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Ballads into Books: The Legacies of Francis James Child. By Tom Cheesman and Sigrid Rieuwerts, editors. (Bern: Peter Lang, 1997, pp. 283. ISBN 0-8204-3404-3, pbk.)

Each summer, The Ballad Commission, an arm of the *Société internationale d'ethnologie et de folklore,* sponsors an International Ballad Conference. The core matter of *Ballads into Books* consists of nineteen essays chosen from the 1996 meeting (which, held at Clyne Castle on the Swansea campus of the University of Wales, was one of the more enjoyable scholarly dos I've ever attended). Added is an extremely useful bibliography and discography by David Atkinson ("A Child Ballad Study Guide") and a list of ballad web sites (1997 model) made up by Tom Cheesman.

Five of the nineteen essays throw light on the British folk ballad data bank — that is, the corpus of texts ballad scholars continually (re)analyze and (re)interpret. Two treat the corpus as it existed before Francis James Child began his definitive work: Stephen Knight's "From Print to Script: Editing the Forresters Manuscript" discusses a recently discovered c. 1675 compilation of

twenty-one Robin Hood ballads and compares them with the versions Child knew of and reproduced in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads (ESPB)*. A second essay relevant to the pre-Child ballad data bank, Mary Ellen Brown's "Mr. Child's Scottish Mentor," is on the excellent William Motherwell, though Brown argues that the early nineteenth-century collector constituted more than just a source of field-gathered texts for Child, exerting as well some significant intellectual influence on the great ballad scholar. David Atkinson examines the uses Child made of the many ballad texts that his contemporary, English field-collector Sabine Baring-Gould, offered the anthologist, versions of interest because they were still "in oral tradition" while Child was publishing the "canon." Sigrid Rieuwerts's topic is Child himself: her biographical "In Memoriam: Francis James Child (1825-1896)" reveals that, in addition to his superb scholarship, Child was a ballad *fan* (hence an appropriate spiritual ancestor for the many twentieth-century Anglo/American folksong cognoscenti who were often both fine scholars and enthusiastic folk-revival participants). A post-Child song collector is Julia C. Bishop's topic: the American James Madison Carpenter, who between 1928 and 1935 sought Child ballads from oral tradition throughout Britain. His huge unpublished collection is only now being seriously studied, though almost exclusively by British scholars, like Bishop herself.

A second category of essays in *Ballads into Books* reflects the text-centered concern that understandably dominates ballad scholarship. Two essays are pitched at the level of genre. One, Thomas Pettitt's "The Ballad of Tradition," reiterates what no serious ballad scholar doubts — that despite "anti-essentialist" skepticism, Child ballad texts are overwhelmingly the product of a clear set of compositional conventions and aesthetic choices intersecting with the equally formal demands of oral song making, learning, and performing; the other, Wolfgang Braungart's "Goethe's *Ur-Ei,*" interprets for modern-day readers Goethe's eighteenth-century understanding of the ballad as primarily a textual but also in some ways a sociological phenomenon. This text-centered group's remaining two essays treat specific songs: Nathan Rose argues that the maker of the rare "Child Owlet" (Child 291) based his story on a John Studley (c. 1545-c. 1590) translation of Seneca's *Hippolytus*, while Tony Conran examines narrative and semantic relationships among the very few known versions (Scandinavian and British) of Child 21, "The Maid and the Palmer."

A third group of essays in *Ballads into Books* is more singer-oriented. Flemming G. Andersen compares two Scottish versions of Child 10 that Motherwell collected in 1825; one came from his star informant, the well-

studied Agnes Lyle, the other from a Mrs. King. In general, Agnes Lyle's rendition marks her as a "proactive" performer whose ballad personnel exhibit some psychological depth and complexity, while Mrs. King was a "reactive" bearer of ballad tradition whose text offers a rather mechanical tale that she seemed to be "reproducing" rather than — like Agnes Lyle — "recreating." Also using primarily textual evidence to formulate hypotheses about traditional singers (though hypotheses which were suggested in the first place by asking modern-day folk-revival performers what the texts meant to *them*) is Pauline Greenhill's "'Whose Gonna Kiss Your Ruby Red Lips?'" This verbal commonplace appears in many different Anglo/American ballads and lyric songs, and Greenhill examines a large number of texts to posit diverse "subject positions" — particularly on the matter of the "speaker's" sexual orientation — with which singers possibly identified. Most singer-centered of all is Thomas A. McKean's "Gordon Easton and 'The Beggarman' (Child 279/280." Informed by close, detailed fieldwork with a tradition-bearer who grew up in the "natural context" of a ballad singing culture, McKean reveals what qualities singers themselves think mark a traditional singer, a traditional song, and even a satisfying performance.

Four essays constitute a further group that might be called "ballad recontextualizations." Thus both Gerald Porter and Dianne Dugaw treat the close give-and-take relationships between famous authors and folksong. Porter indeed suggests that Shakespeare's plays were to a significant extent *like* folklore: not only did his characters use quotidian folk belief, speech, tale, and song, but his plays actually participated, given the nature of Elizabethan life and theater, in the much broader phenomenon of oral expression. Dianne Dugaw assigns much of the appeal eighteenth-century John Gay's songs enjoyed (and continued to enjoy in oral tradition) to their political and social critique. Both Porter and Dugaw, with a populist orientation, imply that ballads as quoted by Shakespeare and composed by Gay were not really *re*contextualized at all; Porter in particular liberates Shakespeare from the ranks of elite authors into which he was later "appropriated." Less of a cultural-studies and more of a folklore-in-literature theoretical persuasion (hence suggesting a less equivocal case of recontextualization) is Faye Ringel's "Stealing Plots and Tropes," which examines how several modern-day "fantasy" writers have reworked traditional ballad motifs and stories in their fiction. Unlike Shakespeare and John Gay, these writers — Pamela Dean, Elizabeth Pope, Katie Letcher Lyle, and others — typically encounter their traditional models not in everyday interpersonal socializing or in street-broadsides but in folk-revival singers' record albums

and even in scholarly works, such as *ESPB* itself. A fourth essay by professional singer Frankie Armstrong — a personal account of how traditional British ballads fit her urban, middle-class, twentieth-century woman's psyche and experience, and of how she tries to give voice to that meaningfulness in her repertoire choice and singing style — rounds off this "recontextualizations" group.

The remaining three essays are a bit too far off the topic of ballads for my taste. Ballad scholar Francis Barton Gummere's political philosophy — the subject of Michael J. Bell's "'To Realize the Imagined Community'" — for the most part influenced the only marginally relevant aspect of his work (his communal theory of the genre's origins) and had little to do with his real contributions (his codification of ballad narrative poetics, such as leaping and lingering, incremental repetition, *in medias res* beginnings, and so forth), while William Barnard McCarthy's essay on Olive Dame Campbell's life and cultural work in Appalachia simply has too little to say about folksong *per se*. James Moreira's survey of scholarship on the construct "genre" is relevant to *folklore's* intellectual history at large (and is better than the cognate Trudier Harris essay in the *Journal of American Folklore's* "Common Grounds" special issue of 1995), but I doubt that his necessarily very general — and as a consequence, somewhat obvious — conclusions will have much effect on any actual studies actual scholars make of actual ballads.

Their tangentiality aside, these three contributions at the very least match the quality of the volume as a whole, a quality which is generally high. While a few of the *Ballads into Books* essays could have been better researched and/or better thought out, and while I myself miss the presence of papers I thought superior to many that do appear (Miriam Jones's "'The Cruel Mother' [Child 20] and 'Mary Hamilton' [Child 173]: From Sin to Crime in the Folkloric Ballad," Ian Russell's "Narrative Singing in West Sheffield: Outing the Central Theme," Pierre Cachia's "The Composition and Transmission of Egyptian Narrative Folk Ballads" — though I don't suppose that last could be considered a "legacy of Francis James Child"), Cheesman, Rieuwerts, and their publisher Peter Lang have given the ballad-scholar community a work of which it can be quite proud.

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