



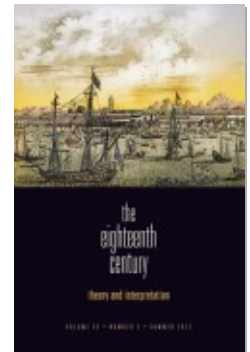
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Placed, Replaced, or Misplaced?: The Ballads' Progress

Mary Ellen Brown
Indiana University

Since my days as a graduate student in the 1960s, I have both heard and participated in many interrogations of the historical placement of the ballad genre in the Middle Ages. These verbal assaults on received academic tradition did finally eventuate in action: the replacement of the ballads in the eighteenth-century section of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. While singularly unheralded by literary scholars, perhaps indicating the ballads' slippage from critical view, the resurgence of interest in balladry, its history, and even ideological salience—witnessed by the present gathering of articles—offers a timely stimulus for scrutiny of this positioning of the genre in the eighteenth century itself.

Certainly institutional politics and disciplinary drift influence the questions we ask. And they have led me to ask again old interconnected questions: what is a ballad and where should the ballad be placed?

Formerly the queen of verbal art, the subject of the first and one of the most frequently taught “folklore” courses in the United States (largely in English departments), the ballad once figured prominently in two courses at my own university, taken by almost everyone who sought a postgraduate degree in what is now the department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology: as a general course on the ballad and folk song, and as a postgraduate seminar (with both English and Folklore course numbers) on *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. The very name of this seminar signals the centrality of Francis James Child's *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1882–1898), generic definitions derived from that collection, and the importance of Child to the study of the English/Scottish language ballads. This is the very same Child who has been called a forefather of English literary study, he who left behind the Boylston Chair of Rhetoric and Oratory to occupy the first professorship of English—both at Harvard—thus inadvertently providing fodder for today's intradisciplinary tension between adherents of composition and literary studies.¹ What

is almost always left out of this appropriation of Child is his role as ballad editor, his roots in the comparative philological tradition of the Brothers Grimm, and the centrality of his edition to virtually all subsequent scholarship on the subject. He would share my concern for the ballads' current invisibility in the curriculum.

General disciplinary shifts help explain this near erasure. The shift to synchronic ethnography, to performance theory and semiotic analysis has left the study of a "genre" figured as literary and especially historical (subject of invented genealogies and elaborated but closed pasts) very much on the margins in Folklore. Ballad texts (and tunes) occupy curricular space when they can be used to illustrate current paradigms, most particularly ethnographic, synchronic, and performative analyses.²

The situation in literary study has a different trajectory with de-periodization, generic confusion, and canonical interrogation as partial culprits. All PhDs in English were once familiar with the ballad as genre, with the Child collection, and with the ballads' medieval affinity. My question of place or location derives from literary study, from the idea that literary productions are best seen as historically located with similar works produced during the same time frame—that is, periods: the medieval, the eighteenth century, and so on. For probably two hundred years, the ballad hovered in the medieval period, thanks to Thomas Percy's eighteenth-century interventions. His discourses on the pre-history of English literature gave the ballads an author, the minstrels ("literature" must have author and thereby a period location), and the objects themselves pride of place, privileging the manuscript over orality as source.³ And so in fact it remains, in some quarters. Yet the inherited supposition of the ballads' medieval location and recent interrogations of that placement suggest the need to re-examine the history/histories of the ballad as well as the definitional foundations of its study. Evidence that all was not well with the medieval placement pre-date the *Norton Anthology* shift.

The Web database of *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, part of the *English Poetry Full-Text Database*, places the texts in the Middle Ages; ballads are indexed there under the category Middle English Lyrics and Ballads 1100–1500. On the other hand, Chadwyck-Healey, the publishers of the database, derive their selection of poetry and its placement from the *New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*. The 1981 *Shorter New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, edited by George Wilson, places ballads under the Renaissance to the Restoration 1550–1660, and the Child collection is placed in the category Miscellanies and Representative Ballad-Collections. This suggests period slippage from the heart of the medieval period.

Over a decade ago two of my own colleagues, medievalists with oral literary sympathies, worked to get the ballads placed elsewhere in the *Norton* (for which one of them served as editor of the medieval section); their reading of the texts and scholarship, rightly I think, called into question that received

placement. They opted for the eighteenth century. The correspondence, or part of it, about the re-placement of the ballad is instructive, reminding me of the undoubtedly apocryphal account of the selection of Chaucer's birth and death dates by vote as 1340–1400! Let me quote briefly from that correspondence without glossing or commenting on the statements made:

1. "I'd like to propose moving the Popular Ballads . . . from The Middle Ages to the end of the 18th century. . . . The statement in the headnote to the ballads that they 'were probably composed during the five-hundred year period from 1200 to 1700' has little to support it. . . . Only four of the Child ballads are found in medieval manuscripts. . . . The language of these ballads is much closer to Burns than it is to Middle-Scots. The logical place to read them in a survey would be as a transition to *Lyrical Ballads*, thus solving the problem of how to close out the 18th century."

To which the following reply:

2. "This is a clever idea; among other things it would serve as an insightful parody of the artificial period divisions that shape the anthology as a whole. And it's true that many of the ballads as we have them represent the 18th century notion of the middle ages. Nonetheless, I'm strongly against the proposal . . . to substitute a periodization based on formal texts for one based on a (speculative) transmission of the past strikes me as pedantic historicism. . . . The devil we know still seems a better choice to me."

A ballad scholar/medievalist critiques the exchange in private:

3. "I find absolutely no evidence whatever for the medieval origin of the ballads and an abundance of evidence against it. . . . It seems to me that . . . [Respondent 2] is intent on preserving a tradition in literary scholarship which has no basis in fact."⁴

This epistolary discussion did result in a shift in location between the revised (5th) and 6th editions of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Once nestled between "Everyman" and Sir Thomas Malory, the Popular Ballads then included eleven ballads ("Lord Randall," "Edward," "Barbara Allan," "The Wife of Usher's Well," "The Three Ravens," "Bonny George Campbell," "Sir Patrick Spens," "The Bonny Earl of Murray," "Thomas Rhymer," "Robin Hood and the Three Squires," and "St. Steven and King Herod"). In the 7th edition (2000), the Popular Ballads—now only six ("Lord Randall," "Bonny Barbara Allan," "The Wife of Usher's Well," "The Three Ravens," "Sir Patrick Spens," and "The Bonny Earl of Murray")—are placed between William Cowper and a category "Poems in Process," thus closing out the eighteenth centu-

ry. The headnote presciently notes, "It is . . . difficult to fit them into an anthology divided into historical periods because their anonymity and oral provenance resist periodization."⁵ An e-mail from the publishers in response to my query about the re-placement of the ballads reveals that "interestingly enough, not a single instructor has commented on the movement of the ballads," a telling remark perhaps suggesting the lack of interest in them. I'm interested, though, and ask myself whether the ballads actually belong in the eighteenth century and, if so, how this replacement or another might be used to invigorate the ballads study. I'd like to begin thinking about these questions, and a related, though prior one—what is a ballad?—by considering some of the ways we've studied ballads.

Early editions often brought together poetic materials deemed somehow different, even old, which lived in memory or manuscript or were fabricated to approximate those states as forgery, imitation, "found" manuscript. In Scotland, whose publishing history I know best, the second half of the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century saw a proliferation of collections with Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* leading the pack. Almost all editions claimed their contents as peculiarly Scottish, thus providing fodder for recent scholarly interest in the ideological salience of what Katie Trumpener named a "major new genre" of late eighteenth/early nineteenth century publication, that is, ballad editions.⁶ A number of recent studies have examined various collections in the context of the period's cultural politics, beginning often with the sometimes extended framing narratives or introductions. Susan Oliver, in a 2001 MLA paper, posits that Walter Scott selected and polished certain ballads to tell a kind of history for Scotland that reflected very much the zeitgeist of the time, that the *Minstrelsy* and especially the framing essays reveal the ideological salience of the work for Scott and for his period.⁷ In much more extended form, Nick Groom's *The Making of Percy's Reliques* and his facsimile edition of the *Reliques* contextually situate Percy, outline the assemblage of the *Reliques*, and describe the invention of a pre-history for English literature in the context of eighteenth-century critical work around the question of authenticity.⁸ The concept *authenticity* itself led commentators to classify and define, using *inauthenticity* as a criterion. In the case of ballads, the inauthentic was early on labeled a forgery, an imitation, or a literary ballad, above all, not authentic; thus some texts (songs) were separated from others to create the hierarchy we have inherited—traditional or popular, broadside, and literary. The idea of "authenticity" allowed Child (and others) to select the traditional/popular for inclusion in his work, paving the way for the study of ballad texts in generic isolation. Folklorists and ballad scholars have often dealt with the ballad in ahistorical ways, stressing texts (sometimes tunes), comparative textual analysis, and underlying shared assumptions about what the ballad is. This approach represents a continuation of the scholarly tradition of Francis James Child, which has provided a generic context for texts, putting together

similar texts (and themes) with little regard for date (thus ahistorical), though sometimes implicitly ranking the texts aesthetically (and I should add that many studies of the ballad have been concerned with the aesthetic dimension and have dealt with meaning and historicity of particular ballads). The web database, a reprint version in process by Loomis House, and a digital version by The Heritage Collectors—all of Child's collection—underline the perceived centrality of Child's work and approach.⁹ Accumulation of texts in the early twentieth century and the development of massive textual databases into the twenty-first attest to the textual, generic focus, while expanding the textual base beyond the Child ballads. Comparison of texts, confirming multiformity, has also led to an international dimension to the study of the popular ballad. Child's headnotes often reveal parallel ballad or tale materials in other language/national traditions and reflect the network of scholars (and books) throughout Europe he created through correspondence. In fact, this comparative, even imperative, focus has kept much scholarly attention on a certain type of text and has often not dealt with reasons for or explanations of cultural, stylistic, and poetic distinctions among texts being compared—often separated in time and space from one another. In this sense, the comparative approach in ballad studies is underdeveloped.

The comparative, textual approach has tended to mine collections for their texts while ignoring their framing narratives—the initial source of the generic and definitional assumptions. The framing narratives, of course, frequently suggest the cultural, artistic, and societal contexts from which the texts themselves have presumably sprung. They often provide assumptions about origins, definitions, and transmission. And, at times their suppositions are more fancy than fact: some ballads may have been created and socialized by minstrels, but not all; some ballads may be very old, even medieval, in origin; most are more recent—certainly almost all extant texts. And those who sing and read ballads conflate all manner of vernacular art without categorizing and dividing materials into traditional/popular, broadside, or literary. While the collective framing narratives might be called the literary history of the popular ballad, it is clear that this literary history itself needs to be re-examined and critiqued; while its pronouncements and assumptions may have no basis in fact, they have yet influenced the generic definitions of the ballad. In other words, the framing narratives have helped to form generic ideas about the ballad which may well reflect a particular cultural context. While “true” to that time and place, the ideas may well be dead wrong, or incomplete at best.

I have found a historian's work on a very different topic helpful in sorting this out. Paul A. Cohen's *History in Three Keys*, about both China's Boxer Rebellions and the practice of history, provides a nice tripartite discussion of different historical keys or registers: the eyewitness account, the historians' attempt to reconstruct objectively, and the mythographers. The latter, perceiving their view to be true, are nonetheless influenced by “the political, ideological,

rhetorical, and/or emotional needs of the present" (their individual presents).¹⁰ They may write the past from distinct ideological perspectives. It may be that the best histories strike a chord that involves all these keys, a multi-vocalic cacophony that may come closest to suggesting the past. The literary history of the popular ballad, for the most part, however, falls with the mythographers who have imagined pasts for the ballad in a splendid proliferation of theories: as Percy's need to provide a prehistory for English literature, which would allow his ballads and things a place and space and minstrels as authors; as Child described an anterior, premodern, homogeneous, isolated community very much in keeping with nineteenth-century ideas of cultural evolution¹¹; as some contemporary scholars privilege the nation and nationalism in their studies of a period's literary production. Guided by their own particular theoretical approaches, scholars and enthusiasts have applied them to a swath of ballads; a sheaf of texts; an assortment of singers, reciters, writers, poets—redactors all—whether performing orally or in print. Oral formulaic composition and ballad architectonics represent the twentieth century's contribution to the fund of scholarship explaining the enigma of the ballads' past. David Buchan redeveloped a selective authorship and reconceived the premodern, homogeneous (read clannit) society articulated by Child, Entwistle, and Adam Ferguson before him. In so doing, Buchan both asked us to accept Mrs. Brown's repertoire as representative of a kind of society that produced the best of the ballads, all found in the Child collection (and thus really a canon), and underlined the categorization of ballads into authentic and inauthentic, certainly greater or lesser types.¹² The beauty of all such totalizing theories is their global supposition, the answering of the unanswerable questions for all times: the ballads are a closed account; they were created in an earlier time and place where society was homogeneous—the folk society of early antiquarian dreams, the premodern haven.

While scrutiny of these ideologically inflected theories has been inconclusive, cumulatively their perusal suggests that popular poetry—often called ballads—exists in many societal contexts, is composed by many categories of people, and may be created in a variety of ways. Using these theories to define and delimit the ballad truncates the phenomenon/a. Historical and ethnographic evidence as well as texts, in and through time, suggest that there is a proliferation of ballad-esque formations. Many things are called ballads. In fact, "ballad making" is probably a continuing practice, an accessible artistic vehicle—at once local, regional, national, and transnational; popular, broadside, and literary. Ballads flourish from time to time, with variable ideas of balladness. Such a long perspective opens up the concept *ballad*.

Despite the textual evidence, then, we have these wonderful, powerfully persuasive literary histories built on a selection of texts whose miscellaneity interrogates grand conclusions and excludes and freezes a dynamic/ongoing phenomenon, often generative. These varied instances of literary history or

invented history, usually as framing narratives to editions of texts, make wonderful sense in an ideological, period-based context. But, for the most part, they make no sense as objective definitions, real histories of the textual reality viewed through time. Framing narratives/introductions at once place collections and editions within a time and place and situate them within an ideological context that links those works with their time of origin. But this does not mean the framing narratives are true. In fact, knowing their ideological situatedness should raise proverbial red flags of caution. Instead, these framing narratives have become the core of a literary history of the popular ballad that has influenced where we place the material and how we define it, determining what is or is not a ballad. The texts may be opaque, but the history invented suggests their transparency. The net result has limited our ability to see ballads/balladry as a persistent, vernacular, even an occasional, accessible poetic impulse—in variable form.

We have a proliferation of all sorts and types of texts, some with tunes, and stories created about their contexts. Perhaps this muddle has contributed to the marginalization both in oral and written literary contexts of this narrative *poetry* or *song* which once took pride of place as the very top, the very beginning of poetry. The definitional and periodizational muddles and inventions have impinged on our understanding of the ballad. Reformulating the definition (what is a ballad?) and placement (where do ballads belong?) may open the way for the ballads' reinsertion into the curriculum in a number of guises. We must look to the texts—in all their variety.

With the proliferation of cultural studies, the interest in the postmodern fragment, intertextuality and pastiche—*ni originaux, ni copie*—the multifaceted phenomena we've come to call the ballad ought certainly to have a place.¹³ Laws's 1957 study of American appropriation of British broadsides described what we would now call a pastiche formation, a facile recycling process: "Beginnings and endings, moral observations, descriptive passages, and even action and dialogue were all available from earlier pieces. They [broadside writers/publishers] had only to reshape them, adding whatever new details seemed worth recording, and they had what could be sold as new ballads."¹⁴ Or "the typical ballad is simply a conventional imitation of an earlier piece."¹⁵ The ballad is always already postmodern: the degree of textual (not to mention musical) recurrence we may call commonplace or formula attests to an amazing intertextuality, sometimes leaving a text that is only a fragment to reference a whole as in the recurring, evocative, "emotional core" stanza from Child 173:

Last night there were four maries,
 Tonight there'll be but three;
 Twas Mary Seaton and Mary Beaton,
 And Mary Carmichael and me.¹⁶

There is also Robert Chambers's fanciful theory proclaiming Lady Wardlaw (1677–1727) the author of "Sir Patrick Spens" and other canonical ballads using the intertextuality between those exemplars and her own literary ballad "Hardyknute."¹⁷ That poem, published anonymously in 1719 and later in Percy's *Reliques*, describes the Battle of Largs, October 2, 1263, and Hardyknute and Scotland's victory over Haco, King of Norway. The case of Elizabeth Halket, Lady Wardlaw, interrogates the distinction between the popular and the literary, showing the power of cultural memory in generating new exemplars, for no doubt Lady Wardlaw was familiar with "Sir Patrick Spens" and internalized its style and content. We might even move further afield and examine the diffuse artistic resource of the same ballad in Coleridge's poem, "Dejection: An Ode" featuring the epigram from Coleridge indicates, the "Ballad of Sir Patrick Spence":

Late, late yestreen I saw the new Moon,
 With the old Moon in her arms;
 And I fear, I fear, my Master dear!
 We shall have a deadly storm.

Note the first stanza, which riffs on and fills in the spare original, making the weather prognostication definitive, as poetic context:

Well! If the Bard was weather-wise, who made
 The grand old ballad of Sir Patrick Spence,
 This night, so tranquil now, will not go hence
 Unroused by winds, that ply a busier trade
 Than those which mould yon cloud in lazy flakes,
 Or the dull sobbing draft, that moans and rakes
 Upon the strings of this Aeolian lute,
 Which better far were mute.
 For lo! the New-moon winter-bright!
 And overspread with phantom light,
 (With swimming phantom light o'erspread
 But rimmed and circled by a silver thread)
 I see the old Moon in her lap, foretelling
 The coming on of rain and squally blast.
 And oh! that even now the gust were swelling,
 And the slant night-shower driving loud and fast!
 Those sounds which oft have raised me, whilst they awed,
 And sent my soul abroad,
 Might now, perhaps their wonted impulse give,
 Might startle this dull pain, and make it move and live!¹⁸

If both “Hardyknute” and the Coleridge “Ode” refer to “Sir Patrick Spens,” in fact owing some of their own aesthetic resonance to the famous ballad, they illustrate the power of recycled images and cultural references. More than that, the three are intertextually entwined; they belong together. The totality is diminished if we eliminate one redaction.

The British composer Judith Weir offers another example of the reuse of ballad materials in a work called “Scotch Minstrelsy,” which embeds partial texts of “Bessie Bell and Mary Gray” (“after F. J. Child; *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*”), “Bonnie James Campbell,” “Lady Isabel and the Elf-Knight,” “The Gypsy Laddie,” and “The Braes of Yarrow.” According to a *New York Times* feature, Weir has been particularly attracted to folk music, noting especially the bagpipe.¹⁹ Ought we not to recognize Weir’s approach/use as one kind of ballad continuity? A recycling? A pastiche?

Each version where multiformity and dynamism persist is neither original, nor a copy, suggesting the enigma of the pastiche formation. If we are able to reconfigure and separate our object of study from the fanciful and intriguing imagined past, keeping that past by historicizing and deconstructing it, we might resuscitate the ballad as a fluid, dynamic practice more nearly reflecting its lived reality. The eighteenth-century categories, based on a kind of authenticity, may artificially fragment the ballad, making the theories and history of more importance than the poems and songs, the ballads themselves.

I suggest then that we might begin by dispensing with the hierarchical divisions, with received notions of orality, with circular definitions that delimit and then define based on the selection made, and expand, extend, and enrich our subject by admitting the gaps in our knowledge, but recognizing continuity and change. In fact, in our own practices we often do this and have done this: recall S. B. Hustvedt’s 1930 remarks: “There is no such thing as a canon of popular ballads, no nearly infallible means of setting a popular ballad apart from one that is not, just as there is no generally accepted definition of the popular ballad”; “ballad origins would be found to have been plural and complex. It is little likely that ballads as we know them could be traced to anything like a common ancestry. It is to be suspected that popular and non-popular elements have been strangely intermingled during the whole period of ballad history.”²⁰ And there is my colleague in the headnote to the ballads in *The Norton Anthology*: “During the 1960s the antiwar and civil rights movements inspired original ballads by performers like Bob Dylan and African-American poets like Dudley Randall. Thus protesters at different periods of time have taken over the style and manner of this seemingly timeless poetry.”²¹ Consumers of ballads, sung and read, have always already accepted the juxtaposition of old and new, story and reflection—that is, narrative and lyric—in their individual artistic performances. The mixtures are there in those eighteenth- and nineteenth-century collections and in Percy’s folio manuscript. Malcolm Laws wrote in 1957 that “The distinction made by scholars between Child bal-

lads and all other is unknown to the folk."²² But we have continued to follow a scholarly practice that delimits, carves up, and defines in what we used to call an etic way—that is, from a scholarly stance: we have constructed our subject and fought to keep it as we defined it—"the devil we know."

This is my call for a revised and re-articulated collective practice, for a different definition and published framework in order to reinsert the ballad into the curricular slot it ought to fill. If the ballad is a genre, it is an especially malleable one; Albert Friedman may well have been right when he called the ballads a *genus*, held together by "similarities of manner and method."²³ To compare "it" with something like the sonnet is to underline the ballad's instability, its very postmodernity, its fluctuations, and its multiformity. The miscellaneity of early collections of ballads—and songs—turns out, I think, to have been right on the mark. Perhaps we need to return to what was connoted in Percy's time, noting with Friedman: "almost anything sung in the streets or gathered into the lower-class miscellanies, and even in the minds of the literary antiquaries, ballads were intimately connected, or confused, with all manner of song and old poetry."²⁴ Even accepting a broader definitional field, we need to question Friedman's class-based moniker—"lower class." We are all too familiar with the ideas of reception that have so often been featured in the scholarly discourse we have invented around the ballad, the problematic of such designations as "folk." Whatever the ballad is or was, it undoubtedly circulated throughout society in many segments, though clearly how it might be transmitted and received and interpreted could certainly vary. Much discourse has been built around these segmented notions, with categories like elite, court, literate materials perceived as "better," and "lesser," more popular materials perceived as unoriginal, derivative, and deficient. It may be that the hypothesizing of a class-based artistic order reflected/s the viewpoint or positionality of various writers' locations on their social landscape. More nuanced historical studies, which are culture—and time—specific, and thus not generalizable, can be useful avenues for exploration, calling into question this extreme sort of segmentation.

Roger Chartier's work on *mentalités*, on the multiple ways of thinking and meaning-making at particular times and places, suggests an approach. "Popular culture is a category of the learned," he writes, which he intends to be a starting point for breaking down the distinction so frequently encountered between the "learned" and the "lewed."²⁵ He describes the different audiences and their different class locations which influenced their receptions and readings of Molière's "George Dandin." In other words, Molière was not just performed for the court but also for the commoners and the bourgeois. Common sense suggests that ballads too were known and heard and read differently in multiple societal locations. Addison's aural encounters with the ballad in the street and displayed in print on the walls of residences interrogate the presumptions about the lettered and unlettered which still litter our scholarship.

He said of ballads that they “please[s] all kinds of Palates” and “please those Tastes which are the most unprejudiced or the most refined.”²⁶ Alan Ramsay, to please all audiences, published the same materials in deluxe editions and as single sheets and garlands; it may be that there were class distinctions in the packaging, if not in the materials.²⁷ Poets took ballad plots for plays and so on. Chartier also underlines the importance of media shifts on transmission, distribution, and appropriation of literature. I take this as advice: we should question the static and restricted ideas about the ballad as a genre that have been fabricated and re-invented over and over again.

Rather than providing a clear and definitive generic designation, the received definitions of the ballad ought to be revised and expanded; many things have been called a ballad. In reality, the concept *ballad* refers to a capacious artistic mode which refers to vernacular, accessible verse forms, popular across perceived social divisions. A persistent mode, perhaps distinguished by its periodic resurgence (whence Walter Scott’s ideas of revival), both the concept and individual exemplars are variable, responding to media, contextual, and historical imperatives. This allows then for different stylistic attributes under different media, contextual, and historical situations.

Sometimes serious, at other times parodic; sometimes sung, at other times read; individual redactions are highly influenced by the vessels of transmission-poet, exemplary performer, hack writer, the familiar yokel, the printer/publisher, the modestly lettered. At different times and in different places, the ballad concept takes particular forms and embeds particular content in particular stylistic ways, often capturing popular taste and being subject to recurring, if fickle, popular reception to the fluid idea/vessel/form.

Then, where do I think the ballads belong? Certainly they belong in the eighteenth century, the century where hegemonic ideas of the ballad took root, the epoch of Percy’s *Reliques*, the gathering if not the publication of Scott’s *Minstrelsy*, the collecting of Mrs. Brown of Falkland’s immensely influential texts, of David Herd’s edition and manuscript. This is not even to mention the very rich ephemeral publication of things called ballads—the political, the verse tellings of Shakespeare, the record of events long since passed from memory. Of course ballads belong to the eighteenth century. Many ballads are found in period collections, and eighteenth-century ideas about what the authentic ballad is have had enormous influence. The re-placement of the ballads in the eighteenth century is, in this sense, prescient. Yet it obscures the real story, that ballads belong to other centuries too—texts as well as collections of texts whose framing narratives have a different ideological salience.

For a true idea of the vitality and persistence of this popular artistic mode, ballads should be placed in every canonical period with appropriate historicizing headnotes²⁸; all periods need to be re-explored to reveal the ballad richness. “Judas” would indeed fit the Middle Ages, and our headnote might explore the eighteenth-century idea of minstrel origins. The seventeenth cen-

tury might show the strength of the English broadside tradition with headnotes on the rise of print and literacy and the social and political role of this vernacular art. On the other hand, including sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Scottish materials called ballads might reveal a malleable lyric tradition of short, highly topical “poems.”²⁹ The eighteenth century might juxtapose presumably orally derived texts with works by early Romantic poets, linking “perceptions,” ideological ideas of the ballads, and that far-reaching literary/cultural movement. The nineteenth century might be illustrated by some of the great Scottish collections, the twentieth with poetic embellishments and newly created texts, with recordings, and so on and so forth.

Of course this appropriation of periodization might be considered subversive, undermining assumptions about periods, their unity and coherence. And I offer the tentative suggestion of ballad—writ large—placement to call attention to the inadequacy of received placements, whether the medieval or eighteenth century. A persistent, recurrent placement across time periods might be seen as heuristic, an organizing principle, to illustrate the ballads’ shape-shifting as individual exemplars and as a poetic manifestation. And this appropriation also suggests a need to look again at the kinds of material anthologized: should we not include more of the vernacular, the popular, and the ephemeral in general? The ballads are all those things, and it was only their presumed age, presumed medieval origins, and sometimes their startling beauty that got them into the canon. Most of these, of course, have been taken from the Child collection.

The ballad has always been an awkward fit for anthologies—even literary collections—largely because of the anonymity, presumed orality, opacity of time and place, and uncertain origins of the texts identified as ballads. The texts’ materiality, preserved first in manuscript and printed collections, only latterly recorded from the sung or spoken word, as if without context or a history, has presented gaping holes to be filled with speculation on origins and authorship and with definitions. Maybe we need not pin it down, but accept its chameleon-like appearance and reappearance, its transmutations—as in Tam Lin’s recovery from fairyland, quoted from the version Robert Burns communicated to James Johnson for *The Scots Musical Museum*:

‘They’ll turn me in your arms, lady,
 Into an esk and adder;
 But hold me fast, and fear me not,
 I am your bairn’s father.

‘They’ll turn me to a bear sae grim,
 And then a lion bold;
 But hold me fast, and fear me not,
 As ye shall love your child.

'Again they'll turn me in your arms
 To a red het gaud of airn;
 But hold me fast, and fear me not,
 I'll do to you nae harm.

'And last they'll turn me in your arms
 Into a burning gleeed;
 Then throw me into well water,
 O throw me in wi speed.

'And then I'll be your ain true-love,
 I'll turn a naked knight;
 Then cover me wi your green mantle,
 And cover me out o sight.³⁰

At once a part of the literary canon and dismissed as low art, this vernacular versifying impulse is best seen as a persistent, variable outlet, and its study shows a dialogic and interrogatory relationship to the old canonical certainties.

Imagine with me then a new anthology of ballads, with no claims for generic exclusivity, but implying some generative relationship among all the materials, a mega-concept of continuity and change. This anthology would be full of the textual (and sometimes musical) evidence—the poems and songs, their corporality and historicity demanding notice. These texts we have in profusion. The headnotes and introductory materials would strive to provide as much of the contextual information as possible, as well as touch on the rich body of “ideas” and “theories” this material—popular, broadside, literary—has stimulated over time: I think here of Pound and Gummere, of Child and Kittredge, of Macmath and Walker, of Peter and David—the Buchans; but I also think of Coffin and Laws, of Shepherd and Wurzbach, of the Roxburghe and Pepys collections, of Ehrenpreis and Yamanaka, of Coleridge and Wordsworth, Housman and Kipling.³¹ The list goes on and must include Scott and Percy. By pulling together materials generatively linked, in multiple media, across time and space, we might display a verse form or tendency—an art—with enormous persistence, sometimes great beauty. Placing ballads in the eighteenth century offers a good place to begin.

NOTES

An early version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Kommission für Volksdichtung, Leuven, Belgium, 2002 and subsequently published as “A Modest Proposal: or My Prolegomena to Twenty-First Century Ballad Study,” *Ballads and Diversity: Perspectives on Gender, Ethos, Power and Play*, eds. Isabelle Peere and Stefaan Top, (Trier, 2004), 64–71. I had initially begun the process of rethinking this topic while revisiting ballad scholarship with a graduate seminar on the ballad in 2002.

1. In reality, Child's shift from the one post to the other was a result of the changing academy, the shift from the old classical tradition of required daily recitations and intensive student-teacher interaction to the European research model, which emphasized the production of knowledge in written form—that is, research, as well as pedagogy. See also Jill Terry Rudy, "Considering Rhetoric's Wayward Child: Ballad Scholarship and Intradisciplinary Conflict," *Journal of Folklore Research* 35 (1998): 85–98.

2. Disciplines may reveal their foci through questions asked; folklorists' and ethnographers' questions have often focused on observing the living materials, sung and performed, with questions about the extent and scope of repertoires; culturally prescribed limits to creativity—especially when using inherited materials (continuity and change); context of performance; interpretation—both those of singer/performer and scholar. Such study is not limited to the English-language traditions. One aspect of performance that has often been noted, if under-explored, is the musical. Bertrand Bronson's studies of the tunes of Child's ballads (*The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballad* [Princeton, 1959–1972]) underlined one accepted truism about the ballads of the Child sort: many are sung; they are a blending of text and tune. Bronson's work was thought to complete the Child collection, erroneously believed to have ignored tunes. Child's sources, by and large, did not include tunes, but he was aware of the musical nature of many ballads, and in volume V listed sources where tunes could be found, printing a selection.

3. See especially Nick Groom, *The Making of Percy's Reliques* (Oxford, 1999). For a discussion of minstrelsy more generally, see Maureen N. McLane, "The Figure Minstrelsy Makes: Poetry and Historicity," *Critical Inquiry* 29 (2003): 429–52. McLane's essay provides an insightful interrogation of the "minstrel" and explores eighteenth-century appropriations. She also suggests that the concept of the "minstrel" could (and can) easily be transformed into something else. Thus the minstrel, like the ballad, might be and mean many things.

4. I am indebted to Alfred David for sharing this epistolary discussion with me.

5. See M. H. Abrams, et al., *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 7th ed. (New York, 2000), 2882.

6. See Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton, 1997), xi.

7. I am grateful to Susan Oliver for sharing her paper, "Resisting Radical Energies: Walter Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* and the re-fashioning of the Border Ballads," with me. It has since appeared in print: (*Cycnos* 19 [2002]: 49–63).

8. Groom, ed., *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (London, 1996).

9. See Chadwyck-Healey's "The English and Scottish Popular Ballads," *English Poetry Full-Text Database*; the Loomis House reprint of *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, vols. 1–3 (Northfield, Minn., 2002–05); and the digital version produced by Heritage Muse, <http://www.heritagemuse.com>.

10. Paul A. Cohen, *History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience, and Myth* (New York, 1997), 213.

11. "Ballad Poetry," *Johnson's Universal Cyclopaedia*, 1900, reprint, *Journal of Folklore Research* 32 (1994): 214–22.

12. See David Buchan, *The Ballad and the Folk* (London, 1972).

13. For an extended discussion of the concept of "pastiche," see Ingeborg Hoesterey, *Pastiche: Cultural Memory in Art, Film, Literature* (Bloomington, 2001).

14. Malcolm G. Laws, Jr., *American Balladry from British Broad-sides: A Guide for Students and Collectors of Traditional Song* (Philadelphia, 1957), 32–33.

15. Laws, 55.

16. See Tristram P. Coffin's "Mary Hamilton and the Anglo-American Ballad as an Art Form," *Journal of American Folklore* 70 (1957): 208–14.

17. Robert Chambers, *The Romantic Scottish Ballads, Their Epoch and Authorship* (Edinburgh, 1849).

18. Excerpts of the "Dejection: An Ode" are taken from Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Sibylline Leaves* (Oxford, 1990), 237–43.

19. Cori Ellison, "She Learned Her Noble Song from Oboe and—Bagpipes?" *The New York Times*, Sunday, July 10, 1994, H23.

20. Sigurd Bernhard Hustvedt, *Ballad Books and Ballad Men: Raids and Rescues in Britain, America, and the Scandinavian North since 1800* (Cambridge, Mass., 1930), 4 and 14.

21. Abrams, 2882.

22. Laws, 64.

23. Albert C. Friedman, *The Ballad Revival: Studies in the Influence of Popular on Sophisticated Poetry* (Chicago, 1961), 21.

24. Friedman, 63.

25. Roger Chartier, *Forms and Meanings: Texts, Performances, and Audiences from Codex to Computer* (Philadelphia, 1995).

26. Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, no. 70, May 21, 1711 and no. 74, Friday, May 25, 1711.

27. Friedman, 123.

28. Even if the texts were limited to those in the Child collection, a true picture of the ballads' persistence would necessitate this approach, for texts of specific ballads have been discovered in manuscript, printed collections, and from singing in and across time periods.

29. I have explored this consideration in a chapter titled "Balladry: A Vernacular Poetic Resource," *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature* (forthcoming, Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

30. See Francis James Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (Boston, 1882–1898), I:340–43.

31. I list here names of writers and collections that resonate with me when I think about ballads: collectively their works offer a kind of mini-view of some of the approaches taken in the past, revealing some of the persistent questions students of the ballad have asked.