstlieder* and *volkstümliche Lieder*. We have hardly anything of the sort in the English song tradition – perhaps 'Drink to me only with thine eyes' and Vaughan Williams's 'Linden Lea'. Moreover, the line of demarcation is not so difficult to draw in the case of folk-song as it is said by Professor Greene to be in the case of folk-poetry. We have a third category into which anonymous and well-known songs that are not folk-songs can be put, namely 'traditional'.

Thus the carol 'The First Nowell' has a complicated history[3]: it certainly has no ascertainable composer, has not been shaped by oral tradition and has been in print since Sandys published

[2] *The Early English Carols*, Oxford University Press, 1935.

[3] Summarized and discussed in Erik Routley's *The English Carol*, 1958.

it in 1833, and indeed is so repetitive that as we have it it must be a mistake. But we have it, and it is universally known: it is neither folk nor popular according to our definitions; call it then traditional. In somewhat similar fashion 'The Vicar of Bray' is classified as traditional. Chappell in *Popular Music of the Olden Time* says it occurs in *The Quaker's Opera* of 1728 and three years later in two other ballad operas, *The Grub Street Opera* and *The Welsh Opera*, where the name of the tune is given as 'Country Gardens'. Sharp collected a version of 'Country Gardens' and in *Some Conclusions* prints the two alongside for comparison. There are resemblances in outline but the differences are greater than in most variants of folk-songs. However, the resemblance was enough to strike the ear of a bricklayer at Headington, who according to a letter from William Kimber to Sharp,[4] on hearing 'Country Gardens' emerge from a piano opposite where they were working said it was 'The Vicar of Bray', which Kimber denied. But whether the same tune or not, the quasi-chemical test of the implied modulation in the middle yields positive evidence for the folk status of 'Country Gardens', negative for 'The Vicar of Bray'. It is true of course that tunes in themselves can hardly be said to modulate, since modulation is essentially a harmonic phenomenon. But simple tunes of A A B A form like 'The Vicar of Bray' and 'The Blue Bell of Scotland' do, when harmonized, gravitate to the dominant at the half-way mark, just as allemands, courants and minuets do in instrumental suites from the time of Purcell (who sometimes does and sometimes does not modulate at the double bar) onwards.

Many tunes that got into print in Elizabethan times on to the eighteenth century, of which the origin is unknown, may therefore be classed as 'traditional'. Of these 'Greensleeves'[5] is probably the most famous, and has come down to us in print and by the folk tradition in the form of the tune, rhythmically altered, to the morris jig 'Bacca Pipes'. 'Barbara Allen', the most widely distributed and widely known of all English folk-ballads, is another example of descent through three parallel

[4] Fox-Strangways's biography, p. 72. [5] See below, chapter 7.

channels: it is found on broadsides as well as in oral tradition and, having got early into print, has hauled itself into literature – compare it as it appears in Percy's *Reliques* with any folk-version. For 'Barbara Allen' has survived as a folk-song, and the manner of its survival as well as its protean forms are accounted for by Sharp, who formulated his definition on a remark thrown up by F. M. Boehme[6] in the course of the great controversy over the origin of ballads (of which 'Barbara Allen' is a good average example). Boehme's remark was 'First of all one man sings a song and then others sing it after him changing what they do not like', or, as he might have said, 'could not remember'. On which Sharp's gloss was 'The method of oral transmission is not merely one by which the folk-song lives; it is a process by which it grows and by which it is created.' The controversy has its own history to be told but enough of the heat has gone out of it to leave the question of origin in suspense and to recognize oral transmission as the determinant of what constitutes a folk-song. Oral transmission also accounts for the communal character of the folk-song, even of its national flavour, for in passing through many minds it takes on the character of communal authorship—many minds have in fact contributed to its creation.

The oral tradition preserves songs and ballads by the simple process of passing them on from one generation to the next by singing and remembering. As there is no writing down, no one version gets fixed and final. The song remains to some extent fluid and therefore liable to alterations, to mistakes, to corruptions even, but also to a process of evolution which eliminates the unfit and produces versions of tried and tested beauty satisfying to generation after generation. The song remains relatively stable in spite of the possibility of degeneration 'through the erosion of unretentive memories and inaccurate ears'. The French scholar, Jerôme Bujeaud, who collected the *chansons populaires* of western provinces of France, remarked that 'la tradition orale que l'on serait tenté de soupçonner

[6] *Altdeutsches Liederbuch*, Leipzig, 1877, quoted by Sharp.

d'infidélité est au contraire d'une exactitude très grande et très scrupuleuse'. and he cited among examples to prove it the case of a song collected from oral tradition in 1862 traceable to a version printed at Caen in 1616. The tradition is safe with illiterate peasants, because, when all but a small upper class are uneducated, the best minds, as well as inferior minds, are illiterate, and being unlettered are forced to cultivate their memories – it is only since the Education Act of 1870 that illiteracy has become a synonym for dull and uncultivated brains. The native artistic gifts of the common people, especially before urbanization changed, and might one say vulgarized?, the habits of Englishmen, can be safely trusted to preserve their artistic inheritance. Of which the proof is that they have in fact preserved it.

The elimination of the unfit has had two uncovenanted benefits: a large proportion of the survivors are of first-class quality and little obscenity gets through. It is a happy state of affairs when the best is also the most characteristic. There are of course plenty of undistinguished tunes, notably quick patter songs in six-eight time built to carry a humorous ballad, but as far as English folk-song is concerned it was the astonishing freshness of the tunes that impressed the early collectors and made them feel like discoverers of buried treasure. Oral tradition is a refiner's fire.

With regard to obscenity Sharp, speaking out of his wide experience and from well-filled note-books, was convinced that the 'really gross and coarse in sentiment and objectionable in every way' are individual and not communal productions, that they offend against the communal sense of propriety, and when they are sung on some far-gone occasion they are sung deliberately with full intent to transgress accepted standards.[7] Stand-

[7] While I was editing the Journal of the Folk-Song Society and its successor of the English Folk Dance and Song Society (1927–45) I only had one song which I simply could not print by any however scientific editorial ethics, and that did seem to me to support Sharp's views that it was an individual deviation.

ards of what is suitable for polite ears vary from time to time, and in the early years of the revival editors and arrangers found it expedient to mollify some expressions or episodes that were thought to be too frank for the drawing-room or the public concert. There is no suggestion that folk-song avoids the facts of life, especially the facts of rural life, seduction, pregnancy, cuckoldry, maids outwitting their suitors, nor denial of the use of sexual symbolism. Every collector found poems too frank to print as they stood without causing embarrassment, though their singers saw nothing wrong in them. Alfred Williams (1877–1930), the Swindon railway worker who made a collection of poems in his locality between 1914 and 1916, *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, found a good many 'rough' songs, that 'were rude but not altogether bad'; mostly they were satirical; and he testified that 'the simple unspoiled rustic folks did not consider them out of place'.

Mr James Reeves opened up this discussion of what was not obscene to the folk-singer but unprintable by his publisher in his two books, *The Idiom of the People* (1958), in which he explored Cecil Sharp's manuscripts, and *The Everlasting Circle* (1960), in which he similarly examined the manuscripts of Baring Gould, Hammond and Gardiner (i.e. roughly Devon, Dorset and Hampshire texts). In all these cases he found that the texts had been expurgated for publication in the first two decades of this century, and that English folk-song, however unimpassioned its melody, was more erotic in its verse than had actually appeared from what Sharp had said. He instances 'O No, John' as a witty song that had retained its fun but lost its smirk in becoming a children's ditty. (But then are not many nursery rhymes the rubbed down stumps of ruthless rhymes, 'Ring a' roses' for instance, a song of the plague?) This rather drastic transformation was made by leaving out a single verse which dealt with tying a garter above the knee, of which *honi soit qui mal y pense* could not be pleaded. The song is one of the type of courtship by question and answer, to which 'The Keys of Heaven' and 'The Keys of Canterbury' belong. But flower

symbolism for sexual activity and what Mr Reeves calls the physio-topographical kind of metaphor, though it may be slightly revolting in a silly sort of way in D'Urfey's *Pills to Purge Melancholy*, is poetic in folk-song, for, as Aristotle said, the poet is the master of metaphor and metaphor is the beginning of poetry. It has to be recognized that sexual symbolism is widely pervasive in folk-poetry, and the use of what Miss Dean-Smith well termed a lingua franca is not confined to England or to folk-song but is found in continental and mediaeval literature. Its use is at once a factor in the poetry and a mark of the folk's delicacy.

The only serious challenge to pure oral tradition as the essential distinguishing feature of folk-song comes from the Iberian Peninsula and Latin America. The street music, *fado*, the dominance of the dance and the frequency of instrumental accompaniment in Spain and Portugal, as in Latin America, where another factor, the slow fusion of several different musical traditions, Iberian, African, Amerindian, has not given time for the folk process of oral tradition to work on its raw material. Rodney Gallop described[8] some of the strands that make up the folk-music of Portugal, beginning with agricultural chants, street vendors' cries, instrumental elements from guitar and bagpipe and dance-songs – he finds not much of the florid ornament and Moorish influence that is common in Spain. A. L. Lloyd, writing thirty years later in his introduction to one of the anthologies promoted by the International Folk Music Council,[9] explains that the South American pattern did not fit the European at all points. Not only was there some polyphonic folk-song but to many of the tunes some instrumental accompaniment was an integral part of the rhythmic complex which was the chief feature of the song. By the time the International Folk Music Council held its seventh annual conference in Brazil in 1955 the question of finding a definition of folk-song that would be acceptable to a society that was not only international but interethnical had become pressing. For while in practice all

[8] Portugal, *A Book of Folk Ways*, 1936. [9] *Folk Songs of the Americas*, 1965.

that was not identifiably art music was grist to the mill of the new organization, which aimed at promoting comparative study, it was plainly desirable to reach some agreement on what it was comparing and for the new science of ethnomusicology, for that is really what it is, to get some order into its terminology.

The definition which the Council had originally adopted was 'Folk music is music that has been submitted to the process of oral transmission. It is the product of evolution and is dependent on the circumstances of continuity, variation and selection', which had replaced the first draft, 'music that has been submitted throughout many generations to the moulding process of oral transmission', because 'throughout many generations' was inapplicable to new cultures, such as those of Latin America. The conference in plenary session finally adopted with a large measure of agreement the following comprehensive definition:

'Folk music is the product of a musical tradition that has evolved through the process of oral transmission. The factors that shape the tradition are (1) continuity, which links the present with the past; (2) variation, which springs from the creative impulse of the individual or group; and (3) selection by the community, which determines the form or forms in which the music survives.

'The term can be applied to music that has been evolved from elementary beginnings by a community uninfluenced by popular and art music and it can likewise be applied to music which has originated with an individual composer and has subsequently been absorbed into the unwritten living tradition of a community.

'The term does not cover composed popular music that has been taken over ready-made by a community and remains unchanged, for it is the re-fashioning and re-creation by the community that gives it its folk character.'

This is a satisfactory statement of the essentials of the concept folk music. Clause 2 of the first paragraph dealing with the creative impulse of an individual or a group covers the difficulty

for the Boehme–Sharp definition raised by certain experiences in North America, where in negro communities spirituals seem to have been born under the emotional pressure of gospel meetings and in gangs of workmen where labour songs are sometimes evolved with or without a soloist, like the shanty-man aboard ship, by stringing together a number of melodic commonplaces to form the vehicle for a local ballad about a local event. These near-approaches to communal composition, which loosen the Boehme–Sharp conception without committing the holder to *Das Volk dichtet*, are worth examination.

The peculiar quality of the negro spiritual obtruded itself on naïve and sophisticated auditor alike. This quality is compounded of sheer striking power or impact, contagion, a sincere sentimentality that is all-conquering and an undeniably racial element. Musically considered the spirituals are only white mission hymns (which are usually contemptible as art) crossed with black rhythm out of Africa. All accounts of their origin agree that the negro is quick to respond to the telling of some story, whether of a recent event or of an episode from Scripture, that he is spontaneous in utterance (even if it is only the interjection of a Hallelujah), that he communicates his impulse to the next man who may add another phrase – for the method of communal composition is cumulative – that the atmosphere of a Gospel or a testimony meeting is electric and uninhibited. For the germ of the new tune only a snatch of the old is needed—hence the use of melodic clichés and commonplaces. Before the emancipation and for a generation after, when negroes were not educated or Europeanized, a negro community was responsive to the lead of a preacher, gang leader or acknowledged song leader. From Krehbiel and Newman White on to Alan Lomax writers on the subject admit that, given a certain stage of culture, comparable to the old illiteracy in which our own ballads were produced, given the occasion when the story of a recent event could be told or an old hymn sung, given the emotional electricity generated in such a gathering, something very like communal composition takes