

## 8: 'Insects in Amber'

### Quotes, Texts and Sources

#### Folk song as 'process' or 'product'

'If a song hasn't been written down or recorded or in some way *perpetuated* in stone, then I can't index it. If I ... hear somebody singing a song, as I walk past, I can't index that performance ..., because nobody can go back to it. I can only index what's been documented' (Roud 2011; emphasis added).

'Folksong singers are basically conservative, in that they do, more or less, sing what they learned' (Roud 2011)

'Our representation of the tunes is intended to help the singer to a deeper interpretation of the songs. We do not wish to impose any arbitrary interpretations and have therefore avoided all but the most essential directions as to tempo and expression.' (Bishop and Thomson 1972: ix)

#### The discourse of standardisation

'The Sanskrit may be regarded as the pure *fountainhead*: the *streams which flowed from it* remained long in a troubled state from the turbulence of the middle ages, till, having found a *more spacious and secure channel*, they have gradually *deposited the dregs* of the Frankish, the Anglo-Saxon, the Cimbric, and the Celtic and reappeared in the beautiful languages of Montesquieu and Racine, Goete [sic.] and Schiller, of Byron and Scott.' (Welsford 1845: 259; italics added)

'Our folk music is *a veritable moraine of rolled and ground fragments from musical strata far away*. It contains songs of many centuries, *all thrown together in a confused heap*. What are the origins of these songs? It is impossible to say but some are ballads that have been handed down by minstrels and troubadours of many continents; archaic melodies from before the Golden Age of Elizabeth.' (Baring-Gould's introductory essay to *English Minstrelsie* (1895–97), quoted in Hitchcock 1974: 7; italics added)

#### Presevation in print

'a work which hath been admitted into the most elegant libraries; and with which the judicious antiquary hath just reason to be satisfied, while refined entertainment hath been provided for every reader of taste and genius' (Percy from 'Advertisement to the Fourth Edition', as reprinted in Rhys 1906: 2)

'Throughout the whole of the first volume, the utmost care, the most scrupulous anxiety has been shewn to exclude every composition, however celebrated, or how ever excellent, of which the slightest expression, or the most distant allusion could have tinged the cheek of Delicacy, or offended the purity of the chastest ear' (Ritson 1783: v).

'Songs Compleat, / Pleasant and Divertive;/ SET TO M U S I C K / By Dr. John Blow, Mr. Henry Purcell, / and other Excellent Masters of the Town./ Ending with some Orations, made

and spoken by me several times upon the Publick Stage in the Theater. Together with some Copies of Verses, Prologues, and Epilogues, as well for my own Plays as those of other Poets, being all Humorous [sic] and Comical.’ (Title page of Thomas D’Urfey’s *Pills to Purge Melancholy*, 1698–1720)

‘Clerk Saunders was first given to the world in the [Scott’s] *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, and was there said to be “taken from Herd’s MS.<sup>1</sup> with several corrections from a shorter and more imperfect copy in the same volume, and one or two conjectural emendations in the arrangement of the stanzas.” Sir Walter arranged his ballad with much good taste, but this account of his dealing with Herd’s copies is far from precisely accurate.’ (Child quoted in Sargent and Kettridge 1904: 142).

‘What was once the possession of the folk as a whole, becomes the heritage of the illiterate only, and soon, unless it is gathered up by the antiquary, vanishes altogether [...] [balladry is relic from] a time when there were no formal divisions of literate and illiterate; when the intellectual interests of all were substantially identical, from the king to the peasant’ (Child quoted in Sargent and Kettridge 1904: xii)

### Preservation in notation

‘No musical script can ever be a faithful mirror of music.’ (Sachs 1962: 31, as quoted in Nettl [1983] 2005: 76).

‘[Charles Seeger (1958)] identified two purposes of musical notation: one provides a blueprint for the performer, and the other records in writing what actually occurred in sound’ (Nettl [1983] 2005: 77).

‘[Bartók provided] incredibly detailed transcriptions of Eastern European folk songs ... but even this master with the infallible ear didn’t have symbols for many aspects of singing style’ (Nettl [1983] 2005: 78).

‘The staff music notation ... represents the tune of the first verse, which should indicate the *basic shape* of later verses’ (Bruford and MacDonald 1971: n/p, emphasis added).

- ˊ ˋ ˋ ˊ ˋ ˋ ˊ ˋ ˋ ˋ ˋ
1. Johnnie, my man, dae ye no think o risin
- ˋ ˊ ˋ ˋ ˋ ˊ ˋ ˋ ˊ ˋ ˋ ˋ
- The nicht it’s weel spen(t) an the time’s wearin on...
- ˊ ˋ ˋ ˊ ˋ ˊ ˋ ˋ ˊ ˋ
3. Johnnie, my man, oor bairns is aa greetin
- ˋ ˊ ˋ ˋ ˋ ˋ ˊ ˋ ˋ ˋ ˋ
- Nae meal in the barrel tae fill their wee wames...

‘[Lizzie Higgins] sings it very slowly and lingers on the sung consonants, notably m, n and l, especially at the end of a word [...] The high D in bar 1 of lines 2 and 3 is arrived at earlier, as a method of emphasising a word and heightening the emotion’ (Munroe 1971: 17).

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<sup>1</sup> An important collector and contemporary of Percy.

# Johnnie My Man

1st eight bars of verses 1 and 3

trad.

1. John-nie my man dae ye no think o ris-in

The nicht it's weel spent and the time's wear - in on Yer

John - nie my man oor bairns is aa greetin

Nae meal in the bar el tae fill their wee wames while

## A Bit of Pop Trivia

*Please Please Me*, the Beatles' first album was famously recorded in a 12 hour session (with Lennon's voice shot to hell in the last song, "Twist and Shout", which makes this the raucous rock number that it is.

50 years on, in 2013, the BBC recreated that recording by inviting contemporary stars to record covers of all the songs, also in 12 hours. It was made into a documentary that you can watch on

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iWb07bBDNx8>

## Preservation in recordings

Buggles: 1<sup>st</sup> video on MTV:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3hs4Gg7RDnc&index=2&list=PL11dd5QkcdJDH4W1c3SQVwXSbgwmM2BBm>

Intro:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XBf0yJVMSzI&index=1&list=PL11dd5QkcdJDH4W1c3SQVwXSbgwmM2BBm>

Buggles on Top of the Pops (BBC, 1979)

Beatles 'Paperback Writer' (1968) as an example of an early 'video'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYvkICbTZIQ>

# Infelicities in the transmission: The Mondegreen

## The original ‘mondegreen’

ye Highlands and ye Lawlands  
oh where have you been  
they have slain the Earl of Murray  
and (they) layd him on the green (Child, in Sargent and Kittredge 1904: 444)

*Cohort Model*: ‘At all times, the system computes the *best interpretation* of currently available input combining information in the speech signal with prior semantic and syntactic context’ (Davis 2013, emphasis added).

<b>Dick Gaughan</b> , who claims to have learnt it from Archie Fisher ‘by osmosis’ (sleeve notes of <i>Handful of Earth</i> ) from <a href="https://mainlynorfolk.info/anne.briggs/songs/thesnowitmeltsthesoonest.html">https://mainlynorfolk.info/anne.briggs/songs/thesnowitmeltsthesoonest.html</a>	<b>The Buskers</b> (on The 2 <sup>nd</sup> Irish Folk Festival on Tour) and The Furey Brothers
And I’ve seen a woman’s anger melt between the night and the morn	And I’ve seen a woman’s anger melt between the neck and arm (different from the Furey Brothers’ recording, unique to Intercord LP)
So it’s surely not a harder thing to melt a woman’s scorn	So it’s surely not a heart of pain to nod a woman’s scorn
<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgjPSIRwWOI">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgjPSIRwWOI</a>	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZFXqplWcx4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZFXqplWcx4</a>

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