

Curating Music: What is perpetuated and why

Franz Andres Morrissey, University of Bern

Performance and perpetuation

Songs, in fact, any piece of music or a recitation are ephemeral creatures that live in the performance and are gone the moment the performance comes to an end. This raises a number of questions, such as how this performed piece can be perpetuated, and, for our purposes more pertinently, why it is that some songs achieve longevity, remaining current for decades or even centuries, and why others seem to disappear without trace. This is particularly intriguing in the context of the kind of popular song that would be described as folk music, often considered, on the one hand, as an oral genre, transmitted through performance, and, on the other hand, as being associated with lower and allegedly illiterate classes (Auer, Schreier, & Watts, 2015) or as addressing their concerns with the attendant expectation that, being unaware, too careless or too uneducated, to be trusted with the preservations of these treasures (cf. Harker, 1985 and Watts & Andres Morrissey, 2019b, p. 321). We shall explore this perception in more detail below.

If there is to be any means by which songs can be rescued from oblivion once their performance is over, non-performative strategies are needed for their perpetuation and these inevitably require some form of *transmediation*, a translation of a song, at least of its salient elements, into another medium. The simplest form of perpetuation is a transcription of the words, a more demanding one requiring a level of training and skill not always readily available is the notation of the tunes.

Concerning song lyrics, there are several potential issues. If performer and collector have vastly different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, as has often been the case with the song hunters of the 18th to the 20th century, pronunciations and understanding of the social practices referenced in the song may create problems in accurately rendering the words. Misheard words, often referred to as *mondegreens* may lead to rather marked misunderstandings, in some cases drastically changing the meaning of a song. In fact, the actual term *mondegreen* (Wright, 1954) is a prime example, changing the lyric “they killed the Earl of Murray / and laid him on the green” to “... and Lady Mondegreen”, an entirely plausible mishearing, given that fact that in fluent (and particularly in sung) pronunciation we often cannot make out word boundaries (a phenomenon known in phonology as *coalescence*). An additional difficulty is that rendering a vernacular performance is complicated by the fact that there is typically no universally accepted grammatical or orthographic norm of that vernacular variant.

There are similar difficulties on the level of musical notation. On the one hand there is the note-for-note representation of transcripts made by the likes of Percy Grainger – and perhaps better known – Bela Bartok, which create considerable difficulties when non-expert sight-readers are confronted with such notation, in comparison to the relatively basic outlines usually used in many songbooks, which give a singer an idea of the tune, often on the basis of the first verse, with the assumption that singer will find a way to adjust the tune and phrasing to differences in syllabification in remaining verses. Seeger (1958) makes the distinction between *etic* and *emic* notation, with *etic* referring to the former and *emic* to the latter type of notation. *Emic* notation is sometimes also referred to as *prescriptive* because it assumes that a

musician or singer adopting the material is sufficiently well-versed in the relevant musical tradition to have an idea how a song is to be performed. The assumption in the context of *etic* or *descriptive* notation is that it should be reproducible without such cultural knowledge. However, the question remains whether any notation can be so detailed as to really do justice to the performance from which it was taken; as Sachs put it: ‘No musical script can ever be a faithful mirror of music’ (1962, p. 31).

What this brief discussion shows is that any transmediation requires choices, thereby inevitably excluding some aspects of the performance while emphasising others. In other words, transmediations could be described as the equivalent of a Vitamin C tablet in relation to the glass of freshly squeezed orange juice that would be the actual performance. The comparison is also apt because orange juice can vary in taste and texture, Vitamin C tablets are uniform in their flavour.

So far, we have looked at transmediations onto paper, but we also need to consider actual recordings, be they merely audio, or as has become much more frequent in the last 50 years, as videos. Although there are ethnographic field recordings that would appear to be fairly spontaneous – even if they are rarely completely unrehearsed – audio and video recordings are usually the result of careful editing. Many studio recordings, audio and video, are so thoroughly edited that they do not reflect one actual performance whereas live recordings result from a choice of several instantiations, a series of takes, with the most flawless one chosen for the final product. For this phenomenon Watts and Andres Morrissey (2019) have used the image of insects caught in amber: such insects may well represent quite exceptional specimens, preserved in a precious medium and considered to be representative while countless other individuals have obviously perished without trace. But in actual fact, these preserved specimens may be untypical for the species, or it is also possible that the process of being encapsulated in amber may have had an impact on the appearance of the encapsulated insect. In other words, the preserved specimen may be unrepresentative.

In the same way a folk song, perpetuated by the efforts of a collector, a sound engineer and/or a director, may well not be a pertinent example of the cultural practice it is meant to represent. However, the main difference between the processes of preservation in amber and preservation in transmediation is that the former is a matter of chance, the latter the result of deliberate choice. In other words, this choice represents a form of *curation* of songs that are chosen for perpetuation, which raises the question as to the nature of this choice. The answer, a little fluid at this point, seems to be the intention of the curator(s), something that will differ between individual curators, but it will also need to chime with the sociocultural interests and politics at the time of curation. In other words, it has to match or at least meet the perceptions of the social and mental representations associated with the material, the collectors and the intended audience and thus conforms to van Dijk’s definition of *ideology*.¹

This chapter aims to explore the curation of songs associated with the lower classes, either as their own productions or as compositions to highlight their conditions by sympathetic parties outside these classes from a historical perspective, in order to illustrate the interplay between ideology and the selection of materials as well as the elements focused on in the transmediation processes.

The Unholy Trinity from a historical perspective

The fact that song perpetuation, and thus curation, is to be discussed from such a perspective takes as a starting point the examination of practices in the Old World. It also means that we

¹ In fact, van Dijk (2003) sees ideology ‘as the basis of the social representations of groups ..., where the notion of social representation is [...] any kind of *socially shared mental* representation.’ (p. 32, emphasis mine)

need to situate the ‘Unholy Trinity’ within that historical context.² It has to be said, however, that, whereas in other chapters each side is likely to be represented by distinct institutions, groups and individuals, in the early stages of song curation it was often one individual, usually the compiler of a collection, the *antiquarian*, who represents all three sides of this triangle.

We clearly have an equivalent of the *music industry* in the increasingly lively market for song collections aimed at the emerging middle classes of the late 18th and early 19th century, fuelled by an interest in the adaptations of popular songs in parlour music. The work of the *academy*, which would define the selection criteria for curation of the material, corresponds to the antiquarians, whose interest in their material was based on their – often very personal – perspective as to what this material was meant to represent and the manner in which this was to be the case.

In this context, it is perhaps worthwhile pointing out, the antiquarians, rarely went out to collect material themselves but relied on the contributions of informants. These could be middle-class and were often referred to by their names and their professional titles while lower-class performers, henceforth referred to as collectors, and actual singers usually remaining unnamed and defined by their occupations (a ploughman, a housemaid, a wetnurse, etc.). Their performances were usually recorded, often by the former group, and sent to the antiquarians in this transmediated format, either reduced to the lyrics or as songs with their tunes. It is here that we regularly encounter explicit qualitative judgment of the material, focused on the quality of the lyrics collected, specifically their level of perceived textual corruption, allegedly reflecting, explicitly or implicitly, the inability of the common people, from whom the material originated, to preserve their own cultural treasures.

To summarise, the perspective of this actor in the combined Trinity, the antiquarian, was usually characterised by at least one, but often all of three assumptions (Watts & Andres Morrissey, 2019a):

- firstly, as pointed out above, that the lower classes, from whom the material originated, were either uninterested in or incapable of preserving their own (low) cultural heritage;
- secondly, that without the efforts of the antiquarians (and their middle class collectors) these songs were inevitably going to disappear, manifest in an often explicit “last-ditch” discourse, clearly related to the first point;
- and lastly, that usually there was (already) a degree of corruption in the material, which required emendations to restore it to the lost perfection of the material it was assumed to have in a long bygone Golden Age (cf. Watts & Andres Morrissey, 2019a, p. 163 ff.).

This last point, the need for editing, can be linked to the equivalent of *music journalism* in its role as an arbiter of taste for the public. Although at the period in question, there would not have been music journalism as we know it, largely because there were few if any publications for this genre, the function of the arbiters of taste is clearly in evidence in the prefaces and forewords of the collections.

However, for the arbiters of taste there are two aspects of judgemental motivation for exclusion, social and historical references on the one hand, usually only implicitly evident in the absence of such material, and concerns of sensitivities and propriety on the other, which not too rarely are explicitly stated in prefaces and introductions.

In terms of overt, topical social criticism, something that has a history in the genre now, but even did so at the time (Ganev, 2009), this would not have found a place in most

² The following discussion is based on Harker’s (1985) perspective of the way in which collecting has shaped the resulting collections, i.e. the curation of the songs they contain.

collections, clearly because the antiquarians and their target audience were middle or at times even upper class and therefore unlikely to embrace material that could foment unrest or be critical of their own politics. Historical comment on the other hand, was a staple in at least some of the collections (Scott, 1802-03).

As far as the second aspect is concerned, there was very explicit reference to propriety of the material in terms of references to eroticism. Ritson (1783), for instance, writes an introductory remark:

Throughout the whole of the first volume, the utmost care, the most scrupulous anxiety has been shewn to exclude every composition, however celebrated, or however 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.

This is part of an attitude that illustrates this point is the English verb *to bowdlerise*, derived from Thomas Bowdler, who, as the 1819 advert puts it, expunged from Shakespeare “those words ... which cannot with propriety be read in a Family.” Clearly, if even Shakespeare was not exempt from being edited to meet the needs for propriety, the culture of the lower classes was fair game for amendments to ensure that no inappropriate references to sexuality or vulgarity would be in line for potential curation.

Therefore, if we combine the considerations presented so far, we find that ideally for a song to be curated, three criteria would have to be met: Firstly, it had to have *commercial appeal*, which would include the possibility that it could be performed in a lay setting, for instance, a middle-class parlour. Secondly, it had to be in line with an antiquarian’s thematic focus, the *selection rationale*, based on their ideology; and, lastly, it had to correspond to whatever was considered *in good taste* in the relevant social context. It is the selection rationale and the ideology on which it is based that I want to focus in more detail in the following section, related to the commercial appeal and the notion of good taste. I shall also undertake to show that the same criteria, in adapted form, continue to apply in the 20th century.

Selection rationales and ideologies

However, before we discuss a number of examples of song curation, mainly of the 19th century, we need to revisit the notion of ideology because it has a strong impact on song collections. Extrapolating from van Dijk’s definitions (1998, 2001 and 2003) we can say that ideology is based on shared beliefs, shared perceptions, shared goals, and shared practices. In order to assure the purity of material for potential curation, in particular the shared perception and practices, such material needs to be subjected to scrutiny, ranging on a cline from conceivable adoption via critical examination of acceptability, possibly with amendments in an adaptation, to rejection or even active eradication. These considerations will apply, to varying degrees to a number of examples I would posit as being representative, presented in this section. It needs to be emphasised that any such discussion will remain sketchy for reasons of space, and selective in order to illustrate some of the more archetypal antiquarian practices. My aim is to present a spectrum of these practices from the point of view of their underlying ideologies.

As publishing songs has a considerably long history, it makes sense to focus on instances that paint a characteristic picture of the early stages of song perpetuation and the resulting curation of songs deemed worthy of preservation. However, we also need to be aware of the fact that in the 19th century there were two distinct tiers of publications. On the one hand, there was the material we will focus on mainly, i.e. the commercially attractive market of

traditional song material for middle class parlour music, deemed traditional and authentic.³ On the other hand, song material was for sale in the streets, often in the form of ballad sheets, broadsides, sold by itinerant peddlers and singers or in relatively cheap chapbooks, facilitated by the increase in printing activity in the 18th century and more prominently so in the (early) 19th century (cf. Ganev, 2009). Sadly, we will largely have to ignore these latter song materials for reasons of space except in the context of them either being considered worthy – or not, as was often the case (Palmer, 1996) – for inclusion in the collections aimed at the middle-class market and their greater market potential.

One of the early collections, which is still quoted as a source and an influence today, is Thomas D’Urfey’s *Wit and Mirth, or Pills to Purge Melancholy* (1698 to 1720). In some ways it is typical of this genre of publication in the sense that it was aimed at an expanding market for such books, which is illustrated by the continuity of its publication and the fact that it eventually comprised six volumes. It is also typical in the sense that it included material that dated back, to the Elizabethan and Restoration periods, in other words, that part of its merit was the preservation of ‘ancient’ songs and lyrics,⁴ supplemented by material composed around the period of its publication. The description of its content on the title page illustrates these points clearly:

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 and Comical.

It is, however, less typical of other examples to be discussed below in two ways: firstly, there is an explicit emphasis on entertainment, which included some openly lewd material. Secondly, it does not make claims to contain what could we might call ‘folk’ songs,⁵ which are the focus of later publications.

Less explicit in terms of including their own material or their editing in respective collections are two Scots, Robert Burns (1759-1796) and Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832). Both are mainly remembered in literary history as writers and poets, but both played an important role in the curation of songs, in particular, how they were transmediated. Burns, a perpetually poverty-stricken poet found employment with two Scottish music publishers and antiquarians, George Thomson (1757-1851), who ensured Burns’ cooperation for his *A select collection of original Scottish airs* in four volumes, and James Johnson (ca 1750-1811) (details in Andres Morrissey, 2021). Burns met the latter in the spring of 1787. Johnson originally edited, printed and sold *The Scots Musical Museum* in six volumes of 100 songs each, in the period between 1787 – 1803, but Burns in effect took over as main editor from the second volume onward, emending and adding text from oral tradition, from pamphlets, chapbooks and earlier collections in addition to writing lyrics for a number of melodies that up to then had no words. The collection also includes Burns’ own songs, most famously, ‘Auld Lang Syne’, ‘My Love Is Like a Red, Red Rose’, ‘A Man’s a Man for A’ That’, which subsequently became part of the Scottish folk song canon. All in all it is assumed that about 40% of the songs are in some way attributable or actually written by him. Two quotes are

³ It needs to be emphasised that both of these terms refer to socially and historically fluid concepts (for a more detailed discussion cf. Claviez et al. particularly Hagmann and Andres Morrissey 2020).

⁴ It is noteworthy that an integral part of the discourse concerning collection of what we would now call folk songs is the *age* of the material (cf. Bishop Percy’s *Relics of Ancient English Poetry*, emphasis mine), with a yen for a Lost Other, an – obviously fictitious – Golden Age. (See above). This is also a recurring theme in Cecil Sharp’s perspective on the nature of folk song ([1907] 1972, p. 157 ff.), in other words, of what he would consider worth curating in order, in accordance with the prevailing ‘last-ditch effort’ discourse to prevent it from disappearing.

⁵ In fact, the term *folk song*, influenced by Herder’s notion of *Volkslied*, is not normally used in antiquarian collections until much later, with terms such as ‘vernacular’ or ‘traditional song’ being preferred.

interesting in this context, on his lyrical contributions, Margaret Smith's assessment that '[e]ditorial working to establish the Burns canon have not yet settled which songs Burns partly or indeed completely rewrote, which he edited, and which he merely collected and transmitted' (quoted in Pittock, n.d.). In relation to Burns' musical influence on curating music, Bronson, editor of *The Traditional Tunes of Child Ballads: With their Texts according to the Extant Records of Great Britain and America* states that "Burns [,] who had an ear for a good tune, ballad words or no, ... was fortunately not musician enough to sophisticate those [songs that] he learned..." (Bronson, 1959-1972) "Introduction" vol , p. xxi). Burns was aware of his role in the preservation of Scottish song as he wrote in letter to Johnson praising Johnson's curation undertaking (which he knew to be largely his own): 'Your Work is a great one . . . I will venture to prophesy, that to future ages your Publication will be the text book & standard of Scottish Song & Music' (quoted in University of South Carolina, 1996, p. 20). It is important from a point of view of selection and curation ideology that Burns very clearly included the tunes of the songs, but also that he felt he was making a contribution to a national (Scottish) undertaking.

Whereas Burns' interest, apart from the nationalist aspect, was also focused on ideals of social equality coming out of France – and, it would seem, of promoting his own writing – Scott, a member of the gentry, was rather more focused on older Scottish history. His *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (Scott, 1802), although originally focusing on ballads about the skirmishes on the border between England and Scotland in mediaeval times, eventually also included several so-called romantic ballads, classic texts we will return to below. Unlike Burns, who was a singer and songwriter as well as a collector, Scott was focused on the historical and the literary, particularly the ballad, but he too had strong patriotic tendencies. In his curation, there is an obvious focus on documenting the history of the Borders on the one hand, but in doing so there is also the intention to draw attention to the Scottish literary soul manifesting itself in these poems, for such these songs were considered (Edinburgh University Library, n.d.). This had two consequences: firstly, although there was no actual generally acknowledged, definitive poetics of the ballad, there were clear ideas as to their form, their composition prominently being in quatrains with alternating lines of four and three stressed syllables, the so-called *ballad metre* (also used in Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'). There is a, possibly apocryphal, account that in his efforts to ensure the texts of the ballads being 'correct' in their literary form, Scott rewrote 'Clerk Saunders' in ballad metre; 'Clerk Saunders' is in the so-called *long metre*, a somewhat less frequent ballad format, with all four lines having four stressed syllables. The effect was that it was no longer singable with its tune in $\frac{3}{4}$ measure.⁶ Even if this account is difficult to substantiate, it fits into the image of Scott notoriously tinkering with his material to fit in with his ideology, both historical and more importantly in terms of *Scottish* folk literature. In fact, Child, of whom more below, in a comment ascertains that 'Scott's variations [of ballads in Child's collection], the contrary not being alleged, must be supposed to be his own' ([1882-1898] 1965, p. II 423).⁷ Furthermore, music as an element of the ballads was not relevant, given the focus on history and the literary value of (folk) balladry as poetry of the national spirit, in keeping with the practice of other 19th-century antiquarians and literary scholars (c.f. (Reed, 1991, p. 8), which in the case of this approach to curation meant that tunes dropped from sight.

Nowhere is this focus on the literary value of song curation more in evidence than in what must be considered the most seminal collection of ballads to this day, Francis James Child's (1825 – 1896) *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* ([1882-1898] 1965).

⁶ Songs in ballad metre tend to have 'regular' measures (4/4 and 6/8) whereas long metre ballads are typically in $\frac{3}{4}$.

⁷ For a detailed discussion cf. Zug (1969)

Although Child himself never published a poetics of the folk or popular ballad, his selections and how he ordered the songs makes a clear statement about his views in this respect. For the philologist Child these lyrics represented a form of archaic literature, going back in their most ancient form to an idealised, classless society, a rather dubious interpretation at odds with history, but a useful strategy to explain why in the ‘romantic’ ballads there was such a focus on protagonists from the gentry (Sweers & Andres Morrissey, 2019). Thus, one selection criterion clearly was material that related to these tales of heroism and chivalry, with another an implied origin in the rural population; urban life was largely ignored as was material that referred to social conflict of the industrial age as well as broadside ballads that were not print versions of evidently more ancient texts. Palmer (1996) quotes a telling passage from a letter of Child’s to Svend Gruntvig, a Danish scholar:

The immense collections of Broadside ballads, the Roxburghe and Pepys, of which but a small part has been printed, doubtless contain some ballads which we should at once declare to possess the popular character, and yet on the whole they were veritable dung-hills, in which, only after a great deal of sickening grubbing, one finds a very moderate jewel. (p. 157)

The literary focus on the literary is obvious in the highly detailed listing for each ballad text in as many of its variants as Child was able to round up from his informants, neatly assigned to various categories. ‘A’ texts represented the most valued versions with sometimes rather spurious fragments grouped under letters further along in the alphabet. With this meticulous attention to textual variants and the literary emphasis on the collection, it is not surprising that music was not considered worthy of attention. It was not until the second half of the 20th century that musicologist Bronson addressed this aspect comprehensively and with equal attention to as many variants in the Old and the New World as he was able to print. His introduction to the first volume tellingly begins: ‘*Question*: When is a ballad not a ballad? *Answer*: When it has no tune’ (1959-1972, p. ix), italics in the original). Like Scott’s, Child’s focus in transmediation was purely on the lyrical, and likewise his undertaking was one of exploring the literary soul, in his case of a broader take on Anglo-saxon culture in a nostalgic, pre-industrial of a romantic idealisation of a largely fictitious past.

At the turn of the century and into the Edwardian age, we come across the so-called *song hunters*, similarly driven by a focus on their own culture, in this case an explicitly nationalistic one. Sabine Baring-Gould, Cecil Sharp, Maud Karpeles, his often underrated assistant, Ralph Vaughn Williams and Percy Grainger, to name but a few,⁸ saw their work as collectors of folk song as a way to preserve something that was British, or in fact distinctly English⁹. The emphatic inclusion of music (with all the issues of transmediation referred to above) in their collections and publications can be seen as a reaction against Oskar Schmitz’s famous dictum that England was ‘Das Land ohne Musik’ (the land without music) (Serotsky, 2005). The interest in folk song was driven by two aspects, firstly that the true musical soul of the nation (mostly, it can be argued of England) was to be found in its folk song tunes (Cole, 2019, p. 22 ff). But another central element was that these songs were collected in rural environments and collectors consistently ignored urban material (Gammon, 1980). The ideal informant was what could be called a NORF, a non-mobile old rural folksinger (Watts & Andres Morrissey, 2019b, pp. 156, ftn.7).¹⁰ Like with folk song collectors in general there

⁸ Although Australian-born and later adopting American citizenship, Grainger was motivated by a strong passion for the ‘British Folk Revival’ and is the composer of many settings for English traditional songs.

⁹ An anonymous reviewer remarked that Sharp’s *A Book of British Songs for Home and School*, ‘although this collection of school songs is designated “British”, no fewer than sixty-six of the seventy-eight ditties contained herein are English’ (quoted in (Cole, 2019, p. 22).

¹⁰ This is an analogy to term NORM (non-mobile old rural male) as the ideal informant in traditional dialectology. Sharp in the ‘Introduction’ to *English Folk Song, some conclusions* explicitly points out ‘I have

was a discursive emphasis on *loss*, in this context not just of the songs, but also of the entire class, i.e. the Peasantry (Knevet & Gammon, 2016). In view of this double loss, the focus on rural music is as unsurprising as it is exclusive of a broader perspective on folk music as music of the people.

However, there is also a highly insidious aspect to this focus on the 'British', in particular in the context of Cecil Sharp's decision to track British song and balladry to and in the New World. 'Mining for Songs', the opening track of the CD *Cecil Sharp Project* contains the very telling lyrics (Pearson, 2011), briefly discussed in the following. It opens with Sharp's aims, 'I search for song in America/like strangers pan for gold' before making the point that there is curation rationale that involves 'sift[ing] and sort[ing], ... leav[ing] aside' while other items are '[he]'ll gently hold.' The song describes Sharp's method, collecting songs by going '[f]rom house to house, from door to door,/Bring them to life, sing them once more'. The notion of appropriation is clearly referred to in the last line of the chorus, which goes 'I'll write them down, make them my own'. Perhaps the most telling notion in the selection rationale, however, is that Sharp's intention to 'sift and sort, or leave aside' in order to find '... souls of England underground, / whose voices echo still.'

The persistent myth of the Appalachians being the new homeland of a homogenous white population with a direct link back to Old World is thematised in Rhiannon Giddens' keynote speech to the 2017 IBMA Convention with an emphasis on the role of Sharp and Karpeles:

With Maud Karpeles [Sharp] spent three years in the Appalachian mountains, recording families and making much of what he found there – but only [from] the white folks. [...] They just plain didn't like black people. [...] Sharp says: "We tramped – a very hard and warm walk, mainly uphill. When we reached the cove we found it peopled entirely by negroes!! All our trouble and spent energy for naught." Except of course, he didn't say negroes. (2017)

A more explicit illustration of how ideology affects curation would be hard to find.

A further example of what could be regarded as ideology impacting song curation can be found in the songs of the First World War. It makes sense to look at this issue from a point of hegemonic vs. antihegemonic songs, the former represented by music hall material, which has been fairly broadly accessible in the form of sheet music from then to today. Where there may be mild criticism of the politics of the day, especially once the war proved to be much more protracted and bloody, these songs do not present a threat to the establishment views, neither historically of their days nor today. This is in some contrast to the clearly antihegemonic songs written by the soldiers (Macdonald, 1984, p. 203) and distributed, often in the form of carbon copied pamphlets (Andres Morrissey, 2020) in the trenches and soldiers' bars. What helped their rapid distribution and adoption was the fact they used popularly known tunes (in this case hymns and musical hall song choruses), a traditional and tested strategy to spread protest music and broadsides meant to be an easy sell. These songs were originally curated during the war but clearly not meant for general circulation as the songs remained largely an in-group form of music. This partly due to the lewdness of some of the songs; Macdonald describes a tour of veterans and their wives to the old battlefields of Arras and Ypres and recounts that '... they began to sing [...] one irreverent ditty after another. The tunes were familiar. The words were not – and many of the fruiter choruses trailed off [...] as the tolerant smiles of their wives became a trifle fixed' (1990, pp. 1-2). Nettlingham a collector of songs during the War echoes this aspect when he writes

spent every available moment of my leisure in country lanes, fields and villages in the quest of folk singers...' ([107] 1972, p. xxi).

It is a great pity that a large number of the wittiest – albeit, of a coarse kind – the gayest – as regards tune – and most frequently sung – therefore popular – creations are so untranslatable as to render them unprintable for general consumption, but ... it seems probable that they will remain unwritten heirlooms for an indefinite period, and in peace-time will be handed down through the generations by drummer-boy to drummer-boy. (1917, p. 11)

Another reason for their minimal curation, the disturbing nature of the material, is highlighted in the foreword, the ‘Dedication’ McGill’s *Soldier Songs*, compiled during the war. He asserts that

[n]one will outlast the turmoil in which they originated; having weathered the leaden storms of war, their vibrant strains will be choked and smothered in atmospheres of Peace. ‘These ‘ere songs are no good in England,’ my friend Rifleman Bill Teake remarks. ‘They ‘ave too much guts in them.’ (1917, p. 14)

What we find here is that there is something amounting to self-censorship, which was in also in evidence in later compilations, where crude material was largely excised and swearwords were severely tuned down (for instance to *bally*, an expletive which never have passed a true squaddie lips). Most of the later collections of World War 1 soldiers’ songs (cf. Palmer, 1990a, Arthur, 2001 Pegler, 2014, etc.),¹¹ are sanitised to varying degrees. However, as so much time has elapsed and most of the material that had hitherto mainly been in nostalgic circulation in reminiscences and recordings passed on in the veterans’ families, the (self-imposed) restrictions of the content of the material – if perhaps not the language – has made way for what could now be seen as historical interest. Nevertheless, it is rather unusual to find in a printed version of the frequently anthologised song ‘The Old Battalion’ a verse like “If you want to find Joe Driscoll, I know where he is.../ On the firestep with half his head blown away” before Palmer decided to include it (1990a, p. 119).

The selection rationale here is clearly informed by what the general public can tolerate, erring, it would seem, on the side caution. And it is not until a safe amount of time has elapsed, relativizing the often caustic criticism of the powers-that-be and placing them in the context of historical interest that these songs have at last been deemed worthy of curation.

The last examples in this admittedly selective account represent an interesting contrast to the Edwardian (and, of course, earlier Victorian) focus on rural song material of the peasantry with its longing for a pre-industrial arcadia. During and immediately after WW2 there was a renewed interest in music ‘of the people’ in Britain, in fact as a kind of national undertaking to overcome class differences, championed, amongst others, by the BBC; this was coupled with a greater awareness of and interest in American musical practices (Watts & Andres Morrissey, 2019a, p. 158 ff.). The American folk scene in the 20th as perceived in the popular domain differed very markedly from the predominant nationalist conservatism of the Edwardian curation focus.

There was a clear left-wing orientation in the American folk movement, concerned not so much with songs *of* but with songs *for* the people, beginning with song compilers like Joe Hill, who wrote several of the songs for the Wobblies’ songbook *I.W.W Songs to fan the flames of discontent* (1909), later with Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, the Weavers, etc, which was later followed by the Civil Rights movement and was still very much in evidence in the 1992 reprint *Sing Out*, where Dave van Ronk is quoted in the preface as describing the collection as ‘an Aladdin’s cave with something for everyone except perhaps tone-deaf *Republicans*’ (Silber, et al., 1992, p. 2, emphasis mine). The British folk scene, clearly influenced by American antecedents, followed the same trajectory of social criticism and

¹¹ It needs to be mentioned that Joan Littlewood in her revue “Oh what a lovely war” made use of WW1 material around the 50th anniversary, i.e. in 1963, with both hegemonic (ironically) and antihegemonic songs to emphasise the horrors of that war.

unsurprisingly had a great deal of overlap with left-wing associations, be it the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, communist groups, etc. (cf. Bean, 2014). In this light we need to consider (in folk music curation terms, at least) the new interest in urban material and songs exemplified by two prominent figures, in fact, figureheads Ewan McColl and A.L. Lloyd. Industrial confrontation, songs about mining disasters, social upheaval through strikes and lockouts were revisited and collected, Lloyd and McColl curating material in recordings, radio broadcasts as well as in print collections (Lloyd's *Come all You Bold Miners* ([1952] 1978) to mention just one example. In particular, McColl supplemented his vast stock of traditional material – which was by no means limited to industrial and urban songs – with highly popular self-penned works, much of it explicitly focused on social comments. Most of the material put out was very clearly informed by left-wing social criticism, a tradition that lasts to today, obviously alongside less overtly political material. In fact, political awareness and antihegemonic discourse, in many cases ventriloquizing¹² the working class underdog, is a hallmark of the song curation in the 20th and also in the 21st century. British folk musician John Tams is famously quoted in Bean, stating: ‘I’ve never been to a Tory folk club yet’ (2014, p. 376). It not only reflects the political and social stance of the folk scene in Britain, but also the underlying selection criteria for at least a sizeable part of curated song both in print and in recordings, audio as well as video.

However, the political awareness that informs such positioning and resulting decisions about what is worth curating also accounts for the fact that certain songs in the course of time fall out of favour. This may be because they reflect attitudes that would now appear to be racist, e.g. the term *darkie* in some Stephen C. Foster songs, the reference to the tight-fisted ‘jewman money lender’ in Dominic Behan’s ‘Waxies Dargle’; the misogynistic story lines in many traditional songs, e.g. ‘I Wish I was Single Again’ or the stark male abuse in ‘Prince Heathen’ (Child 104), but also songs, of course in more mainstream songs like ‘Hey Joe’, ‘I’ve Got Woman’, ‘Run for Your Life’, etc. ; or discredited political views, e.g. ‘The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down’, but perhaps more overtly political, Ewan MacColl’s ‘Ballad of Stalin’. Similarly, American material of the late fifties in praise of the Western position in the Korean War, particularly songs extolling the efficacy of the Bomb, have been all but forgotten (Sweers & Andres Morrissey, 2019) and certainly would never enter the repertoire of today’s (British) Americana acts, except perhaps as an ironic anti-war statement.

Conclusion

What I hope to have demonstrated is that transmediation and thus the perpetuation of songs, as well as the curation process of what is deemed worthy of being recorded, is first of all a highly selective process. It can be riddled with errors in the form of linguistics and cultural misunderstandings deriving from the often traditionally disparate backgrounds of collectors/antiquarians and informants. It is likely to exclude elements that the latter may not want to share and others the former consider of less immediate interest, most notably, as we have seen, melodies or the subtleties of musical variation between various verses of a song (cf. Seeger’s concept of emic and etic notation), or it may reflect what the collector/antiquarian, at times rather spuriously or arbitrarily, deems the proper form of the material, leading to swathes of emendations and ‘improvements’. And, lastly, of course, it reflects the ideology of the collectors/antiquarians who see their work as a mission to curate with the intention to separate the wheat from the chaff. The result, particularly as far as

¹² MacKinnon convincingly characterises the British folk scene as follows: ‘it is a specific sub-section of the middle class which is heavily over-represented in folk music, those in service occupations which are largely in the public sector, jobs such as teaching and social work’ (1993, p. 130). The term *ventriloquizing* in this context is therefore apt.

ideology is concerned, could be described as the ‘submersion’ of elements, songs or entire genres that do not fit the discursive socio-political understanding or practices of the antiquarians and/or their imagined target audience. Callahan’s work *Songs of Slavery and Emancipation* (2022) is a very stark reminder of how the hegemonic discourse can submerge songs of slave revolts because the notion does not fit the traditional historiography of passive African Americans having to wait for the Whites to free them from the bondage of slavery. However the work is also a testimony that songs can be extremely resilient to submersion, surfacing in unexpected contexts, which is also reflected in the recent find in a local library of the ‘Chartist Hymns’ (Sanders, 2012 and Calderdale Council, n.d.), in this case, again sadly, without tunes; these hymns clearly advocate an anti-capitalist stance, condemning wage slavery and exploitation as a sin in the eyes of God, a very strongly antihegemonistic position in the contemporary 19th century politics.

This chapter has focused mainly on what we would now describe as folk music. Particularly in the understanding of the last seven to eight decades, in contrast to the 18th and 19th antiquarian marketing, publication in print or as recordings has arguably limited financial appeal and is therefore a welcome repository for the inclusion of or even an active focus on material and topics seen as unfit for mainstream curation, e.g. in Tin Pan Alley style music publishing. As Frith (2008) puts it: “Folk” ... did not describe musical production but musical values, and these values were derived from a critique of commercialism: the description of folk creation (active, collective, honest) was, in fact, an idealised response to the experience of mass consumption (fragmented, passive, alienating)” (p. 160). This is what has allowed so much 20th century folk song and material curated in the same period to reflect egalitarian and antihegemonic values and has the ability to counteract the forces of submersion. Nevertheless, curation still depends on the underlying ideologies. That these are subject to change and to cultural values is illustrated by the fact that in Germany and Switzerland they have so frequently been co-opted by the nationalist right (with a relatively brief interruption by the local folk movement in the late Sixties and in the Seventies) whereas in the British Isles they firmly reflect leftist values. In short: in curation ideologies matter.

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