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CHAPTER IV

FOLK SONG?

High Priests and a Heretic

Much sympathy with your *Topic* in
regarding the folk song of your district
it would help when I come, but
I fear we are very much astray
in our elemental idea upon the subject
& that some of my notes might
appear as criticisms rather than as
lights. You had your *ambulations*
"Folk Song of the upper Thames" but
you include certain Victorian
drawing room, or parlour lyrics by
known writers & composers which
may be found in contemporary
sheet music. I don't know
whether you rank these as "folk song"



LETTER FROM FRANK KIDSON TO ALFRED
WILLIAMS (PROBABLY LATE 1915)



PART I

PROPÆDEUTIC: THE THING-TO-BE-EXPLAINED

WHAT IS MEANT BY 'FOLK' SONG? WHAT ARE THE FOUNDING DIVISIONS OF THE PROBLEM? *What mode of knowledge is apposite to this province of outlandish musical forms and enactments? An inventorying of root constituents is intended not prescriptively—what all enquirers must fulfil—but as promoting examination of the ways individual commentators configure those components around their unique compound of knowledge-ignorance, oriented by contingent purpose. Reflection on terminology is woven in in ironizing parallel (and as coda). The thrust of this approach is a refocusing away from materials towards disjunct clusters of agents, less banal than it appears, given that discussion tends instinctively to be pitched in terms of contents. The rigorous undertaking is not simply to 'collect'—that is, record in whatever medium tune and words—but to elucidate (seek to extend understanding of) an order of music-cum-music-making held to be quintessentially other, qualitatively distinct from sedimented forms. While investigation in the present can substantially regulate its data creation—the sanctity of fieldwork—the peculiarity of the problem becomes more pronounced in its historical dimension: predominantly oral workings decree that any body of record will be at best insufficient, typically non-existent. The question is raised of tooling, of systems of representation and analytical means consonant with an out-of-the-way object, of explanatory possibility where conditions habitual to scholarly practice are wanting. Pioneering fieldworkers groped their way around the problem by affixing the qualifier 'folk', then largely pristine and thus capable of being employed in all innocence, to the contents (melodic and verbal) of what they sought out. What they could not have foreseen was the contentious multiplicity of reference which would accrete around the term as revival burgeoned and fractured. The resultant discrediting, supremely a terminological loss of innocence, points up the naivety of supposing that a province may be neatly marked off and a term made to stick exclusively to it. What this perception omits—blindness and insight—is that the stricture will apply to any alternative proposed: traditional, ethnic, roots, vernacular. More perniciously, a myopic preoccupation with terminology tends to occlude that the difficulties engendered are primarily methodological-conceptual: that is, the question should be not 'what label to attach', but 'what possibility of locating a province deemed discrete and converting it to knowledge' (striving of the enquiring subject to get inside the object of her attentions). Squabbles over nomination cede place to (attempted) clarification of the cardinal divisions of the problem, in the light of which expressive adequacy of existing terms may, incidentally, be estimated.*

§ I : KNOWLEDGE? (OBJECT AND SUBJECT)

BOSWELL. 'Then, Sir, what is poetry?'

JOHNSON. 'Why, Sir, it is much easier to say what it is not. We all *know* what light is; but it is not easy to *tell* what it is.'

The Life of Samuel Johnson (11 April 1776)

WHAT, THEN, IS FOLK SONG? THE QUESTION IS AT ONCE TRITE, IN SOME FORM FINALLY inescapable—if only to disavow the very idea—and significantly miscast. In the most manifest terms, the intention is of a unitary domain of vocal music(making) distinguishable within the multifarious body of musical creation, a postulate which must be confronted, if not acquiesced in. Any such segregation is not, *pace* Cecil Sharp & Co (*infra*), self-effecting (at least not in formal terms), but must be the outcome of intervention by reflective enquirers, calling into being the root distinction of object and subject upon which the work of (attempted) conversion to knowledge conventionally turns. Here, 'object' is constituted, notionally, as a certain order of totality of song, singer and milieu; and the enquiring subject enters in the person of the 'collector' in all her guises: fieldworker, editor, exegete (evangelist). For expository purposes, given the primacy accorded here to partialities of filtering ('mediation'), this root duality is better figured as a triad, resolving the object-subject embrace into disjunct clusters of percolating agents (those who, musically, are *aboriginal* and those whose avocation is that of *interloper*), and a (contested) largely unprovenanced corpus of melodico-verbal materials which can be abstracted but which have only notional existence independently of either party. The primary elements are thus:

aboriginals | melodico-verbal corpus ('folk' song) | interlopers

Where the essentialism 'song', however qualified, connotes contents *in vacuo*, a *découpage* predicated on the negotiating of intermediaries opens up permutations; it is this tangle of difficulties making up a sphere of enquiry, a dynamic of premise and testing, that the qualifier 'folk'—a usage once new and strange, become little more than a dismissive label—might usefully be taken to designate, not a closed set subject to ready definition. Thus construed, the condition of 'folk' song is not categorical but differential, immanent to a play of inherently discrepant mediatings.

§2 A KIND OF DOING? ABORIGINALS AND THEIR (MUSICAL) CONTENTS

What are the founding elements of this rude province, social and economic as much as musical, which so unexpectedly became an object of polite attention under the unwonted qualifier 'folk'? (The example of the 'Upper Thames' has been sketched out in Chapter II.) In that the term's primary resonances are populist, the topic may be broached as a musical variant on the ready-made rubric *what people do for themselves*, a formula which neatly clinches the issue and points, in each of its four heads, productively to a range of questions. The order of discussion is reversed, so as to respect the capital modulation signalled by the last component.

§2.1 (WHAT PEOPLE DO) FOR THEMSELVES A CAPITAL SCHISM The extension 'for themselves' denotes participation, but gestures at a division more fundamental. Emblematic of the rationalizing, technologizing civilizations of the modern occident is a remorseless harnessing of ingenuity to the extension of expertise, such that entire realms of endeavour are placed beyond the ambit of the formally unschooled, a professionalization—of knowledge, of the modes of expression—which is thus also an expropriation, an acquiescent delegating to the institutionally accredited specialist few.^o This crystallizing of high culture effects a root segregation into elite and demotic (polite and popular) spheres, the former according a certain undesigned salience to the latter. Music(making), manifestly, enjoys no exemption from the alienations of aggressive specialization—indeed embodies the schism in singular form, customarily expressed as ART : FOLK / TRADITION(AL). Broad consensus† on this root divide breaks down doctrinally, however, on the question of how, if at all,

^o Two non-musical instances, tectonics and medicine. *Primo*: industrial Swindon was also allotmentsville, and allotment holders require a shed. Bits of superannuated rolling stock were, by one means or another, readily obtainable with which to confect one of these indispensable shelters. In that the resourceful confectors were not the recipients of formal training in design and construction, their efforts can usefully be distinguished as 'folk' architecture. (Conversely, when the burgeoning agglomeration found itself in need of an imposing town hall, the mayor and corporation—many of whom are likely to have been railwaymen, and allotment holders—did not roll up their sleeves and improvise a structure from sides of old railway wagon, but delegated the task to a custodian of technical knowledge.) *Secundo*: technology and the application of empirical scientific method, supremely, have removed the prerogative of healing from the realm of popular practice. 'Folk' medicine, located in opposition to lengthy technical formation, embraces such efficacious potions as those concocted from badger fat, of which Williams himself has the example of Granny Ferris at Basset Down: 'It was especially in demand for anointing the ears of deaf people, and for use in cases of acute bronchitis, swellings and inflammation. Granny's last pot is just exhausted; people come from far off to beg a little of it.' (*Villages of the White Horse*, p. 27). Understood in this way, 'folk' stands as the perfectly valid and serviceable linguistic marker of a capital axis expressible as 'what people do for themselves' / 'what people do not do—are excluded from doing—for themselves'. Music, as we shall see, represents a complicated twist on this apparently neat polarity.

† Cecil Sharp, in *English Folk Song: Some Conclusions* (1907) makes this distinction an irremovable cornerstone: see Part 2 *infra*. It is retained, with qualifications, by for example *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, which has: 'For European countries, the dictionary distinguishes between 'art' music (that is, European classical and sacred musics), 'folk' or 'traditional' music and 'popular' music. However, the perspectives of contributors express different national intellectual and disciplinary traditions.' (Second edition (2001), Volume IX, p. 67—entry for 'Folk Music'.)

the popular end of the polarity should subdivide. *Is there a further cardinal division between traditional and commercial popular music, as First Revival interlopers believed (the dyad is really a triad); or is the demotic realm a continuum, as a heretical section of Second Revival would have it?*

§2.2 (WHAT) PEOPLE (DO FOR THEMSELVES) A TRIBE & ITS WORLD The polarity as it stands of institutional schooling / unschooling is too loose. Here, 'people' designates not the totality of those unconditioned by formal instruction but, for practical purposes, the manual toilers of the countryside,⁹ labourers and small artisans and their families, a shrinking segment of the populace by the time of quarrying for its song by outsiders. This group, representing a *de facto* form of *ethnos*, can be taken to be circumstantially self-selecting, working to its own undogmatized values. By extension, the (vocal) music-making characteristic of a tribe has to be acquired, rendered, handed on in a milieu to which it is, at any juncture, integral. Historical developments peculiar to modern England—relatively extensive circulation, the infiltrations of print, a porousness conducing to supra-parochial dispersal—render this habitat complex.

§2.3 (WHAT PEOPLE) DO (FOR THEMSELVES) What, in specifically musical terms, does a population segment of this order 'do'? Music is a realm in which 'do' is ambiguous, covering both articulation and creation (composition). Music *stricto sensu* entails performance (music-making), the delivery of organized sound by means of the body, inflectional procedures through which the enactor strives to negotiate her materials. The particular values which inform articulation, the peculiar competence constituted, stand at the core of the problem. Performance is, furthermore,

⁹ This is not to ignore the debate over whether there might be an urban or industrial form of the music-making at issue, simply to observe that, overwhelmingly, the attentions of the first wave of collectors were directed at country people. Further controversy, conceivably otiose, surrounds the issue of whether the socio-economic group in question constitutes a 'peasantry', as the early collectors supposed. In classical economic terms, the early break-up of feudalism in England in favour of a market system substituted for the peasantry a class of toilers who sold their labour for cash wages, which the rubric 'rural proletariat' perfectly cogently expresses. Dave Harker (*Fakesong*, 1985) polemically but non-technically follows this line. C J Bearman mounts a typically muddled rearguard action based on a combined appeal to contemporary popular usage—that others beside Sharp *believed* that peasantry obtained—and, airily dismissing a vast scholarly literature, catch-all glosses drawn from non-specialist dictionaries: 'One who lives in the country and works on the land, either as a small farmer or as a labourer; the name is also applied to any rustic of the working classes; a countryman, a rustic.' (*New English Dictionary*, 1905.) These putative defences neglect that points of knowledge are not to be adjudicated by reference to ill-informed popular belief or dictionary entries designed as working guides to the range of usage. (C J Bearman, 'Who were the folk? The demography of Cecil Sharp's Somerset folk singers', *The Historical Journal*, 43, 3 (2000), pp. 754 *et seq.*) Linguistic naiveties of this kind dog the problem generally. The capital point which both parties in the debate contrive to miss in this context is that the issue is only germane if some informing *musical* connection can be shown: what bearing does the question of whether Sharp's fabled singer Mrs Overd was or was not a 'peasant' have on the matter and manner (ultimately, the value) of her singing? (Sharp himself, of course, believed there was; but made no serious effort—saw no need?—to sustain the position in argument. See Part 2 *infra*.) A good (bad?) instance of how ink slinging will cause commentators to lose sight of proper pertinence.

the vehicle of transmission, both of contents and of emblematic articulatory ethos.[⊙] From where, then, does the performing tribe derive its materials? Simplistically, provenance gives two possibilities, internal composition or external adoption, only the first of which constitutes doing-as-creating. Terminologically, the polarities are *endogenous* / *exogenous* (the advantage of *endogenous* 'originating from within' over the more usual *indigenous* being that it gives the antonym *exogenous* 'originating from without'), or *creation(ist)* / *assimilation(ist)*. The second term in each case expresses inverse perspective: *exogenous* emphasizes creation external to the tribe, thus introducing the complicating element of a class of agents distinct from aboriginal performers and a network of circulation; while *assimilation* starts from recipients, accentuating the (f)act of adoption, and horizons of taste thereby at least implied.† The modality common to the two possibilities is *orality*, all that subsists predominantly by word of mouth, which serves to problematize the genesis question.‡

§2.4 WHAT (PEOPLE DO FOR THEMSELVES) Concomitant to the matter of provenance is that of contents, here a marriage of word and tune: to what extent is there a distinctive corpus within the profusion of musical forms, distinguishable in terms of internal properties? A domain obtains *de facto*, but with the native singers cast in differing offices by the genesis options: if creators, they necessarily determine character; if adoptors, their role is to sift and assimilate what is crafted by others. Either way, the coagulating of a repertory entails exercise of a certain discrimination, an undoctrinaire horizon of preference.

⊙ Percy Grainger (1882–1961) was an early apostle of the determining role of delivery: 'I think that most folk-song enthusiasts who have had the good luck to hear the singing of gifted folk-singers and chanteymen, must feel that much of the attractiveness of the live art lies in the execution as well as in the contents of the songs ...' attracted as he was to what he found to be 'delightfully at variance with the usages of cultured music.' ('Collecting with the Phonograph', *Journal of the Folk Song Society* III, 12 (1908), pp. 150 and 156.) Obvious as this view may seem, it has been far from widespread among *aficionados* in the revival. An article on the fabled Norfolk singer Harry Cox (1885–1971) confesses 'for many of us in the [English Folk Dance and Song] Society it has taken five, ten or even twenty years to appreciate the subtleties of his performances.' (Cited by Peter Kennedy in his notes to the sound recording *Harry Cox Sings English Love Songs*.)

† The assimilationist view extends the dimensions of the process: notably, the vagaries of exposure to what is externally purveyed—you cannot acquire what you have not heard—and the restrictions of prowess—you cannot acquire what you cannot perform. (What people create for themselves they can by definition perform.) In this way, notionally discrete 'aspects' of the problem prove to be mutually limiting, highlighting a decisive, and neglected, conjunction of musical property and articulatory habit which qualifies the *anything goes* line. The easy one-liner 'they sang it if they liked it (didn't they)' thus omits decisive conditions: if 'they' were exposed to it I and they liked it I and were able to sing it I they sang it. The dynamic is of a mutually informing nexus of circumstance, competence and non-doctrinaire election, contrasting with the organic sequestered model promoted, for example, by Cecil Sharp (see Part 2 *infra*). Idiosyncratic negotiations of aboriginals are displayed in adoption-adaptation: Scan Tester, a musician formed in traditionally-occurring repertory at the dawn of the twentieth century, acquired the tune to the The Seekers' song 'The Carnival is Over' from the reviled medium of television in the 1960s—but he was only able to admit the piece to his moribund ethnic idiom because it exhibits characteristics familiar from existing materials. Importantly, this points not to counter-Sharpian open-endedness but to *de facto* delimitation.

‡ A slither of mediæval verse rather clinches the conditions of our discomfiture: *Qui ne fu ne puns ne couvés | Mais el fiens des cheveu trouvés*. ('Neither laid nor hatched but found among the horse-dung': 'Une Branche d'Armes' (anon), in *The Penguin Book of French Verse*, edited by Brian Woledge, Geoffrey Brereton and Anthony Hartley (1975), p. 96.)

§3 A KIND OF KNOWING? INTERLOPERS AND THEIR (DIS)CONTENTS

§3.1 As they occur, of course, the ‘aspects’ posited are a functioning social and musical totality, what is intended by *tradition*—gutsily autotelic, unselfconscious in its enactments and valuing, predominantly oral and therefore not self-documenting—which *ipso facto* makes sense to its enactors, strands woven in unanxious *doing*. It is this weave which acts of intervention, variants on (attempted) *knowing*, disturb: an object’s specificity, inexpugible imperative of investigation, after which enquirers grope may be inscribed in any of its facets, but the need itself to distinguish ‘facets’ is dislocating. Where ‘tradition’ signifies an assemblage of earthy practices unreflectingly finding its own level, a robust equilibrium of heterogeneous elements, intervention unavoidably rends the fabric in its pursuit of codifiable meaning.

§3.2 Recording, initially on paper, of the song once widespread among working people of the countryside results in extensive deposits of transcripts. This accumulation may be catalogued, edited, reperformed, quixotically extolled, but its broaching poses ultimately the question of the ways—if any—in which the modalities of a marginal, ostensibly rough hewn music-making may be brought to elucidation; subjected, that is, to the alembications of formal knowledge. Questing after specificity will entail (attempted) delimiting of an object, then turning it over to locate the decisive dimension: a search, perhaps finally fruitless, for what may be taken to be *categorical*. Fundamentally, the explicandum can be construed narrowly as scrutiny of melodico-verbal materials *in abstracto*, with or without the accretion of performance; or more broadly as investigation of a contextually-grounded (habitat-specific) ensemble of self-determining musical practice(s)—essentially, how the elements musical and extra-musical coalesce. Determining this enterprise of *accounting for discreteness*, terminological counterpart to which stands the shop-soiled qualifier ‘folk’, is occidental musical Babel, a primal shattering of wholeness.⁶

§3.3 The urgent question this imperative of (attempted) conversion to knowledge asks of the interloper is her degree of equipping for the task, the extent to which she deploys means—representational, analytical, evaluative—apposite to a

⁶ This calls to mind the *boutade* attributed to Louis Armstrong: ‘All music is folk music, I ain’t never heard no horse sing a song.’ (*New York Times*, 7 July 1971, p. 41) His point has a surface appeal, but in fact describes a logical nonsense: when *all* music is folk music, then none is; that is, it is precisely when *not* all music is folk that ‘folk’ obtains. Horses, of course, do not come into it.

musical realm not homologous with culturally sedimented habits of enquiry.[⊞] Music-makings specific to the formally unschooled adjudged, in both substance and delivery (the behaviour of 'heterodox' tunes, distinctively fugitive idioms of inflection), music(ologic)ally egregious most evidently exemplify the dilemma. The underlying generality here, namely whether extra-institutional oral practice may be 'understood' in terms of the fixities of record (its obverse), is essentially embodied in the genesis shibboleth and its concomitant, vintage. Canons of historiographical procedure geared to documentary deposits, and the verifications they putatively permit, are frustrated in a province predominantly oral and thus extra-documentary. An entire dimension deemed essential to understanding is lost to record, inaccessible to the vaunted fillings-in of fieldwork. Otiose in terms of the object in itself—why attend to what cannot be known?—preoccupation with origins foregrounds deficiencies revealing of the enquiring subject. Decisively, an elemental, potentially disabling dissonance of *mentalités* is at work.[†]

§3.4 The disjunctive structure of the problem accordingly becomes apparent. In place of naive empiricist intimations of an initiated 'collector' establishing—recording in the field and explaining in print—*what is actually there*, a picture emerges of improvident intercessions throwing into relief what is not, evidently, 'there'. (Hence the salience, in this context, of origin as epitomizing the difficulties of what is not available to be recorded: unavailable to the bearers, and largely unavailable to established methods of enquiry.) Signal transpositions result: what ostensibly are properties of an object to be transcribed become symptoms of intervention, or,

⊞ To assert that dedicated tools were radically unavailable to pioneering fieldworkers in England is perhaps too sweeping. To some extent these did already exist, with the late-nineteenth century advent albeit primitive of the phonograph, and technical and ideological advances by, *inter alia*, the English phonetician Alexander J Ellis, 1814–1890. (Ellis devised the 'cents' system of pitch measurement 'whereby the Western tempered semitone is divided in 100 cents', and promoted a view of musical systems as culture specific. See 'Ethnomusicology' in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (second edition, 2001), Volume VIII, pp. 367–403.) It might be more accurate, and more revealing, to suggest that late Victorian and Edwardian collectors did not see the need for more finely adapted tools, corollary to an undeveloped sense of the foreignness of their quarry. Percy Grainger is, customarily, the egregious exception in the period.

† This clash is exemplified in a review by John Ryle of Ryszard Kapuscinski's study of Africa, *The Shadow of the Sun*. Kapuscinski avers: 'The kind of history known in Europe as scholarly and objective can never arise here because the African past has no documents or records, and each generation, listening to the version being transmitted to it, changed it and continues to change it ... As a result, history, free of the weight of archives, of the constraints of dates and data, achieves here its purest, crystalline form—that of myth.' Ryle counters: 'This account of the role of collective memory in African societies is partial in the extreme. Oral history can often be accurate; genealogies can be precise. ... Here, in the domain of myth, the reporter is freed from the constraints of cross-checking, the tyranny of documents and records. Here facts are no longer sacred; we are at play in the bush of ghosts, free to opine and to generalize about "Africa" and "the African" without criticism from self-appointed guardians of fact.' (*Times Literary Supplement*, 27 July 2001.) Confusion stems from a failure to distinguish the workings of orality from conditionings of documentary method. Can the one be 'understood' in terms of the other? Ryle's reflexes betray this formation: 'accurate' supposing empirical verification.

more precisely, projections (perplexities) of enquirers. In unpicking the functioning empirical weave, an inescapable evil of investigation, strands are isolated which do not, in abstract terms, knit together. It follows that equipping for the task entails more than the means merely of chronicling: exegetes must contrive to represent the unfamiliar, supply what is perceived to be wanting, effect reductions of seemingly non-aligning elements. Where specific tools have yet to be honed, as with the proto-folk music movement, existing instruments must be brought to bear in hermeneutic improvisation. This matter of equipping—the impediment is not, absolutely, of untooling but of expedient cross-tooling—is the manifesting of a more fundamental clash of formations between the parties concerned, one index of which is conflicting attitudes to canonicity. ‘Songs’, the one component readily abstractable from the musical nexus, may be sifted by educated exegetes able to identify the handiwork of professional composers in ways foreign to their aboriginal possessors, resulting in a discordance of evaluation.

§4 DISCREPANT MEDIATINGS: AN ELUSIVE IMPRIMATUR

§4.1 What ‘people’ do (musically) for themselves? However the specificity of the problem is construed, it must turn upon a founding affiliation of aboriginals with their materials, some sense of what might be termed *ethnic imprimatur*: an irreducible *qualia* from having been in the mouth of a population segment, easily overlooked in the scramble to chronicle. Doing-as-creating most evidently satisfies the imperative, a specific endogenous complexion, individually or communally determined (as Sharp, Part 2 *infra*). The case, however, remains unproven, conceivably unprovable. To propose, conversely, that the materials in question are not internally generated, just as they are not self-recording, is by implication to reduce those found in possession to the condition of conduit from orders of creation to notation and interpretation effected by others, delegation to extra-tribal parties.⁶ This set to exogenous status effectively means that any distinguishing stamp must be sought in doing-as-

⁶ A E Green makes the point: ‘It may be reasonable to infer that frequent reprinting means frequent singing, but it may also be true that broadsheets were functioning significantly as literature, among people who could ill afford books, rather than acting chiefly as a source of texts for singing. The large number of texts extant in printed form, compared with the rather small number of them that have ever been encountered by field-workers as songs, seems to suggest that this is so. Now if it is realistic to talk at all about ‘working-class culture,’ then I believe that we must mean the shared culture of the group, as manifested in public performance, not the poems that some working men and women happen to read in private.’ (A E Green review of *Rhymes of Northern Bards*, in *English Dance and Song* 34 (1972), p. 73.)

performing, in which aboriginals' negotiation of adoptive materials through articulation becomes the capital accomplishment. The significant discrimination is not, merely, practices untouched by institutional formation, but a formation peculiar to the tribe; a distinction not, absolutely, of schooled and unschooled but of the *differently* (ethnically) schooled.^o The commentator's compelling task, therefore, is not to affirm freedom from contamination by tutoring but to seek to expound the baroque inflections of ethnic musical formation embedded in performance. Similarly, the figure of *grammar*—an ensemble of articulatory mechanisms determining a distinctive idiom—usefully applies incommensurably not exclusively: an *ethnic grammar of performance* evolved independently of institutional prescription, the product of cultivation though not studiously so; nothing, that is, 'natural' about it.[†] If precisely formulable, such a grammar, not social and economic circumstance, would confer the means of delimitation of aboriginal agents: 'they' being *those who can*.[‡]

§4.2 In purely musical terms, a singer binds to the materials after her particular manner of articulation. In the broader context of the relation to a world—through performance in the case of the aboriginal possessors, through chronicle, advocacy and exegesis in the case of those who presume to interlope—defining divergences become apparent. Customary practice, subsuming music-making, constitutes one modality of the *de facto* contract which once bound rustic aboriginals to each other within their world, the cultural enactment of *fitting (in)*. Songs and their context-oriented singing expressed *belonging* to a native habitat, a loosely tribal set of affiliations. For the interloper *a contrario* the motivating factor is precisely a felt *absence of belonging* prompting the quest for a renegotiating of her relation to the world through

^o Exemplification is furnished by the fêted Shropshire singer, Fred Jordan (1922–2002). (Reference to biographical notes by Derek Schofield to the sound recording *Fred Jordan: A Shropshire Lad*, Veteran VTD148CD (2003).) Jordan was clearly formed in the musical crucible of the family, both parents being singers (pp. 12–13) and conscious of their craft: he later relayed the forthright advice given to him by his father on the proper delivery of a song, essentially ways of relating to an audience (p. 46). In this light, Douglas Kennedy's verdict on Jordan's performance at the 1959 EFDSS festival appears doubly foolish: 'Such traditional art needs no schooling and fully justifies the bathroom singer in hoping for perfection by daily repetition.' (pp. 19–20, cited from ED&S.) The interest and value of 'ethnic schooling' lies precisely in its remove from unformed bath-time crooning. As they say in the West of Ireland, 'It's not off the grass (s)he licked it'.

[†] Sharp uses 'grammar' as substantive divider, absolutely, where it more usefully denotes articulation, relatively.

[‡] Deutero-Revival shifting of emphasis from contents to performance (people) does little to dispel perplexity over validity of inclusion, as a hand-out headed *Guides to Field-Workers* found among the Clissold papers entertainingly illustrates: 'A Collecting Exercise: Effort should be made to collect, either on tape or in MS, songs of any kind sung from memory by anyone not a professional artist; with the qualification that singers whose main experience of folksong is directly or indirectly through scholarship or the commercial folksong revival must be avoided. As above, material of any kind will be acceptable, though special effort should be put into recording the kind of material that has been and will be discussed in class.' (Private collection. No further details, but evidently relating to some kind of institutionally sanctioned course.)

extra-habitual musics: a declaration of disaffiliation. Viewed in this way, the two manners of mediation are diametrical, the positive and negative of congruity.

§4.3 The 'music' (song) itself is what wedges refractorily between the elections and enactments of non-doctrinaire aboriginals and the tendentious deliberations of interlopers; a content set of indeterminate identity, differentially not categorically constituted. The designation 'folk' shifts from intrinsic melodico-verbal properties to a dislocation of (self)conscious and un(self)conscious manners of mediating. It is a founding disjunction, at once constitutive, trammelling, and inexpungible, which ordains that what cannot be problematic to its aboriginal enactors—level-finding, intuited music-makings of the ethnically schooled—cannot *not* be a set of problems to those (ruminative, extra-tribal) agents who appoint themselves to intercede. This structural schism, corresponding to a division of *doing / (not) knowing*, is the matrix, finally, of allegorical excrecence. If 'producing as knowledge' is understood as elaborating an order of representation which captures, that is respects, the *differentia* of its object (these *noises from another world*), then the allegorical turns which commonly do service for knowledge fulfil the inverse condition: domestications reducing otherness by shifting the problem into extra-(ethno)musicological terms. The accretion of reflexivity attendant upon intercession thus produces a refracting of its object, in which the contingent negotiations of outsiders do not so much artlessly portray states of affairs as summon into being difficulties.

§5 THE MAKING OF A DYSPHEMISM

Folk is extra-institutional schooling; folk is an idiom of performance and / or an idiom of creation; folk is a conjuncture of social and economic conditions; folk is a coagulation of predilections peculiar to (in a limited sense) an ethnos; folk is a closed set of melodico-verbal (choreological) elements (the creative yield, though not necessarily product, of the endo-instructed, transferable as such); folk is a modus of delivery inimitable to intruders (and thus not transferable); folk is tendentious colonizings by interlopers, the quixotic co-opters of 'value', and thereby an enervating battleground of 'agendas'; folk is the interloper's remove from her object (her delusion that she is not removed from it); folk is obloquy visited on others ('folkies'), those who presume to differ; folk is discomfort with shiftless contemporaneity; folk is the identity crisis to which we cannot confess; and so folk is, finally, us, the yearners-after-innocence.

What objection might conceivably be levelled at so conveniently capacious a term-concept?^o The difficulty of requiring a single term to encompass this gamut as it has obtained in England[†] is not to be neatly dissolved by repudiating the qualifier 'folk' in favour of 'traditional' (does grand opera not represent a musical tradition?),[‡] 'ethnic' (do not the participants of any musical realm form an *ethnos*?), 'roots' (is Bach not musically rooted?), 'vernacular' (does not the bath-time crooner, entirely lacking the inflective nuances which embody the interest of extra-institutional tribal formation, constitute a kind of vernacularity?), none of which ersatz rubrics any more satisfactorily demarcates the core problem. Nor is it to be fixed in absolute oppositions of *art / tradition(al)* (demotic music-making is a kind of art, elite music-making operates as a kind of tradition), *tutored / untutored* (a kind of ethnic schooling

^o Two instances of this scepticism among Deutero-Revival luminaries. Mike Yates announces: 'one is sorely tempted to do away with the term "folk music" altogether' ('The Socio-Political Songs of Walter Pardon', *Musical Traditions*, no 1 (1983), p. 26); and Reg Hall, pleading for the holistic case for the performer-as-person: 'and that's why I reject the notion of folk song ... you know ... what is folk song? It's what people collect—it's not what people sing' (*Collecting Folk*, BBC Radio 2 broadcast, 17 May 1995). In exemplification of the principle of blindness and insight, Hall's unclarity here is to imagine a problematizing disjunction, which he perfectly insightfully identifies, to inhere in a term-notion ('folk') rather than to be a structural feature of the enterprise; in other words, he draws the wrong conclusion from the perception. A revised formulation might read: 'Folk is not what is performed but the outcome of intercession by outsiders: therefore there *has to be* folk (because it can only be known by virtue of that intercession).' This is the 'observation alters' bind. The performers involved did not, indeed, regard themselves as 'folk', but neither did they regard themselves as 'traditional' or 'vernacular' singers; a state of affairs which further confirms that the problem is not, quintessentially, one of terminology. These are instances of the root naivety that language may be regulated by fiat, when it works to a murky consensus largely beyond the purchase of indignant would-be arbiters. Besides, elucidation of a problem is not to be achieved by changing the label. A clue to this terminological animus, of course, is not far to seek. The reperformances of self-conscious urban revival have determined that 'folk' no longer designates farm labourers clumping away in dung-encrusted boots or warbling in cottage and inn but an evolving circus of spinster schoolmarm cavorting in plimsolls on the vicarage lawn between tea and biscuits, tuners of guitars in folk clubs who announce that the device was in tune at the time of purchase, technological and stylistic fusions of ego-tripping apostles of contemporaneity ('folk rock')—all anathema to votaries of the 'real thing' (for which read disavowed bourgeois colonizings of hoi polloi music-making from another time and place). From this perspective, distaste derives not from the term in itself, but from associations acquired historically through atomizing, intermecine revival. Hence the attempt to reserve 'tradition(al)' for the rustic sources, confining 'folk', pejoratively, to forms of expropriation (chronicle, disquisition and reperformance) and by extension to its perpetrators. (Language, need it be said, cannot be commanded in this way.) Nomination is reduced to a linguistic marker of tribal affiliation—you say 'folk', I say 'traditional'—one more tiresome variant of the solecism: *you tourist, me traveller*. How incriminating; how very self-deluding.

[†] The rider is significant: A L Lloyd avers 'we are still without a definition of folk song that really fits our local conditions' (*Folksong in England* (1967), p. 14). The 'conditions' in question extend, furthermore, to the percolations of interlopers.

[‡] Grainger, unfailingly, was alive to the wider reach of the notion of (musical) tradition. He extols the virtues of sound recordings, in that they 'give an enduring picture of the live art and traditions of peasant and sailor singing and fiddling; together with a record of the dialects of different districts, and of such entertaining accessories as the vocal quality, singing-habits and other personal characteristics of singers. And a knowledge of such points is every bit as indispensable to good renderings of folk-music as is experience of the traditions of cultured music to its proper interpretation.' (Percy Grainger, 'Collecting with the Phonograph', *Journal of the Folk Song Society* III, 12 (1908), p. 150.) Important adjustments surely follow. If 'tradition' designates *doing not being* (a set of practices collectively carried over), and all established forms of music-making constitute a form of tradition, then to speak of 'traditional song' is a nonsense (except as having the circumstantial sense of anonymity: no ascribable creator). The sense is rather: 'music occurring within one (marginal, outlandish) order of tradition among many'. If, however, this abrogated usage is for practical purposes retained, it is more apposite to speak of materials as 'traditionally-generated' in the few cases where creation can be known, or as 'traditionally-occurring' where materials are known, or believed, to derive from beyond the tribe (conveying the sense of *bearing the stamp of a set of practices, irrespective of provenance*). Even those of determinedly assimilationist persuasion seldom entirely wriggle free from the postulate (instinct) that some musical artefacts are intrinsically set apart from others—the classical reference of 'folk'—so that ersatz qualifiers mark no advance on the problem. The assumption that 'traditional' has precise reference where 'folk' does not is simply unfounded. This is a problem of overworked abstractions required to shoulder a greater semantic burden than, as they stand, they are capable of.

obtains), *written / non-written* or *oral* (extra-institutional forms may employ text or notation,^o much of the ethos of elite music is orally perpetuated), *contrived / uncontrived* (culturally, there are only degrees of contrivance), *polite / popular* ('popular' is too baggy a category to clinch this singular cranny of music-making: *all that is not 'art' is insufficiently restrictive, a further capital division within popular music is required.*)

The *differentia specifica*, the compelling delineation of singular value, after which enquirers must grope lurks in the interstices of this grid of ready-made dichotomies. Moreover, this object is, on inspection, not 'homogeneous' but made up of a heterogeneity of elements finding a level through performance (conceivably acquiring homogeneity thereby). The *sine qua non* of a discrete, incommensurable order of music-cum-music-making assumes, in this instance, too multifaceted, too messy, too recalcitrant a guise categorically to be contained in entrenched polarities or an unequivocal linguistic marker. There is, rather, dissonance (*sic*) of determinant musical values. Thus, however broached, the task of the exegete is not to circumscribe a unitary domain but to construct some cogent accommodation of multifarious constituents; not to police a musical *cordon sanitaire* but to strive to frame (to witness the undoing of her efforts to frame) the ineffable modalities of a musical ethos incommensurable with elite canons, the hallmarks of ethnic imprimatur.

Terminological concomitant is to relinquish the squabble over rubrics in favour of more scrupulous, *nuancé* formulations of the nature of the problem. The requirement of a qualifier is nothing other than a linguistic effect of the sovereign imperative *differentia specifica*, a fugitive quality which may be sought, schematically, in any of three notional modalities: the materials *in themselves* (their several facets); the aboriginal's relation to her materials (creation / adoption, performance, aggregation within a habitat, ultimately valuing); and the interloper's relation to these angles, separately or conjointly examined. Of these, the first—inaugural—sense proves least persuasive. *Differentia may cogently be refigured as an ensemble of musical elections and enactments proper to a tribe whose schooling is intuited, uncodified, but no less piquant for that: on that account,*

^o The obvious case of use of text is the broadside trade, a massive but enigmatic (in the absence of direct testimony of transmission by this means) presence. Use of music notation was probably confined to musicians rather than singers. Walter Bulwer (born 1888), a fiddle player from Shipdham in Norfolk discovered and recorded by Mervyn Plunkett in the early 1960s, is a fine instance (he could draw contents from the printed sheet but instinctively articulated according to his deep-set 'ethnic' values), but the old church bands are a further case in point, using primitive notation but—we suppose—rendering gutsily what they found on the page.

indeed. Whether materials were endogenous, the possessors were indubitably aboriginal, their idiom enigmatically autochthonous. This shift of emphasis, largely that of Proto-Revival to (one coterie of) Deutero-Revival, effects a decisive refocusing which yet reproduces in modified form the root questions without, of itself, resolving them. Savages achieving their nobility in performance rather than through composition remain noble and savage (their very appeal); a canon of performers in place of a canon of musical materials remains a canon. The shift to performance leaves all the questions intact—crystallization, distribution, what we cannot do now—with their aspect altered; but it does highlight the misguidedness of Proto-Revival in searching for *differentia-as-ethnic-imprimatur* exclusively in the materials (tunes).

‘Folk’? In place of the default postulate of a readily delimitable zone of musical (melodico-verbal) materials *in themselves*, the problem is more instructively construed as an irreducibly disjunctive matrix of mediating instances, giving rise to a plethora of meanings which the shibboleth ‘folk’ may assume. The article-of-faith-become-dysphemism may be reinstated as perfectly commodious rubric once it is understood to designate not some naturally-occurring body of material but an ensemble of unexpectedly unsettling questions and difficulties strewn the path to understanding. Within this horizon, the rule of thumb that knowledge *stricto sensu* is *what cannot (easily) be looked up* receives alluringly off-beat exemplification in the marginal form of music-making intended here.

The account of the problem proposed above suggests three decisive extensions to the handy starting point *what people do for themselves*: the agenda-specific consecration by interlopers of | a particular variant, musically, of | what *certain kinds of* people do for themselves. This elaboration sets forth not a solution but a difficulty: the (in)capacity of interlopers (subject) forming the first accretion properly to elucidate the cardinal qualifications in the object, resulting at least partly from conflicts inherent in motivation. What, finally, prevents exposition from being coextensive with its object—why it is not possible simply to describe what is there—is an inextinguishable disjunction of mediating agents. In the ironizing of that disjunction, not its (pro)claimed reducing, the contested ground of knowledge lies.



PART II

EDWARDIAN FOLK SONG CONSENSUS?

THE HISTORICAL CARRYING INTO PRACTICE OF THIS TANGLE OF EXIGENCES AND conundrums constituting an object of attention fell initially (from *circa* 1890) to the fortuitous coming together identified in the convenience form 'First Revival'. Potted versions of this development incline to the perfunctory, pitched as circumstance rather than substance.⁹ There is perhaps still no entirely satisfactory scholarly study of the topic, those which have appeared suffering from varying degrees of *parti pris*: Dave Harker, *Fakesong: The Manufacture of British 'Folksong' 1700 to the Present Day* (1985); Georgina Boyes, *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology and the English Folk Revival* (1993); Richard Sykes, 'The Evolution of Englishness in the English Folksong Revival, 1890-1914' (*Folk Music Journal* 6, 4 (1993), 446-490); Christopher James Bearman, 'The English Folk Music Movement 1898-1914' (PhD thesis, University of Hull, 2001), especially Chapter Two for a narrative account of the movement.

Alternatively, the topic may be broached at the level of ideas, in the form of a detailed examination of the disputed meanings with which First Revival commentators sought to invest the problem. (Harker leans in this direction, but in a polemical idiom lacking in rigour.) In that it embodies a *de facto* orthodoxy, though one to which not all early Folk Song Society mandarins were unqualified signatories, Cecil Sharp's proto-synthesis *English Folk Song: Some Conclusions* (1907) is the text which most readily lends itself to an approach of this order. All references are to the first edition (London, 1907).†

⁹ An instructive instance of summary in a non-specialist context occurs in Robert Ensor, *England 1870-1914* (Oxford, 1936). (Originally volume 14 of *The Oxford History of England*. References are to the reprint of 1992.) Recognizing the historical significance of the early folk song movement, Ensor builds a potted piece into a section on music (in Chapter 15), introduced as 'the rescue and recording of English folk-song at the last moment before universal standardized education would have obliterated it' (p. 543). Baring-Gould is credited as the originator—'Before him it had been widely assumed that (save perhaps on the Scottish border) the English people, unlike the Germans, Scots, Welsh, and Irish, had no folk-songs worth mentioning' (p. 544)—followed by mention of Barrett, Kidson, Broadwood and the advent of the Folk Song Society in 1898. Acknowledging that 'the first initiatives ... came, as was almost inevitable in those days, from the cultivated country clergy' (chiming with his view of the capital role of a committed rural clerisy, p. 306), Ensor accords greatest prominence to Cecil Sharp's song collecting, principally in Somerset. 'The back parts of pastoral Somerset were then—with similar parts of Lincolnshire—probably the most isolated in England. ... In these ways a unique and precious heritage of the English people, both in music and dance, was saved from extinction within the narrowest possible margin of time.' (p. 544.) Some of Ensor's summary is clearly précis from Sharp's *English Folk Song: Some Conclusions* (1907): 'Had the work been done a century earlier, it might have made a contribution to English literature as well as to music. But words corrupt more easily than tunes; and the versions in which they survived, at that late stage in the dissolution of English country life, were mostly of little interest save to ballad specialists.' (pp. 544-5: see *Some Conclusions* Chapter Eight, p. 273 *infra*.) The stock elements of a *de facto* establishment orthodoxy are thus all in place: unattributed denigration ('assumed' not to exist by whom?), a congratulatory last-minute rescue operation by the educated (with no mention of the aboriginal custodians), nationalist apologetics, remoteness, 'too late', the partly corrupt condition of what survived, but taking its worth to posterity ('folk') as given. This seeping of a received understanding into the historical mainstream offers a convenient *repoussoir* against which to explore the problem: most of these ingredients can be contested.

† I am grateful to Dr Tony Bennett of the Music Department, University of Sheffield, for the loan of this edition.

I. SOME CONCLUSIONS SYNOPSIS

With admirably incisive self-summary, Sharp recapitulates the thesis of the first three chapters in the opening paragraph of Chapter Four, to the effect that:

we have seen that folk music, being un-written music, lives only in the minds and memories of those who sing it; that it is in a constant state of growth, each singer unconsciously contributing something of his own to every song that he sings; that these minute alterations are imitated or ignored by other singers according as they appeal to them or not; that folk music is thus, at every stage of its evolution, being continually moulded into conformity with the taste of the community; that it is, therefore, communal music, not individual; and that, proceeding from out the heart and soul of a nation, it embodies those feelings and ideas which are shared in common [*sic*] by the race which has fashioned it. (p. 32)

(4: 'Conscious and Unconscious Music') This matrix describing what is now dubbed 'orality' takes on full significance within a larger historical horizon: a putative four-stage elementary musical development (pp. 32-3) eventuating in the 'epochal' advent of musical 'grammarians'. An engendering of self-consciousness / *destruction of unselfconsciousness* which principally results (ushering in of 'art' music) furnishes a musical-historical foil against which to situate what lies on the far side of high artifice, its value cast in æsthetico-moral, rather than strictly music(ologic)al terms (aboriginal 'folk' music) (p. 34). In this scheme, art music—the confections and practices of the highly schooled—marks a bifurcation from an (ab)original 'folk', grounds for a defence of which are furnished by the consequent fractures peculiar to occidental musical endeavour: tutored / untutored, written / unwritten.

A sequence of three chapters then reflects on musical characteristics. One chapter (Five) on the modes generally,^o one on the modes as encountered in the rustic mouth ('English Folk Scales'), and one ('Rhythmical Forms and Melodic Figures') which prods at the inventorying of internal musical properties supposed by the postulate of discreteness-privilege, with no serious effort at systematicity.

Chapter Eight ('Folk Poetry') is the most evidently *bricolé* of the 12, reflecting Sharp's lack of interest in the verbal aspect as he found it. A breezy historical conspectus of the (narrative) ballad proper—clearly derived (without acknowledgement) from printed sources and confidently embracing Homer, Norse saga, the

^o 'The chapter on the Modes is perhaps the least satisfactory.' (Maud Karpeles's preface to the fourth edition (1965), p. xi.)

minstrels dismissed as appropriators not originators (pp. 89-90)—segues into a taxonomy by subject matter of (lyrical) song, as index of rustic popular tastes. Most telling is the final section, on the broadside trade and the sensitive matter of bowdlerization (p. 101, p. 102). Having posited a linguistic equivalent to his theory of folk tunes (communal evolution), Sharp declares the greater part of these words to have been at a stroke, *circa* 1800, supplanted by worthless printed verses circulated by the great broadside revival: variously the confections of hacks or country lyrics perverted in the expropriating—‘It was only very rarely that a genuine traditional ballad found its way on to a broadside without suffering corruption.’ (p. 101). The verbal component as encountered, blighted for a century, could in this way be conveniently passed over in favour of pure melody, insulated by oral transmission from the corrosions of the printing press. Sharp’s hypothesis—none of this, significantly, is documented—evades evident difficulties in its resolute hostility. Acquiring words from a printed sheet (p. 93 / p. 101), as well as supposing literacy, raises the question of why country singers would be moved to discard their own existing ‘folk’ poetry. In assuming that they would retain original tunes, this line also ignores the potential role of the hawker in dispensing not just flimsy sheets but, orally, accompanying tunes. What if there never was any ‘folk’ poetry to replace? What if many of these songs were taken over complete, *tune* as well as words, from the ballad sellers?

In Chapter Nine (‘Folk Singers and their Songs’), Sharp, finally, seeks to place song within its flesh-and-blood milieu, essentially the connection of the melodico-verbal artefact to its aboriginal performers deriving from the encounter *in propria persona*—‘I have talked with scores of old country people on this subject of folk singing’ (p. 105)—contrasting with a disregard by earlier generations now deemed ‘puzzling’ (a judgement which could readily be reversed: solemnizing this music is what is puzzling). The assumption, fostered by its occluded existence, that no folk song had obtained in England (pp. 104-5) is the perfect *repoussoir* for apologetics driving the movement—‘The evidence is overwhelming that, as recently as thirty or forty years ago, every country village in England was a nest of singing birds’ (p. 105)—lent urgency by intimations of apocalypse. Sharp’s observations on these residual custodians—their reserve in the presence of a foreigner; the ‘high value’ they place upon their songs; their manner of vocal delivery (p. 106); the frequently extensive scale of their musical stock

(p. 107)—are benedictory but perfunctory. A proclaimed correlation between these aspects of idiom and repertory, that distinct modes of articulation are employed for differing orders of song (p. 108), prompts lengthy dilation on the hobby horse of canon, the integrity of which Sharp labours to police against three perceived cankers: choices made by aboriginals in adopting exogenous materials (pp. 111), and two forms of the adaptive attentions of prior interlopers (pp. 111–118).

In the final three chapters, Sharp turns to present state and future possibility. (10: ‘Decline of the Folk Song’, pp. 119–123) He recognises the terminal decline of folk song, its ‘causes’ of little moment (p. 120): but does this apocalyptic moment mean irrevocable association with the past? The case he must make is for its continuing pertinence beyond the merely antiquarian (matter for the ‘aimiable archæologist’ p. 124). Given the passing of the bucolic modus in which folk song hitherto flourished, it cannot be revived in its previous form:

Reformers would dispel the gloom which has settled upon the countryside, and revive the social life of the villages. Do what they will, however, it will not be the old life that they will restore. That has gone past recall. (p. 119)

Further, he must refute the (unattributed: ‘some critics’ p. 120) charge that what by then lingered in the countryside was hopelessly corrupt. (11: ‘The Antiquity of the Folk Song’) Concomitant to putative non-ascribability to a single originating instance is non-ascribability in time: folk creation is deemed exceptional in transcending the stamp of historical period which music otherwise displays (Handel is the example chosen). The hallmarks which define the genre are not indicators to location in time; thus modal prevalence is a reflex of singers, not (necessarily) an index of antiquity. (p. 125) *‘The latter-day folk song does not bear upon it any mark to witness to its antiquity.’* (p. 125) Accepting which, charges of antiquarianism—academic association with the past—are misplaced, and vintage is dismissed in favour of æsthetics: ‘If it is beautiful, it needs nothing to recommend it. And if it is not beautiful, declaring it to be as old as Moses will not make it so.’ (p. 126) Both chapters are thus tilted to favour revival: bearing no mark of period, folk song’s timeless character and æsthetic virtues ensure its enduring appeal. The impression is almost of welcoming demise in its *de facto* habitat, preparing the project of transplanting to the wider populace, and by extension legitimating Sharp’s own prerogative as superintendent.

(12: 'The Future of the English Folk Song') Completing the arc of his survey, Sharp seeks to entwine folk song with the destiny of the larger nation, the principal informing rubrics of this project being apologia-nationalism—'*For centuries we have rested under the stigma of being an unmusical race*' (p. 127)—its idiom unabashedly evangelistic ('the new gospel' of English folk music p. 127). This is essentially the issue of *uses* to which materials recovered might be put, evident index of purposes (ideology). The potential of folk song (intending tunes) to found a distinctively national school of art music is directed outwards, competitively, to the international field (pp. 129-132). Finally, turning inward on the nation, Sharp the educationalist (he announces himself as such at p. x) occupies the book's culminating ten pages, a positioning indicative of his most insistent concerns. Introduced under the deceptively perfunctory rubric of 'other uses', folk song is proposed as a corrective to the materializing tenor of the times—what will 'react beneficially upon the character' (p. 134). This instrumental-interventionist gloss closes the loop with the founding thesis—'that the folk song stands in a category of its own, that it is generically distinct from all other forms of music' (p. 139)—to provide the foundation of its instructional utility, to which the Board of Education was, at that point, yet to be won over.⁶

2. SOME CONCLUSIONS SYNTHESIS

How far does Sharp's account meet the exigencies set out in Part 1? Its expository arc, from penumbral beginnings to portentous future, has an evident surface cogency. Yet when subjected to close critical scrutiny, aporias become apparent.

The issue of how near Sharp comes to transmuting his object into (con)testable understanding ('knowledge') is addressed below.

What Sharp proposes as the cornerstone of his account—intrinsic properties determining (*in abstracto*) the integrity of the musical object—he proves unable to sustain. Attempts to inventory putative hallmarks fall short of systematicity:

A large number of our folk tunes are remarkable for their large compass, the unexpectedness and width of their intervals, and the boldness and vigour of their melodic curves. (p. 82)

Ultimately, he almost gladly concedes defeat. In Chapters Six and Seven

⁶ Sharp's whole book might, indeed, be read as an elaborate self-appointed embassy to the Board of Education.

an attempt has been made to call attention to certain technical attributes of folk music which are demonstrably of folk origin and by means of which the musical creations of the common people may to some extent be distinguished from the inventions of professed musicians. ... Even if our enquiry had been more thorough and searching than the scope and purpose of this book permitted, it would, nevertheless, have failed in deducing any set of rules which would enable the critic to discriminate, without possibility of error, between folk music and composed music. A precise and scientific definition of the difference between folk and art music is, in the nature of things, unattainable. Certain technical qualities may be pointed out as peculiarly characteristic of folk music, and that we have endeavoured to do here. Yet it would be possible to produce a folk air in which not one of these qualities was present. (p. 87)

‘Scientific’ is here a hostage to fortune. It might be noted *au passage* that ‘demonstrably’ is an instance of Sharpian adverbial steamrolling: nothing of the kind has been ‘demonstrated’. See also ‘emphatically’ pp. 117 and 132, and ‘fervently’ p. 140.) On the concomitant issue of value, Sharp fares no better. The transcendent æsthetic worth of folk song he deems capital to his case:

The question is ... Is it worth reviving? In other words, is it, apart from all other considerations, beautiful in itself, judged as music, pure and simple, and judged, too, by the very highest standard? Now, this is a question of taste rather than of argument. (p. 140)

Thus *differentia specifica* eludes our capacity to formulate; and the primacy of beauty is not susceptible to argument. This hardly constitutes a solid foundation.

Of connection to the plebeian agents: Sharp’s fundamentalist *what people*—those insulated from formal, in some degree institutional, instruction—*do for themselves* line casts ‘doing’ primarily in the form of creating, an untestable evolutionist–collectivist model of genesis invoked as mainstay of his thesis. Doing-as-performing, *par contre*, is relegated to incidental comment.⁹ (pp. 107–8) The third dimension identified—music-making as social practice—is entirely omitted, though Sharp takes as given the integrity of the tribe, as he saw it a residually homogeneous ‘peasantry’.

From this, the relative weighting of Sharp’s construal of *folk* is evident: what is held to be intrinsic to the musical artefact (properties and value) predominates

⁹ Sharp appears to make performance central, but distinction needs to be made between performing as expedient (supposedly) to the gradual shaping of content, and performance *in itself*: specificities and nuances of articulation. Arguably, the endogenous evolutionary theory more cogently fits performance than content: a mode of delivery developed by, and peculiar to, the tribe. This is the singular imprimatur which does not show up in conventional notation. In revival terms, evisceration occurs not (primarily) at the level of editing but of (re)performance: lost in the transferring is any sense of the earthy inflection characteristic of aboriginal practice; a point which Harker and Boyes, for example, neglect to consider.

over performance (except as process of creation) and milieu(x). This object-specific triad—genesis—*differentia*—value: discrete and having distinctive worth *because* it is created after a particular fashion—remains, however, unsubstantiated. He does not ‘demonstrate’ ‘folk origin’ (p. 87) but attaches a conjectural-explanatory story to an unearthed corpus without ascertainable provenance and seemingly without analogue; he fails to distil *differentia specifica* from that corpus; and he concedes that æsthetic worth exceeds what can be argued. As set forth, this forms not the cornerstone of a ‘scientific’ account of the problem, but a foundation of sand.

Conceivably, the constituents of Sharp’s hypothetical (re)construction are more far-reaching in their implications than he imagined, requiring the upending of cherished tenets, chiefly three: that creation is enabled by formal education; that all that exists supposes a specifiable creator; and that access to the past is conferred by the document. An object deemed to lie beyond these principles presents evident difficulties of procedure. Inverting the first—the lucubrations of ‘grammarians’ deemed destructive of musical unselfconsciousness, a decisive *tournant* which, in creating conditions of a distinctive unschooled music-making, lays the ground of its subsequent fetishizing as ‘folk’—produces a noble savage variant, though the Biblical archetype of the Fall makes a compelling alternative figure: Edenic innocence destroyed, a progressive shrinking of the musical garden. (The proposal here of a music(ological) *break* contrasts with evolutionary gradualism.) Inverting the second, related, postulate is more troublesome still: how can there be creation that is both collective and untutored, how may its workings be traced? The difficulty of understanding in the present (through fieldwork) these characteristics collectively subsumable as ‘orality’ is compounded by the absence from all that is constitutively oral-aural (out of the mouth and into the ear) of documentary record, the bedrock of historiographical practice in written cultures. Sharp’s thesis of communal elaboration turns precisely on lengthy diachronic mutation, oral-aural and therefore inaccessible by received method.

Where evidence in its embedded empiricist mode does not run, new strategies of understanding must be put into place, essentially a reorienting away from print-centredness, a shift Sharp neglects to identify still less perform. Absence of documentation is deemed no impediment to the evolutionary thesis (*In both individual*

and communal compositions it is comparatively easy to trace the course of development when once the evolutionary process has been brought into action.' (p. 13), where in fact any tracing of long process, a wearing smooth of the pebble on the beach (p. 16), demands extra-documentary method.[□] Conversely, want of record is invoked to dismiss rival views, such as the 'garden escape' line—*'if the music of the common people originated in the towns, the sheet music and song books of the past would surely bear evidence of the fact. And this they fail to do.'* To this is added difference *as music*: '*Composed music differs generically from folk music*', the latter '*distinguished by certain technical particularities*' (all p. 8). He works to a distinction between prior record (or its lack) and record created in fieldwork; but it is precisely the latter that he fails to exploit. Then, responding to the charge that tunes found among country people had become degenerate: '*no one, a hundred years ago, collected our folk tunes, and there is, therefore, nothing with which a comparison can be made*' (p. 121), and: '*What those same songs were like in their earlier stages we do not and never will know, for we have practically no ancient records that are trustworthy.*' (p. 125) By this point Sharp has unwittingly reversed his initial position.

This reflex bandying of 'evidence' betrays both Sharp's incapacity to wriggle free of cognitive habits and the polemical promptings of his arguments. In these ways, he trades on the notion rhetorically rather than refocus it to serve the altered conditions of 'folk': instead of asking what sense 'evidence' might have in oral practice, it is invoked as *what antagonists neglect to supply*.

Lacking both a method for inspecting what remains, in the absence of prior

□ How might the arc of melodic mutation be more particularly described, especially in the absence of extensive diachronic record? A case of new strategies of investigation being required where received procedures are not applicable. A potential parallel from the realm of philology is supplied by Jacob Grimm, with whose presence Sharp was acquainted at second hand through F B Gummere's *Old English Ballads*. (p. 10) More pertinent in this connection than Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie* (1835), oddly, might be his *Deutsche Grammatik* (1819), in which a radical methodological set traces linguistic morphing by reverse extrapolation, enabling the framing of postulated forms (**). (See for example Tom Shippey, 'Grimm's Law', *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 November 2003, pp. 16–17.) The brazenly extra-empiricist thrust of a scheme for constructing grammars of what is ultimately *unrecorded* has evident pertinence in a dominantly oral province. (Sharp's comment on the Grimms' 'failure'—'The demonstration that we have given is an attempt to supply what they [Grimms] failed to give, and reach by logical steps conclusions which, if not identical with theirs, are very nearly so.' (p. 15)—is presumably directed at their work in folklore. In the realm of language, Jacob Grimm's insights led, precisely, to steps being made. Sharp's 'logic', of course, is hypothetical rather than particularist.) Similarly, a grammar of folk song might be outlined—or not, if the method is enlisted to refute the Sharpian evolutionary model—by close scrutiny of the few instances of mutation recorded. Sharp's examples, undeveloped, pertain to the modes: 'Cupid's Garden' (p. 125), a harmonic tune transposed to dorian by an unidentified singer, and the general statement that 'the folk-singer will frequently translate into one or other of the modes the "composed" songs which he takes into his repertory' (*English Folk Songs* (1919), p. ix). This latter facet of country singing points up the hermeneutic potential of adopted compositions, the validity of which Sharp unreservedly dismisses (see *infra*). A further instance is provided by James Hook's 'Bright Phoebus', found altered in the mouth of Henry Brown by George Gardiner in 1907, and picked out for comment by Frank Purslow: 'the way in which Tradition has dealt with Hook's original tune makes it perfectly acceptable as a folk song' (*The Wanton Seed* (1968), p. 123). Like Sharp, Purslow does not deign to set forth the comparative analysis which might be so illuminating. Indeed, his hypostasis 'Tradition' rather skews the point: it is *individual performers*, whose collective endeavours it may or may not be useful to dub as tradition, who effect mutations according to an internalized ethos, suggesting a construal of 'grammar' as performative rather than substantive (sound organization).

chronicle, hypothetical (evolution) and a mode of analysis for what is manifest (internals abstractable via notation), Sharp's lucubrations fall well short of the 'scientific' status to which he aspires. Entering the field unapprenticed, Sharp effectively possessed no proper means of bringing his demotic quarry—a more considerable set of difficulties than the confident pronouncements littering *Some Conclusions* allow—to elucidation. What is *collected* (hunted down and recorded in the field) is not 'English Folk Song' but individual singers and songs; and any synthetic construct, necessary but problematic, demands tools honed to the work of conversion. In this case, intervention supposes a model of knowledge apposite to the particularities of an object located outside established disciplinary procedures. Alive though he is to the chore of digesting (p. viii), Sharp does not consider that understanding the heroic accumulations of fieldwork might call for a reconfigured methodological set.

3. CRACKS IN THE EDIFICE

In addition to this non-fulfilment, at least partly avowed, deeper flaws can be detected in the Sharpian construction. In the opening sections, oral evolution is characterized as a species of creative Chinese Whispers, mutation without end (a weakness *au passage* being the lack of convincing distinction between positive and negative mutation p. 95), regulated, *de facto*, by an entity confidently termed 'the community'. Sharp's declining to situate the singer within her habitat is most injurious to his case in the matter of this central regulatory function, no more than *ex hypothesi* as invoked. In a rare remark on social circumstance (rustic immobility), Sharp deems the popularity of songs extolling the roving life to be 'remarkable'

when we remember that the peasant usually spends his life in the village of his birth, from whence he will rarely adventure beyond a circle of a few miles' radius. (p. 96)

If, accordingly, communal creation has the sense of *evolved within the palisade of the parish*, the outcome would be, potentially, as many folk *musics* as there are communities, it being inherently implausible that self-enclosed enclaves hundreds of miles apart should coincidentally evolve a substantially common body of song. (The closest he comes to suggesting individual specific communities is: 'it is evident that the musical taste of every community must vary', p. 29.) If 'the community' intends

the nation *in toto*, then it manifestly did not obtain. (The figure he proposes of the flock of starlings is apparently compelling but inapposite: in terms of the postulated national folk music, there is no discrete flock. p. 30) With this founding model of collective (by implication parochial) creation through endless flux, propositions occurring in the development glaringly conflict. Sharp defends, in anticipation of criticism, extrapolation from region to nation upon which his case rests by protesting the 'representativeness' of what he encountered in Somerset, provisionally endorsed by the fieldwork of others:

No authoritative statement on this point can be made until every part of England has been explored with equal thoroughness. In the meanwhile, there is some warrant for the belief that the distribution of folk songs throughout the kingdom is, to a large extent, independent of locality. (p. ix) ⁹

This presumption in favour of ubiquity finds reaffirmation in the debate over whether tunes as recovered were degenerate. *'But although, as we have said, it is difficult to test the fidelity of the tradition by which these tunes have been preserved, it is not impossible to offer some evidence bearing upon the point at issue.'* (p. 121) Coincident instances of a variant of 'Tarry Trousers', from Somerset and Essex ('districts as far apart as the width of southern England'), are the 'evidence' adduced (p. 121-2). The argument is that it is implausible a tune should have been *'corrupted in substantially the same manner'*. *'Surely, it is more reasonable to conclude that neither of them is corrupt, but that both have been handed down to us by a tradition that is beyond suspicion.'* (p. 122) This chimes with the earlier assertion that continuity of substance is guaranteed by the singer's prodigious powers of memory: 'The traditional singer, moreover, regards it as a matter of honour to pass on the tradition as nearly as possible as he [*sic*] received it.' (p. 17)

In itself perfectly cogent, this view of 'fidelity' heedlessly reverses the perspective of the opening segment: that there is nothing for surviving forms to be faithful to. In advocating a single, unified 'tradition' across the south of England, Sharp turns his initial construal of tradition on its head: individuals preserving faithfully, not 'community' constantly refining. At work here is a pronounced, though unconscious, non-congruity of those conclusions founded on empirical instances and those advanced *in abstracto*. To what factors might these flagrant disparities be attributed?

⁹ In a footnote to the fourth edition (1965), Maud Karpeles observes: 'This has proved to be the case.' (p. xxii)

4. DISSONANT TELOI : ENQUIRY AND 'REFORM' (DISCREPANT AGENDAS)

Amid this cognitive confusion—the problematics of converting marginal musical object to knowledge proper—the aboriginal enactor occupies a shadowy place, more *ex hypothesi* manikin than flesh-and-blood agent. Where the singers obtrude in gratifyingly recalcitrant fashion is in the matter of (s)election and its concomitant, *taste*. Having celebrated the essential tastefulness of these artefacts deemed to be of peasant creation, Sharp is forced to acknowledge that his sources also exhibited a partiality for the very commercial popular songs in distinction to which he located the virtues of 'folk'. (Sharp furthermore neglects to enquire into the process by which country singers might have come by such vulgar urban products.) His consequent fudge, to the effect that country singers only *imagined* they were attracted to these meretricious confections (pp. 110–111), exposes a fissure at the core of the problem: the self-election of interlopers as arbiters, a form of evaluative colonizing.⁶ The effect of this sophisticated strategy to sustain the integrity of a posited canon is to deny a voice to the performing tribe by affecting to speak on its behalf, high-handed ventriloquism. A further instance of this *presuming to know better* lies in dismissing words in favour of tune, having established that the singers accord inverse weight to these components (p. 18). Sharp next switches his strictures to pre-revival educated adaptations of 'folk' songs, in two degrees: tunes appropriated to new words (the ballad operas being the pre-eminent instance), and the doctoring of whole songs of which Chappell is deemed the chief culprit (pp. 116–8). An obliviousness meriting censure ('*One of the most amazing and puzzling things about the English folk song is the way in which it has hitherto escaped the notice of the educated people resident in the country districts*' p. 104) collides with prior saturation demanding correction ('*the old song books are full of what may be called 'derived' folk tunes, many of which have since found their way into the standard collections of Old English airs*' p. 112), without explanation of how this neglected

⁶ It is this edge of imperialism that the defenders of selective fieldwork neglect to address. Bearman dismisses as unreasonable the implication that Sharp (and others) 'should have made a complete sociological survey of lower-class music making'. (Christopher James Bearman, 'The English Folk Music Movement 1898–1914', PhD thesis, University of Hull, 2001, p. 206.) Schofield patiently explains: 'He [Sharp] knew what he wanted, and also what he did not want to collect, although that definition was determined by his knowledge of previously published collections. It has been fashionable to criticise Sharp and Marson for not collecting all the songs that the singers knew, but Sharp's choice was based on aesthetic considerations. He was not conducting research into the social context of music in rural communities, or into the total repertoire of singers. Sharp should not be criticised for what he did not collect; he was looking for examples of one type of song.' (Derek Schofield, 'Sowing the Seeds: Cecil Sharp and Charles Marson in Somerset in 1903', *Folk Music Journal*, 8, 4 (2004), 503.) This blithely skates over the question of *why* Sharp was 'only looking for one type of song' from among the stock known to country singers. Objection is not to limits on time or to the dictates of personal taste, but to the pronounced, elitist implication—virtually the assertion—of *knowing better than the source*.

corpus came to be known to early editors. Sharp reserves his vehement eloquence for vilification of Chappell's influential volumes (p. 118), the embodiment of all he seeks to combat, but passes up the occasion to sustain his discreteness thesis through detailed comparison, in favour of assertion of what is deemed axiomatic: 'it is not difficult to distinguish between the genuine folk song and its edited version' (p. 115) as the reader 'will see for himself' (p. 116).

Despite the semblance of unfolding argument, *idée fixe* predominates. In clinging to the shibboleth of a circumscribed domain, Sharp is forced to defend 'canon' against both the singers' putatively ingenuous elections and the benighted depredations of pre-revival arrangers and editors, so that 'rescue' becomes as much extrication from aboriginal possessors and delivery from traducers as from extinction as such. (The enticing title of this chapter (9)—'Folk Singers and their Songs'—would more properly read 'Trespassers and their Squabble over Folk Singers and their Songs': the disinclination to maintain aboriginals in the frame is significant.) Sharp's self-positioning at this stage (Chapter Nine)—ventriloquizing of bucolic source and excoriation of prior trespassers—acquires clarity in the light of his culminating section.

The culminating ten pages (pp. 134–141), revealingly, are occupied by Sharp the educationalist, the second of the two chief concerns announced in the Introduction. His disdain for contemporary popular music, embodied in the anathematic institution of the music hall, epitomizes what has been intermittently apparent:

the mind that has been fed upon the pure melody of the folk will instinctively detect the poverty-stricken tunes of the music-hall, and refuse to be captivated and deluded by their superficial attractiveness. (p. 135)

The significant concluding modulation is now to the larger realm of conduct. A distinctly moral varnish—qualities, that is, not specific to music narrowly construed—conveyed *passim* in Sharp's favoured lexicon finds re-affirmation here in the negative, properties deemed inverse to those of folk song: 'fugitive', 'flashy', 'pretty', 'insincere', 'ugly'—and thus 'downright harmful' (p. 139).

the extreme naturalness, the spontaneity, freshness and unconventionality of folk music (p. 8); wholly free from the taint of manufacture, the canker of artificiality; transparently pure and truthful, simple and direct in its utterance. (p. 34); spontaneity, artlessness and spirit (p. 113)

Sharp's assumption of a sovereign association between music and manners finds expression in alimentary metaphor. From the belief that if you feed the masses vulgar music—*I've got a luvverly bunch ov cokernuts*—they will behave in a vulgar manner, follows the crusade to prescribe improving 'musical pabulum' (p. 135) in the form of folk song, 'ideal food for very young children' (p. 134): 'a beneficent and enduring effect would be produced upon the national character. For good music purifies, just as bad music vulgarizes' (p. 135).^o

Flood the streets, therefore, with folk tunes, and those who now vulgarize themselves and others by singing coarse music hall songs will drop them in favour of the equally attractive but far better tunes of the folk. This will make the streets a pleasanter place for those who have sensitive ears, and will do incalculable good in civilizing the masses. (p. 137)

Here speaks the missionary abroad in darkest England who, in so solemnly yearning after a land fit for the refined, betrays the regulatory design of his pursuit of this object.† Informationally redundant, dwelling of this kind signals the presence of an insistent bee. (This aspect prompts much repetition: '*good tunes will ... exercise a salutary influence upon the minds and characters of those who sing them.*' p. 138) This formative influence, furthermore, needs to be national in character, bound up in an unashamed concern with Englishness: 'And it is Englishmen, English citizens, that we want' (p. 136) in the project of creating 'a better citizen, a truer patriot' (p. 136). The other ingredient prominent in the Sharpian mixture is anti-materialism, a programme of moral renewal directed against the brash materialistic proclivities of the age:

In a material age, too, such as the present, there is an especial need for fostering the growth and development of those things which, like good music, exercise a purifying and regenerative influence. (p. 140)

Sharp reveals himself to be the very type of the blinkered bourgeois philanthropist, solemnly prescribing correctives for the plebeian masses. His preoccupation is thus

^o This, very precisely, is the original Greek sense of *ethos*: variants on the 'belief that music can convey, foster and even generate ethical states'. See *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (second edition, 2001), Volume VIII, p. 403 *et seq.*

† 'A few weeks ago I was hunting for songs on Exmoor, and had spent two or three hours one afternoon listening to and noting down several exquisite melodies that were sung to me by an old man, eighty-six years of age. In the evening of the same day, my peace was rudely disturbed by the raucous notes of coarse music-hall songs, shouted out, at the tops of their voices, by the young men of the village, who were ending the evening in the bar of my hotel. The contrast between the old-fashioned songs and kindly manners of my friend the old parish clerk who lived hard by and the songs and uncouth behaviour of the present occupants of the bar struck me very forcibly, and threw into strong relief the deplorable deterioration that, in the last thirty years or so, has taken place in the manners and amusements of the country villagers.' (p. 137) One shudders to think what he would have made of subsequent developments in boorishness.

not, as many have averred, exclusively æsthetic but primordially moral; or rather, a vision of the æsthetic at the service of the moral. The correlation, capital to the Sharpian scheme, between musical quality and instruction—posed once in the negative: tunes deemed ‘bad’ and *therefore* ‘uneducative’ (p. 136)—points to state sponsored education as the instrument of implementation. It was not, pragmatically, the street whose flooding would bring about the desired ‘fostering’, but the classroom, an expedient requiring some sway in the composition of the syllabus:

But if the Board of Education take any action in the matter, it must, to be effective, be based upon the theory propounded in the foregoing pages. That is to say, the authorities must realize that the folk song stands in a category of its own, that it is generically distinct from all other forms of music, and that, as such, it must be given a special place in the educational scheme. (p. 139)

Thus the circle of argument is closed, revealing the veritable goal towards which exposition has all along been steered. In the culminating confluence of what is (held to be) musically *sui generis* with institutionally controlled instruction (in personal terms, the apostle of music makes common cause with the educationist) the Sharpian salmagundi acquires a kind of perspective. Artful exposition in three broad stages—conditions of creation, characteristics as chronicled, supra-tribal potentiality—is oriented towards an ideologically-driven (re)instatement of forms taken to be autochthonous, a slant accounting for the weight of hypothesis invested in genesis. The root imperative of Sharp’s mission to transplant the flora he plucked from the verge of extinction is thus its extricability qua corpus from a decaying habitat. A valorizing of country song as unique product of collective, counter-bardic endeavour is not derived from observation but postulated to justify this transplanting. Much is explicable in terms of this dissonance. While the three (tacit) segments appear to articulate a compelling concatenation of past, present and future, divergent logics are in play. Root disjuncts—the positivistic (enquiry) in conflict with the tendentious (supra-musical evangelism)—translate into surface disparities (as set out above). Most significantly, Sharp’s quarry shifts from knowledge, whether understood as *differentia specifica* of a paradigm of musical materials or as musical ethnography (the first he fumbles, the second he recognizes as capital but declines to pursue), to a programme of (re)disciplining, a schoolmasterly prospectus of *castigat cantando mores*.

HOW, ULTIMATELY, DOES SHARP'S EXPOSITION MEASURE AGAINST ROOT IMPERATIVES? He seemingly fulfils the criterion of ethnic imprimatur with an endogenous theory of genesis (not merely found in the rustic mouth but made there), but, in his scramble to extricate contents, rends the fabric of habitat which confers meaning. Avowed cognitive defeat—discreteness which is finally unrepertoriable, value which is properly unarguable—is transmuted into a (pro)claimed victory as allegory of æstheticomoral edification, the preferential compound of music and education conducing to an overestimation of the purgative properties of 'folk' song (tunes) and the efficacy of institutional elementary inculcation as a means of their imposition, in advocacy of which the purloined (more than 'rescued') belongings of country singers are reduced to the occasion of one more bourgeois power struggle. Sharp is Quixote by bicycle, tilting tirelessly at the windmills of material-commercial (urban) degeneracy; or a secular Paul, preaching the new gospel—*ipsissima verba* (p. 128)—of home-spun beauty to a populace befooled by humbuggery, his book a bloated Epistle to the Philistines. Within this horizon, he proves less proto-ethnomusicologist than self-confessed missionary, his vision reversing the received polarity of civilization: the jungle of the urban-industrial, having tenement, factory and hateful music hall as its iniquitous loci, will putatively find salvation in the Elysian fields of a residual peasantry and its ethnically primal song. This impeccably Fabian-philanthropic mythification[□] of an *objet de valeur* has as its unwitting result that it contrives to invert the agent's (performer or otherwise) association with the materials, so that what was hitherto unselfconsciously practised as part of a horny-handed way of life is pressed into service in doctrinaire repudiation of the modern, through which aboriginal expression of belonging becomes a symptom of *not* belonging.



□ Responding to an early draft of this section, C J Bearman (of Chelmsford) writes: 'Why say 'Mythify'? The participants certainly believed they were taking part in a recognizable movement.' (Private letter, 23 September 1998.) A passing acquaintance with the indispensable work of, *entres autres*, Roland Barthes would have avoided this crushing naivety.

PART III

COMMENTARY ON THE COMMENTATORS

THIS SURVEY OF EXISTING COMMENTARY ON ALFRED WILLIAMS AS A SONG COLLECTOR seeks to be detailed and comprehensive, as a means of framing the terms of debate within which his intervention in the subject takes place. The reflections of each commentator in turn are described and implications explored. For practical purposes, however, discussion stops short in two ways. Firstly, the aim of this conspectus is merely to identify the kinds of comment made about Williams, on the principle that selection signifies, rather than seeking extensively to evaluate that commentary, especially criticism, against the specifics of his writings: this in effect forms the main body of the thesis in Chapter VI, which picks up and elaborates upon points identified here (some degree of repetition is inescapable). Correcting instances from Williams are, however, occasionally cited where a misreading is particularly glaring. Secondly, there is a potential connection at every turn to the larger folk song issues—ultimately, the intractable but unavoidable question of what ‘folk’ may or may not be taken to mean—an outline of which is given above.

The body of commentary falls loosely into three parts: three papers making up the *Folk Music Journal* Symposium of 1969; the chapter (10) given over to Williams in Dave Harker’s *Fakesong* (1985); and all the rest, rather token mentions dating mainly from before those more elaborate examinations. Discussion is presented chronologically, with the exception of Stewart Sanderson’s new preface for the reprint of *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* in 1970, the form of which offers a useful model for a final drawing together of strands. Importantly, this diachronic approach has a thematic significance as much as it is merely a convenience of the calendar. As the survey unfolds through the century, a distinct trajectory in folk song reflection becomes apparent. In terms of the stock division into First and Second Folk Music Revivals, Williams’s collecting work is largely coldshouldered by the former, in which antipathy typically takes the form of pointed neglect rather than of overt criticism, and espoused by the latter, which has proved broadly sympathetic but which has failed hitherto to conduct sustained scrutiny; that is, neither faction says much about the man and his achievement. In this way, interestingly but rather oddly, shifting response

to Williams becomes effectively barometric of thinking on the wider subject without translating into any real extension of understanding of his place in the saga of folk song mediation. In following the twists and turns of his fate down the decades, a glimpse is caught of the revival looking at itself in the mirror.

Despite, then, increased attention in recent years, Williams remains a shadowy figure, a still largely unknown quantity. The path of acceptance of his work into the folk song canon, which this survey seeks to trace, has been far from smooth: a story of patchy uncritical recognition and eloquent silences.

The title of each source is given at the head of discussion, with page references incorporated parenthetically in the text. Full titles of works appear in the bibliography.

THE HIGH PRIEST The first reaction to Williams's song collecting endeavours came while work was still in progress. Frank Kidson volunteered 'expert' commentary leading to a spat, the contents of which are examined in Chapter VI.3 (p. 429).

REVIEWS OF FOLK SONGS OF THE UPPER THAMES (1923)

In my work *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, which was published in 1923 by Messrs. Duckworth and Co., and was extensively reviewed ...¹

Alfred Williams's *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* was published by Duckworth in May 1923. It comprises 267 headnoted texts of all kinds, including four variants, plus a contextualizing introduction of 35 hefty paragraphs. In the course of preparing copy for publication, Williams wrote to his friend Henry Byett:

I wanted to do some very *careful* revisions, & verifications ... I accordingly spent most of my time in re-reading, and adopting *points of view* for which I might be expected to be severely criticised.²

For the first time since entering the field in the autumn of 1914 Williams knew his mediating endeavours were about to be exposed to the gaze of a wider, more knowledgeable and potentially more critical audience. Though this confidence to Byett indicates a measure of consciousness of the pitfalls attending full book publication, we may question how far Williams really grasped the longer implications of electing to cross this particular threshold. In a culture which obsessively preserves and classifies, the book as artefact is for ever, at once pleasing in its permanence and disturbing in its fixing properties, in the way it spins beyond our capacity to control

its fate at the hands of often harsh posterity. The print spoor traced here in a small way exemplifies this Gutenberg gloss.

Appropriately, the first notice to appear was in the *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard* (Cirencester, 5 May 1923, p. 2), in which a majority of the texts had originally been serialized in 1915-16. At that period, the paper ran a regular comment column on the inside front page headed 'Chit-Chat' under the pseudonym 'Rambler' (probably W Scotford Harmer, who edited the *Standard* from 1911 to 1936 and who was personally known to Williams). The column, given over to verbiage on the week's topical matters, local and national, opened its review thus: 'The *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard* is entitled to congratulate itself on having afforded to Mr Alfred Williams the medium for the original serial publication which led the way to the issue of his two latest ... books' (the other being *Round About the Upper Thames*, 1922). Largely ignoring the song texts themselves, discussion takes the form of extended paraphrase of the introduction, including one lengthy passage quoted, of which the following can be taken as representative:

While engaged in collecting material for this work ... Mr Williams probably became more closely acquainted with the habits and customs of the people, than any other writer who has attempted to describe their mode and views of life, their joys and sorrows, their work and recreations, their sturdy virtues their human failings and weaknesses.³

This focus on the country life interest of the book, and on Williams's achievement in recording it, rather than on the song texts themselves, is also adopted by other local reviewers. The daily *Swindon Evening Advertiser* (14 May 1923, p. 4) gave over the best part of a page to a review which is unsigned but which bears all the stylistic hallmarks of J. B. Jones, a local headmaster who knew Williams and tirelessly championed his cause.⁴ Jones adopts the 'prophet without honour' line, and accords some attention to the song texts as popular lyric verse, the tone of which can be savoured in this extract:

Melancholy evidently assorted ill with hard work. Many of these spirited little compositions are poems of the highest order, sweet flowers whose grace and charm are bewitching.

Two texts ('Phyllis and the Shepherd' and 'Dolly and Hodge') are cited in illustration. As in the *Standard* review, discussion here takes the form of an essentially

uncritical blend of close paraphrase of, and quotation from, Williams's introduction, picking out familiar points such as his concern not to borrow from the work of others, the tribulations of collecting and his anti-revival line conveyed in the final two paragraphs. The piece contrives to be wordy without being informative.

A further anonymous review appeared in the weekly *North Wilts Herald* (Swindon, 18 May 1923, p. 4), in which *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* is hailed as a 'great book', and Williams owed a debt of gratitude for having saved the songs from extinction. The reviewer plays up the nobility of this ostensibly humble subject, the way the book paints a picture of country people in song. Three texts are approvingly cited: 'My Old Wife's a Dear Old Cratur', 'In the Days we went a-Gipsying', and 'The Jolly Waggoner'. The review concludes with a restatement of the scale of Williams's efforts in gleaning the material.

This favourable, not to say fulsome, response Williams no doubt found gratifying, but he saw the fears he had confided to Byett confirmed with the first significant extra-parochial response to *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, a lengthy anonymous review which appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement* of 10 May 1923 (p. 312). In contrast to the local notices discussed above, this piece focuses exclusively on Williams's assemblage of song texts through the prism of prevailing canons of 'folk', ignoring the contextualizing introduction. This inaugural encounter with the wider world shows that, from the outset, the battlelines were drawn. What now seems a quibble—objecting not to the compilation as such but to its sanctification as 'folk' in the title—was deemed a sufficiently grave matter by the reviewer to form the nub of discussion. Since the review both establishes the principal bone of contention and represents a largely unknown source, it merits quotation *in toto*.⁹ (Paragraphs are numbered for ease of reference.)

[1] Honesty, Mr Williams repeats, is the best policy. He has travelled in one way and another some thirteen thousand miles through the country of the Upper Thames, making himself master of its life and lore. Some books he has already published concerning his acquaintance with the region, and he felt it imperative to bring his work nearer completeness by compiling a volume of the songs which people sung [*sic*] thereabouts in his day. So, he emphasizes, the songs which he collects were each and all sung round about the Upper Thames. He will admit no alien ditty because it is sweet. Neither, on the other hand, will he exclude an Upper Thames ballad because others may claim it.

⁹ I am grateful to Steve Pennells of Hove, Sussex for this text. The cutting was found inside his copy of *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, purchased in a bookshop in Abingdon many years ago.

My pieces [he tells us in his lengthy introduction] may have been sung in Somersetshire, Cornwall, Surrey, Warwickshire, Lancashire, Yorkshire, or Aberdeenshire, if you will. But as long as I have proof that they were also popular in the Thames Valley I am satisfied.

[2] We are satisfied that Mr Williams has held fast to this honest principle. But it appears to modify the purport of his title "Folk Songs of the Upper Thames." And on examination of his anthology one is constrained to attach a comprehensive meaning to his label "Folk Songs." The choice of a title is probably the worst problem that an author encounters, and we could not, if it were our business, suggest a happy epitome to supersede Mr Williams's fancy; but what his title page ought to have declared is a miscellany of songs of all sorts which he had from denizens of the Upper Thames. We will give instances of their miscellaneous character.

[3] Mr Williams annotates each poem with its immediate provenance and perhaps some appreciative comment. "This little piece," for instance, "is altogether superior, and yet I think it is a folk-song. It was told me by a very aged man, J Minchin, Eynsham, Oxon." This "folk-song" is a sentimental trifle which probably arose not long after Tom Hood's "I remember." Witness such lines as

There's the gate I could run to, returning from school,
The willow still shading my little fish-pool,
Yon old scattered casement, where birds build their nest,
Marks the spot where I slumbered in infancy's rest.

[4] A few pages away he prints "The Long-tailed Blue," and dubs it "a quaint old song," the complete text of which caused him many inquiries. And what is "The Long-tailed Blue"? In point of fact it is a negro melody—slightly denigrated [*sic*] by Mr Williams's blacksmith—which was first set free on town and country about 1840. For, despite Mr Williams's view of rustics with a soul above ragtime, the fact is that negro songs, first warnings of the syncopated storm to come, did take the ploughman's fancy, just as nowadays one hears Amos or Reuben in the inn chimney corner expressing nostalgia for Michigan or a coal-black mammy. Another instance occurs in Mr Williams's pages, "South Caroline is a sultry clime," which he says was popular sixty or seventy years ago.

[5] To the opening of the nineteenth century probably belongs "Eve [*sic*] around the huge oak," first heard by Mr Williams "at Lechlade, which abounds in old songs," this one was set by Shield. "Old Towler," here also, was a song of Shield's. "In the days we went a-gipsying," remembered by Elijah Iles of Inglesham as favourite with the travelling drovers of the thirties, and a favourite too with Jane Eyre's nurse, is of no greater antiquity. "The Downhill of Life"—"this I admit as a folk-song"—was written by Collins the actor and appeared in early editions of the "Golden Treasury." Another curiosity under the classification of "folk-song" is "The Sower's Song." "A superior piece, not heard out of North Wilts," says Mr Williams. It fell from the pen of Thomas Carlyle.

[6] The object of these few ascriptions is to show what a hotch-potch Mr Williams has perforce given, for many familiar general ballads also occupy his common-land. "The Bailiff's Daughter of Islington" is followed by "It's my delight of a shiny night"; we meet the jolly miller of Dee and the lass of Richmond Hill, Barbara Allen and John Peel. Altogether, as a record of the songs which Mr Williams heard in his

chosen country, and as a picture of rural taste in music and letters, the book is highly meritorious. It gives many a whimsical, pretty, or beautiful stave for desultory enjoyment. But what is it, judged from a more scientific standpoint, but a queer jumble of ancient and modern, genuine and artificial, worthy and worthless? Mr Williams acknowledges that he did not go to libraries or collections of folk-songs in order to verify his transcripts. It was well of him not to do this if he would have altered his readings; but in another way his refraining from using the archives has spoiled his work. His obligation in the matter of editorial comment was surely to save us from confusion, and as far as possible to distinguish local songs and versions of songs of true rustic growth from the second-hand fugitives of the town. There is real need for discrimination in the country, with its peculiar use of the word "old-fashioned," applied sometimes to a chromo-lithograph given away with a Christmas number thirty years back, or to some doggerel on the relief of Ladysmith.

[1] An ostensibly approving summary of Williams's purposes—completing his picture of country life with music, and confining collecting strictly to a defined district—proves backhanded. [2] The reviewer goes on to organize his reflections around the paradoxical thesis that Williams proves hoist with the petard of his own paraded 'integrity'. By virtuously placing himself in a kind of voluntary purdah, he is betrayed in practice into a naivety which defeats the project announced in his title: many of these songs are not 'folk'. The reviewer's rhetorical ploy of foregrounding these naiveties of inclusion and ascription is at once penetrating and unjust: penetrating in that it points up Williams's peculiar lack of knowledge of the subject, which cannot be denied and which no judicious evaluation of his work should seek to deny; unjust in that it does so by ignoring the many virtues of *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*. (In passing, a new parlour game is created: compose an alternative title.) [3-5] Contriving a tone of witty acerbity, the reviewer then effortlessly mobilizes his musical knowledge to spot, by way of illustration, a few impostors. The impression is rather of wearily swatting a fly.

[6] Looping back to the gambit, the casual concluding paragraph is fraught with big issues. Principally, the review exudes superiority, of the established view of the subject and by extension of those who had appointed themselves to its custodianship. Whoever composed this was to such an extent saturated in the tenets of the prevailing folk song consensus that any alternative account of the subject is simply inconceivable. Thus, in taking Williams to task for failing to distinguish 'songs of true rustic growth from the second-hand fugitives of the town', he misses

the point that Williams did not believe they *were* of 'true rustic growth', a view he sets out in his introduction but one so egregious at the time that the reviewer does not take it on board. Revealingly, this saturation has a series of further effects: it leads the reviewer to miss the oddity of adopting the line that this book can be *both* highly meritorious 'as a picture of rural taste in music and letters'—which is, of course, precisely what Williams set out to do—and 'scientifically' invalid as 'folk' (though the rhetorical implication is that the latter predominates over the former); and the period assumption that 'folk' music existed in a social vacuum means there is not the slightest nod to Williams's pioneering efforts in his introduction to tie music in to the singers' lives. Furthermore, the judgement that Williams's book belongs to the realm of 'desultory enjoyment', a *divertissement* which does not count as a serious contribution to knowledge (that 'scientific' is very Sharpian),⁵ is truly the art of reflex condescension: this is all very quaint, Mr Williams—but it isn't folk. Finally, the injunction that there is an 'obligation' to save the reader from confusion raises the question of the role of the collector-editor, central to the whole 'mediation' debate. What if the editor's role is to show that what untutored country singers elect to perform should not be airily dismissed as 'confused'? (Was the repertory a 'queer jumble' to the champion nonagenarian singer Elijah Iles, who delighted in all sorts of popular songs?) The reflex here, clearly, is that country people are idiots in need of the winnowing hand of educated discrimination.

Of greatest moment for this discussion is the way in which the *Times* review establishes the terms of reception of Williams's intervention: from the outset he is marked down as marginal, the well-intentioned amateur, a bumbling local enthusiast who could not recognize a 'non-folk' song when he pedalled into one on the road to Lechlade. What his thoughts were on reading this verdict—as he surely must—on his great labour of love is not recorded.

Other national recognition at the time of publication included a notice carried in the *Westminster Gazette*, which Williams knew of and prized. Alluding to the text 'Of all the Brave Birds' in a lecture, he remarks:

Now, this is a most interesting survival. The reviewer of my *Folk Songs* in the "*Westminster Gazette*" (several years ago) pointed out that this appears in an old play (Knight of the burning Pestle) printed in 1609.⁶

Williams's song book went unnoticed (*sic*) in the *Journal of the Folk Song Society*.

An early inkling of understanding that Williams's work might be out of the mould is conveyed in a short plug for *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* which appeared in the second issue of *Word-Lore* magazine (March-April 1926) published by The Folk Press.⁶ The notice is not a review as such but indicates, among other things, that the book was still available, three years after publication, at 7s 6d (37.5p).

Some day the remarkable work that Mr Williams has done in his own particular district, the upper Thames basin, will be generally recognised. At present it seems to be very little known. This is, perhaps, because he regards himself less as a collector of folk songs than as a student and recorder of the life and customs, the sayings and doings, of his chosen people. Yet he has, in fact, collected a very large number of these songs, and in this volume nearly three hundred of them are given. Mr Williams has original views on some points, and certain matters he explains with great clarity. (p. 82)

Of principal interest here is the prescient point that proper recognition of Williams's work still lay some way in the future. As instances of his 'original views' the piece goes on to cite from the book's introduction Williams's belief that these texts were the work of metropolitan hacks, and his perception that dialect in song is generally anathema to country people.⁷

G H GEROULD, *THE BALLAD OF TRADITION* (1932)

What is evidently the first scholarly mention of *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* is oddly deadpan. In two passing references, one to each of the principal sections of the book, Gerould conveys no sense that Williams was anything other than a perfectly unremarkable member of the club. Seeking corroboration for his thesis that compilations taken down from singing more accurately represent the incidence of refrains than do collections, such as Child, derived from print or recitation, Gerould tosses *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* onto the fire quite casually alongside Sharp (p. 119). Secondly, he cites the account of country singing matches in the book's introduction as exemplifying 'feats of memory that strike with amazement

⁶ Seeing a copy of the *Folk Press Handbook* in 1925, with its overwhelming bias towards songs collected in Somerset, Williams was moved to write a piece in the local press extolling the musical virtues of the Upper Thames. 'Last summer someone sent me the FOLK PRESS HANDBOOK & I saw by that that out of 350 songs Somerset had 300, Wilts, Gloucester, & Oxfordshire 3 apiece. I wrote to the *Wilts Gazette* & corrected this; and I have since written an article for the new magazine WORD-LÖRE on the Folk Songs of the Thames region (at the request of the editor) so I have no doubt we shall come into our own by & by.' (Lecture notes, wsno 2598/36.) The first article in question is 'The Local Distribution of the Folk Song and Folk Music', *Wiltshire Gazette*, 26 August 1925. A Folk Press letter of 23 November 1925 (wsno 2598/63) inviting an article for the first issue of *Word-Lore* in 1926 resulted in the important piece 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames District'. Williams's stringing together of these two circumstances suggests they were connected, i.e. an effort on the part of the publishers to correct the picture, though his conjunction 'and' does not actually specify any such relation.

those of us who depend on books for our knowledge' (p. 163). There is no further attempt to evaluate Williams's place in the subject.

BYETT AND CLARK: THE BEGINNINGS OF BIOGRAPHY

Swindonian Henry Byett knew Alfred Williams socially for the last thirty years of Williams's life. Following Williams's death in 1930, Byett published a series of biographical articles in the *Swindon Evening Advertiser*, which were subsequently collected up into the slim, and now extremely rare, volume *Alfred Williams: Ploughboy, Hammerman, Poet & Author* (1933). Byett's modest efforts incline, inevitably, to the hagiographic, but have the compensating merit of being derived from first hand knowledge, in effect the only lengthy body of writing to be grounded so.⁸ The interest of the half-dozen pages he devotes to Williams as collector is largely anecdotal, relating to circumstances of gleaning and publication. One passage, however, bites a little deeper into the key question of Williams's relation to the wider revival:

Mr Kitson [*sic*] and Mr Cecil Sharpe [*sic*] were each collectors of folk songs who were assiduous in getting them introduced into the schools. This class of collector he [Williams] considered lacked success in collection, owing to their being much above the station of the villagers. They were for this reason unable to obtain the confidence of the old singers; the latter would not open out to them as to one of their own station, such as himself. Further, the two classes collected for entirely different reasons—one from the point of view of commercialism, the other for literature. (p. 65)

Accepting that, though he may have taken an informed interest in song collecting through Williams, Byett would have had no specialist knowledge of the issues or personalities involved, then the line he is relaying can only have come from the horse's mouth. Construed in this way, the effect is of obliquely listening to Williams himself: the prickly, slightly jaundiced tone of the above, for example, is likely to represent feelings aired in conversation but which Williams was circumspect enough not to state in so many words in his published writings. However this may be, Byett's remarks chime with the dominant theme: Williams as virtuous outsider, his efforts defined *in opposition* to those of contemporary collectors—and, as understood by Byett, 'better'. Finally, he misleads on one important point which needs correcting:

He had for years been seized with the importance of collecting all the folk songs of Wiltshire and neighbouring counties, as partaking of the nature of a history of the people. A villager himself, he had been accustomed to hearing these old songs sung (p. 63)

Williams became aware of the survival of a substantial corpus of song among country people only at a late stage in his life, *despite* being a villager of humble origins, a fact which in itself makes an important point: as he acknowledges,⁹ a 'peculiar elusiveness' is characteristic of this rustic musical activity.

More than ten years were to elapse before a full biography of Williams finally appeared, during which period (the 1930s and early 1940s) there seems to have been little attention of any kind accorded to his work. In *Alfred Williams, His Life and Work* (1945) Leonard Clark produced a consummate, though essentially unscholarly, life. In discussing song collecting Clark, like Byett, perpetrates naiveties through being unacquainted with the issues. While this means his account is of little moment for any serious attempt to evaluate Williams's mediation of song, as biography it yet merits scrutiny in that it remains the principal secondary source on Williams and as such tends to carry considerable clout. Assertions by Clark which are either untestable (the book is entirely unreferenced) or demonstrably mistaken are routinely swallowed as authoritative by commentators unwilling to do the spadework for themselves. For this reason, it will be salutary to dwell on instances in detail.

A clutch of instances will serve to illustrate the looseness of many of Clark's pronouncements, such as this on the extent of Williams's field of collecting:

by autumn [1916], two-thirds of the work was done and the field of exploration had been extended west to Chippenham and east to Wallingford. (p. 94)

This is unfounded: Wallingford is way beyond his delineated 'Upper Thames', beyond, in effect, realistic cycling distance from his base at South Marston.

only a few days after [the song book] appeared, William Bridges, a very old friend and an exquisite singer of folk songs, died in his 97th year. (p. 160)

Since none of the extant song texts in Williams's collection is attributed to Bridges, nor is he anywhere referred to in a folk song connection, Clark's assertion that he was an 'exquisite singer' cannot be substantiated. Bridges does, however, figure in *A Wiltshire Village*, Williams's account of life in and around his native South Marston published before he began song gleaning in earnest.¹⁰ More substantive is the issue of the degree of contact Williams may or may not have had with other interested parties:

Williams corresponded with people, many of them experts, all over England, about the songs, for they were attracting unusual attention as they appeared week by week in the *Standard*. His old friend, Jonathan Denwood, then living in Whitechapel and pining for a smell of the Downs and the mists of his own northern fells, sent him information about Cumbrian folk songs. And Frank Kidson, a real authority, advised him that many of the so-called "folk" songs of the Upper Thames valley were no more than Victorian drawing room lyrics which could all be found on contemporary sheet music of which he had original copies. (p. 94)

No documentary evidence survives for any such extensive correspondence, at least not in the Williams Collection.¹² If serialization in the *Standard* was 'attracting unusual attention' it was certainly not apparent in the columns of the paper itself: with the exception of the exchanges with Frank Kidson referred to above (p. 287), only two reader responses were printed, from the son of a local informant serving at the Front, and from Frederick Bingham in London.¹³ Or take the following, related, sweeping assertions:

He was well aware of the pseudo nature of many of the songs which were called folk songs. (p. 161)

He had heard of the work of Cecil Sharp, and admired it, but he was not influenced in any way by what he and others had done. (p. 93)

The first statement, following from the previous passage cited, touches on one of the core questions raised by Williams's collecting: was his inclusion of 'non-canonical' material the result of doctrinaire contesting of that canon, or was it, circumstantially, the outcome of musical ignorance? Any attempt to adjudicate on the point supposes very careful pondering against the primary materials. In the context of this discussion, the important point is the way Clark's confident 'well aware' traduces the messiness of the issue. Similarly, though Williams certainly knew of Sharp's work (it would be extremely odd if he had not), the judgement that he 'admired' it is very hard to sustain in terms of the two or three passing mentions of Sharp in his writings. In sum, Clark's account is anodyne, tending to play down the heterodox tenor of Williams's intervention, as well as being on several counts positively misleading.

FRANK HOWES, REVIEW OF CLARK'S BIOGRAPHY IN *JOURNAL OF THE EFDSS* (1945)

This discussion of Clark's life of Williams leads neatly into the first significant recognition from the folk song establishment, Frank Howes's review of the book:

Alfred Williams's contribution to folk-song studies is confined to a single book, *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* (1923), but his delineation of village life in *A Wiltshire Village* (1912) and still more his references to folk custom and country pursuits in *Round About the Upper Thames* (1922) have commended his writings to all who care for the closely inter-related subjects which abut on traditional song and dance. ... Williams did not add music to his varied accomplishments ... but he was a true collector in that he tapped the oral tradition of rustic singers and as a student right outside the folk-song 'movement' his book has a special value for us. [Extract]

Howes's gambit is at once unpromising and emblematic: the exclusive equation of Williams's work with his folk song book is a commonplace misconception: his contribution in fact ranges more widely, in ways which significantly extend the account contained in the book. Thereafter, however, Howes makes (and omits) a series of points which amount to an appreciable shift in attitude. There is a new receptiveness to the circumstances in which song subsisted, recognizing that Williams pioneers the contextualizing approach; his condition as outsider is now seen as a source of interest rather than as grounds for dismissal; and the inclusion of 'non-canonical' texts is passed over in silence rather than held up as a heinous crime. This is already a long way from the *Times* review of 1923.

MARGARET DEAN-SMITH, *A GUIDE TO ENGLISH FOLK SONG COLLECTIONS* (1954)

Confirmation of Williams's belated admission to the pantheon comes with two, rather repetitive, entries in Dean-Smith's *Guide*, an establishment document:

Last among the large textual collections is Alfred Williams's *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, representing about one-third of his gatherings before 1916, published in 1923. It seems clear that, in this tract of country still rural and comparatively remote, Williams struck a very rich field. He noted some 1,300 songs and seems to have left more un-noted. He was aware that other collectors were at work elsewhere, but he deliberately chose to pursue a solitary way, without benefit of association or comparison, and whether ill or well-equipped for the business of noting the tunes, he had intended to go back for them. Like *Songs of the Peasantry*, the earliest wholly textual collection included in this *Guide*, *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* is a heterogeneous assemblage. In the *Guide* omissions from such have been made only after examination of all collections with music disclosed no associated tune, or where, so far as judgment could decide, by the standards of the Folk Song Society the item must be deemed "composed"; but the benefit of the doubt has been liberally given in this instance because much work may yet be done in the Upper Thames country, and because the experience of the past has often shown that unlikely texts may prove to be fragments of something "accepted", and that poor texts may be married to fine tunes. Moreover, among "recognized and accepted" folk song texts *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* contains some of remarkable beauty and completeness which, unlike those in almost every other collection, have neither been edited, nor "made-up" from printed versions.

About 300 songs, i.e. texts from over a thousand noted chiefly between 1914 and 1916. The Essay is of great interest and value in describing the survival of songs and singing in a part of England still rural and remote; the autumn singing matches in the inns, or occupying days of winter unemployment; the feasts of seed-cake, hay-harvest, sheep-shearing, bark-harvest and harvest-home; the sports, games and morris dancing still extant or practised within living memory. These subjects, and the accounts of the old singers, dancers and back-swordsmen are more fully treated in *Round About the Upper Thames* which had been published in book-form the previous year. Many of the songs had been published, annotated, week by week in *The Wilts and Glos Standard*. Williams, a remarkable and self-taught man, pursued his collecting as a solitary, though he knew of other collectors and exchanged correspondence with them, notably with Frank Kidson. The contents of *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* are of very mixed kind and quality, as Williams was aware, but except for some easily recognized glees and catches from Playford and Ravenscroft, all have been included in the *Guide*, since further investigation may yet discover the tunes which Williams could not spare time to note down before he enlisted (see his article in *Word-Lore*, 1926). Any attempt at separating tares from wheat at the present time might lead to loss rather than gain, especially as previous collecting had demonstrated that the quality of tunes cannot be deduced from associated texts. Some of the texts of well-known songs are notably fine, and some, such as 'The Lark in the Morn' supply verses usually missing or omitted in other versions. A chapter devoted to Williams's folk song collecting, with references to his lectures and articles will be found in *Alfred Williams, his Life and Work*, by Leonard Clark, Blackwell [sic], 1945. (Introduction, p. 23, and p. 38)

Within the perspective adopted here, these passages make for interesting reading. Dean-Smith's circumspect comments, set in characteristically measured syntax, appear to give little away but, on closer inspection, there is between the lines a tension between her determination to accord Williams his due and her condition as a figure fully within the folk music establishment. The fact in itself of Williams's inclusion in a document such as this is noteworthy: from discussion below, it becomes clear that, had for example Maud Karpeles compiled the *Guide*, there is a strong chance that Williams would have remained excluded. Most revealing on this point is Dean-Smith's guarded pondering of the selection issue. Though to dub Williams's book a 'heterogeneous assemblage' (supposing a model of 'homogeneity') is to echo the 'hotch-potch' line taken by the *Times* reviewer, she is notably less quick to dismiss out of hand certain texts as invalid—and by extension to imply the verdict that Williams was an idiot for including them. (For the early commentators, there was no 'doubt' for Williams to be given the benefit of.) Without going so far as to question the sanctity of old Folk Song Society canon, Dean-Smith succeeds in

ever so subtly suggesting that Williams shows us things might not be quite so clear cut. The status quo remains undisturbed but a distinct shift is detectable beneath the surface. In this vein, Dean-Smith follows Howes in stressing the particular value of the contextualizing material Williams furnishes. Unremarkable as this may seem now, it is worth recalling that at this time Dr Karpeles was still pedalling the inverse view: 'Cecil Sharp believed that folk music ... was capable of dissociation from the circumstances in which it was created and that, like all other musical creations, it would be upon its intrinsic artistic merits that it would stand or fall.'¹⁴

A further tension embodied in Dean-Smith's reflections is that between a desire to promote Williams and the poor condition of knowledge of his work. At this period, before the Williams song manuscripts had been properly catalogued, there was uncertainty even over the precise extent of his collection: the figure here of 1,300 is simply eccentric. In this connection, Leonard Clark's life of Williams was beginning to work its damage: Dean-Smith's reference to contact with Kidson is likely to be parroted from this source rather than being based on first-hand knowledge of the *Standard* exchanges; and she concludes by referring the reader to the folk song chapter in Clark's biography, published by 'Blackwell',¹⁵ which, as we have seen, is such a poor guide. Connected also is a tendency to take Williams's own claims at face value: that he intended to return for the tunes; and his assertion of editorial integrity, that he 'neither edited, nor "made up" from printed versions'. Conversely, Dean-Smith contrives at least once to skew Williams's intention by stating that he chose to operate 'without benefit of association', when his line was that association with the work of other collectors was potentially corrupting not beneficial. Finally, in the verdict that certain texts are of 'remarkable beauty and completeness' we can perhaps detect the pendulum swinging back from tune to words. Tacitly, this makes the paradoxical point that Williams's inability to note music may have had the positive spin-off of being able to concentrate his efforts on establishing the fullest possible text.

REEVES AND PLUNKETT: THE LATE 1950S

James Reeves swings the pendulum back towards words. Two volumes of selections from the early collectors (which have something of the feel of Williams's book) aim to be a celebration of folk poetry, presenting full texts uncluttered by music and at

¹⁴ For the record, full publication details are: 'Bristol: printed for William George's Sons Ltd and sold by Basil Blackwell, Oxford, MCMXLV.'

the same time correcting anathematic Edwardian expurgation. Williams features fleetingly: a notorious passage from *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, in which Williams confesses to ‘hypocrisy’ at declining to note certain ‘indelicate’ songs, is quoted in the Introduction (pp. 13-14) to *The Idiom of the People* (1958) without judgement, simply dubbed an ‘interesting statement’ of a ‘feeling of dissatisfaction’ shared by many early collectors; and there are some brief, rather random, textual cross-references, such as to ‘Death and the Lady’ (p. 87) and, in *The Everlasting Circle* (1960), to ‘The Red Herring’ (p. 180). More significantly, interest in Williams’s work picks up with the emergence from the late 1950s of a Second Revival consciously defining itself as ‘radical’ in relation to the comatose folk music establishment. In 1959, the enthusiast and collector Mervyn Plunkett produced, jointly with Reg Hall and Peter Grant, a periodical called *Ethnic*. Though in the event the publication ran to only four issues, its editorial line is emblematic of certain stirrings then perceptible in the revival: the view that First Revival values and criteria are inappropriate to a proper understanding of the subject. In a screed of editorial in the second issue taking up a reader’s letter on the hoary topic of selection, Plunkett is among the first to bring himself to *believe* that Williams’s ragbag marks a true step forward:

Some degree of selection is inevitable, but on what basis? Certainly not that of the old collectors ... The only representative collection of which I know is Alfred Williams’s *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*. Having had a look through his manuscripts in the Swindon Public Library, and having seen some of the superb texts that he chose not to publish (not bawdy texts) one can only suppose that he was giving, as he claimed, a true picture. (p. 25)

Where Dean-Smith had hedged, Plunkett forthrightly mongers the big word—‘representative’ (without, of course, addressing the substantial problems this throws up). This ostensibly obscure mention marks a turning point: caught up in the great rethink then taking place, Williams is haplessly transformed from villain into hero.

DONALD WILGUS, *ANGLO-AMERICAN FOLK SONG SCHOLARSHIP SINCE 1898* (1959)

That same year, 1959, a parallel revaluation was taking place across the Atlantic. Wilgus devotes a substantial passage to Williams which is worth quoting at length:

[1] And it is doubly unfortunate that the one unselected English collection of the early twentieth century is deficient in other ways.
[2] [Wilgus notes that Williams is unique in the period in not noting music, swallowing his ‘lack of time’ explanation; and describes *Folk Songs of the Upper*

Thames as] 'a "word book" of 346 songs (plus eleven variants) from a collection of 600.' [3] ... almost alone among the English collectors, Williams seems to have had little knowledge of what a folk song should be or what had passed for folk song in other collections. This latter ignorance (if it was ignorance) gives the collection a special value. Williams belongs to a group which is much larger in American folk song collecting—the local enthusiasts [*sic*] with a folk background. ...

[4] He printed the texts largely unemended, not because of a knowledge of the significance of variation, but because of an honest regard for the "musical tastes of the people," and because of lack of time to consult other texts to verify his own. Therefore his unwitting agreement with other English collectors that the texts are largely incorrect copies of broadsides written in large cities bred no disrespect. [5] The lack of arrangement, the almost total lack of enlightening comment on the texts (except for mention of the source and record of the occasions at which they were sung), even his preoccupation with "good" or complete versions can be overlooked when we realize that the collection gives the only reasonably full illustration of the English folk song repertory at the turn of the century (Williams collected in 1914-16, 1919-1923). As he remarked later [*Word-Lore*, 1926], he did not "attempt to adhere to the accepted canon, which has always seemed to me too rigid as ordinarily applied to folk songs and ballads."

[6] With all its faults, the collection helps to fill the gaps left by the Folk-Song Society, because almost nothing else exists which gives an indication of the full repertory of the English folksinger. (pp. 134-5)

[1] Significantly, Wilgus's modulation from the selectivity of the early collectors to Williams turns on the recognition of two salient features of his egregiousness: that Williams's collection is unique in its inclusiveness (though 'unselected' may not be the most felicitous term) and that he exhibits faults all his own. [2] Wilgus goes on to perpetrate two errors previously encountered in Dean-Smith, that of taking claims at face value—Williams did not collect tunes through 'lack of time'—and an uncertainty as to the extent of his yield: *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* is said to comprise 346 texts '(plus eleven variants)' from 600. The second is Williams's own figure (see note 1) but the first is bizarre: the book contains 267 items of all kinds, including four overt variants, i.e. texts with the same title ('Barbara Allen', 'The Draggie-Tail Gipsies', 'Old Moll', and 'Poor Old Horse'), a total of 263 different texts. (He might have made more of the unusual status of *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* as a 'word book' in contrast to the 'singing books' (p. 134) produced by Williams's contemporaries: this is an important point to do with purposes and uses.)

[3] Then Wilgus puts his finger on what is potentially the crux of the matter: the view that Williams had the merits of his faults, a core paradox which turns the effects of 'ignorance' into a virtue. At this point, however, he also starts to run into

difficulties resulting from his sketchy reading of the Williams materials: slipping in the qualifiers ‘seems to have had’ and ‘(if it was ignorance)’ rather vitiates the point he is making. (These judgements are, of course, questions rather than answers, calling for extensive testing against the detail of Williams’s mediation of the subject. For the sake, however, of briefly anticipating, it can be suggested that we confront here an idiosyncratically messy mixture of circumstantial ignorance, doctrinaire isolationism, and just enough knowledge to keep his endeavours purposive.) At the very least, Wilgus’s comments at this point serve usefully to emphasize Williams’s essentially outlandish status, a point reinforced by (non-pejoratively) dubbing him a ‘local enthusiast’—though his having a ‘folk background’ also rather begs the question. [4] Wilgus’s next comments are some way adrift: despite his own avowal, evidence suggests Williams did not necessarily print the texts ‘largely unemended’ (see Appendix I), nor was his failure to consult other printed sources the result of ‘lack of time’. The verdict of ‘unwitting agreement with other English collectors’ is astute as far as it goes, but misses the point that Williams’s line on the provenance of the words remains egregious, not to say heretical, in relation to dominant thinking in that he did not believe there had ever been any ‘folk poetry’ for the broadsides to supplant. [5] The assertion that *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* lacks ‘arrangement’ is open to dispute—there are indications that Williams had a definite scheme in mind; as for ‘the almost total lack of enlightening comment on the texts’, his headnotes are certainly somewhat quirky, but become in their way enlightening with closer inspection. Circumstantially, there is no record of Williams doing any more song fieldwork after entering the army in November 1916 (‘Williams collected in ... 1919–1923’)—see Chapter V. He did, however, return to writing about the subject in the mid-1920s, creating two phases of rumination, and this time lapse has to be taken into account. The quotation here from his *Word-Lore* article of 1926 questioning the established canon may represent a *post hoc* rationalizing of what was, at the time of collecting, a purely *de facto* transgression.

The crux of Wilgus’s reading of Williams comes in deeming his work ‘the only reasonably full illustration of the English folk song repertory at the turn of the century’, a more circumspect formulation than Plunkett’s bald ‘representative’ but one which still calls for more detailed testing against the nature and distribution of

the texts making up the Williams collection. [6] His verdict that certain undeniable failings are overshadowed by the more extensive picture Williams paints effectively inverts the original valorization: a cardinal sin has been converted into a virtue to be prized for its sheer rarity.

As potted pieces go, this contrives to cram in much salient matter. All the elements are in place of a 'revisionist' account of the contribution made by Williams, who is defined as egregious still but now to productive effect. Equally symptomatic is the other side of the coin: Wilgus's prejudices poke through at a number of points, such as the reference to 'the ladies, gentlemen, and clerics of the Folk-Song Society' (p. 135), and to Halpert's perception that 'songs with the most significance for the student of folk culture may be those least esteemed by the orthodox collector' (p. 340). Tacitly, Williams is seen as much as a stick with which to beat the forces of First Revival gentility as of having interest in his own right (in this, Wilgus accords perfectly with Plunkett). Wilgus's conclusion indicates just how far thinking had travelled since the *Times* review. In the altered climate of the 1950s, the exercise in renaming suggested by that reviewer has lost its *raison d'être*: what is wrong with the title? The game has become not so much unplayed as *unplayable*.

BBC : AS THEY ROVED OUT ... SONGS COLLECTED BY ALFRED WILLIAMS (1959)

The third development of 1959 saw Williams caught up in a further questioning of the prevailing orthodoxy, from an unexpected quarter. Making use of developments in portable sound recording equipment, the BBC sponsored during 1952–57 its Folk Music and Dialect Recording Scheme, a wide sweep of the British Isles in search of survivals of oral tradition. The scheme was co-ordinated by Marie Slocombe,¹⁵ Librarian for the BBC Recorded Programmes Permanent Library (Sound Archive), who later oversaw a series of broadcasts based on material collected, entitled *As They Roved Out*. Though by the late 1950s wireless was not a new medium, what was new was its use in popularizing folk music, given that Cecil Sharp and his followers had instinctively turned to the education network for this purpose rather than to the possibilities of the 'media'. Remarkably, not only did Williams rate inclusion in the series, his programme was accorded the first slot. The second number was given over to Lady Lewis, a luminary of the Welsh Folk Song Society presented by her son, Dr Mostyn Lewis, and only with the third broadcast—Frank Howes

on Lucy Broadwood—did the series feature a recognizable figure of the early folk music establishment. The peculiar conception of this series thus marks a conscious attempt to refocus the subject. (Nothing so doctrinaire, need it be said, was proclaimed by the makers. A further circumstantial irony is furnished by the fact that the series was launched hard on the heels of a broadcast celebrating the centenary of Sharp's birth on 22 November 1859.)¹⁶ It seems inconceivable, for example, that, had an equivalent series been produced in the 1930s, Williams's work would have featured at all, let alone been accorded such prominence.

The Cotswold singer Bob Arnold (1910–1998) was chosen to present the programme on Williams, which went out on 31 December 1959, the series being introduced with a short piece by Harold Rogers in *Radio Times*.¹⁷ Disappointingly, however, the content of the programme is anything but revolutionary. Arnold serves up an unilluminating mixture of song performances—some recorded, some rendered himself—and anecdote, with no attempt at serious evaluation of Williams's work. Since few sound recordings were made in the Upper Thames, the recordings used are drawn from elsewhere in the country, songs versions of which happen to occur in Williams. Arnold's own renditions of songs, and his recounting of the circumstances of acquiring them, tend to reduce Williams to the condition of pretext for exhibiting his own singing activities. The broadcast features interviews with Williams's sisters Laura (Mrs Pill) and Ada (Mrs Thorne) which are of great interest biographically but which do not address the issue of the song collecting. The impression is strongly created that Arnold does not know what to make of the subject, a squandered opportunity to set out the case for Williams's unique contribution.

THE 1960S: DESULTORY RECOGNITION AND TELLING SILENCES

The advent of the long-playing gramophone record brought with it the new genre of sleeve notes, routinely containing cross-references to printed collections. Most inserts to the 10-volume *Folk Songs of Britain* series issued by Caedmon in the early 1960s have perfunctory mentions of *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, except, oddly, the two volumes (IV and V) devoted to Child ballads, of which a number figure in Williams (see Chapter II). Other commercial issues through the 1960s and after which mention Williams's book include: *Harry Cox Sings English Love Songs* (DTS Records, 1965), *Phil Tanner* (EFDSS, 1968: reissue of 1937/1949 recordings), *Mrs*

Sarah Makem, Ulster Ballad Singer (Topic, 1968), *When Sheep Shearings Done* (Topic, 1975), *George 'Pop' Maynard, Ye Subjects of England* (Topic, 1976), and *Mary Ann Carolan, Songs from the Irish Tradition* (Topic, 1982).

These instances make two, related, points: first, that *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* had by this period gained acceptance as a standard printed source; second, that the picture is skewed by references being confined to texts included in the book to the neglect of the manuscript collection. Thus, for example, in his notes to the Mrs Makem LP Sean O'Boyle makes the connection to 'Barbara Allen' (track B5) but not to 'Caroline and her Young Sailor Bold' (track A1), despite a notably full set in Williams noted from Elijah Iles of Inglesham, Wiltshire. An isolated exception to this effect occurs in the notes to the final volume of the Caedmon series, 'Songs of Animals'. The opening track on the disk is 'The Happy Family' recorded from Harold Colvill, of March, Cambridgeshire:

Alfred Williams, collector in the Upper Thames area, received a version of this from a singer who called it 'The Song of Stock'. There is another unpublished version among the Cecil Sharp manuscripts called 'The Irish Family', noted from John Coles at Hambridge, Somerset. Peter Kennedy also recorded a set from Jim Baldry of Woodbridge, Suffolk. The song has not hitherto appeared in any published collection, though it apparently enjoyed widespread popularity in many parts of England.¹⁸

A more perfunctory instance of this occurs in the notes to the CD *A Century of Song* (EFDSS, 1998), relating an early recording of 'The Banks of the Nile' to a version found by Williams at Alvescot, Oxfordshire but which he did not include in his book. Finally, Mike Yates's notes to the George Maynard LP furnish further exemplification of a number of points already encountered:

'The Weaver's Daughter' was described as 'once popular' by Alfred Williams who noted it once in the Thames Valley some time prior to the Great War [*sic*]. Other collectors appear to have ignored the piece.

Namely: a passing comment taken at face value (what constitutes 'popularity'? when is 'once?'); factual inaccuracy (he collected *during* the First World War, not before it); and, more positively, the rarity value of items in Williams's collection.

The printed counterpart to this form of stamp collecting extends to anthologies such as *Marrowbones: English Folk Songs from the Hammond and Gardiner MSS* (1965), edited by Frank Purslow, in which texts are extensively cross-referenced to

Folk Songs of the Upper Thames. (The notes to this volume were not composed by Purslow.) Williams's work is recognized, if only in passing, in two books by Leslie Shepard, *The Broadside Ballad* (1962) and *John Pitts* (1969). The first merely lists *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* in the bibliography with no reference in the text, while the second quotes (p. 45) the rare record of hawkers from the book's Introduction.¹⁹

Finally, a pair of omissions: the one surprising, the other resonant. Given the angle from which he was approaching the subject, A L Lloyd's *Folk Song in England* (1967) might have been expected to accord Williams some prominence, instead of which mention is confined to the bibliography. Bibliographies are, of course, signifying documents in their own right. In her widely-used fourth edition to Cecil Sharp's *English Folk Song: Some Conclusions* (1965), Dr Karpeles appends a four-page bibliography headed 'Collections of English Folk Song which have been taken down directly from the lips of folk singers'. The list is selected but evidently intended to be compendious in the proper sense ('comprehensive but fairly brief', *COD*): it is arranged largely chronologically to give some sense of unfolding outsider intervention between 1843 and 1962; and geographically extends beyond Somerset to embrace Northumberland and parts of the New World. Pointedly, however, there is no place for *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*. Historically, the list jumps from 1922 (*Folk Songs for Schools*, Set 8, by H E D Hammond) to 1924 (E J Moeran's *Six Folk Songs from Norfolk*); geographically, the picture contains a hole at the junction of the counties of Berkshire, Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire: Williams's book is, for better or worse, an important piece in the jigsaw of folk song in England. It seems unlikely that this omission could be an oversight: his efforts fully satisfy Karpeles's criterion of notation from the horse's mouth (Bell's *Ancient Poems, Ballads and Songs*, for example, does not). The charitable explanation is that she is clinging to the Sharpian primacy of music over words (for 'song' read 'tune'); the sceptical view is that Williams is still *persona non grata* for transgressing the old canon. (The two do not exclude each other.) Even as Williams's work was receiving a more sympathetic hearing, the Old Guard stood firm, presenting to him a shoulder that remained resolutely cold.

¹⁹ Perhaps the most unexpected, however, of the brief mentions comes in Eric Hobsbawm's *The Age of Revolution* (1962): in the chapter 'The Labouring Poor', he quotes the popular lament, 'If life was a thing that money could buy / The rich would live and poor might die' (p. 254), with the footnote: 'A Williams, *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* (1923) p. 105 prints a similar version rather more class conscious.' (The reference is to a toast concluding 'The Prop of the Land', noted from Robert Godwin of Southrop, Glos.)

ALFRED WILLIAMS: A SYMPOSIUM – *FOLK MUSIC JOURNAL*, 1969

In terms of the historical reading suggested here, developments in the late 1950s such as *Ethnic*, *Wilgus* and the BBC *As They Roved Out* series can be seen as the first visible cracks appearing in the edifice of Sharpian consensus. ‘The’ folk music revival can usefully be glossed as ‘outsider interest in the (formally) untutored music-making of country people’, but it becomes increasingly evident that that outsider interest can take many forms: it is nothing so monolithic as that definite article suggests. A new receptiveness to Williams and what his work stands for is part of this process of fracturing, seized upon as a lever for prising open the cracks. (In this vein, it might be noted that the BBC programme on his collecting work was broadcast on the last day of the 1950s, or, more symbolically, on the very eve of the 1960s.) Thus, as suggested, we start to see the way Williams becomes, in his marginality, oddly barometric, a condition which would surely have surprised him.

Full confirmation of this new-found acceptance is ostensibly marked by devoting a whole issue of the *Folk Music Journal* for 1969 to a symposium on Williams, though even at this stage in the trajectory it is possible to detect from Russell Wortley, the *Journal’s* editor, a hint of trepidation that the decision may have been a little bold:

An unconventional folk song collector such as Williams demands unconventional treatment, even if the starry-eyed view of folk song receives a few jolts in the process. Readers will no doubt agree that we have here a much broader and realistic picture of the traditional song situation than we are accustomed to find in the *Journal*. (Editorial p. 292)

Whatever response ‘readers’ may have made, it is interesting to speculate on feelings within an editorial board which still included Dr Karpeles, rubbing shoulders with A L Lloyd. As we shall see, the outcome of the decision was less far-reaching, in terms of extending understanding of Williams’s work, than might appear.

As far as the contributors are concerned, the symposium represents a fortuitous coming together of interests at that moment of three related strands:

- Ivor Clissold, ‘Alfred Williams, Song Collector’, pp. 293-300
- Frank Purslow, ‘The Williams Manuscripts’, pp. 301-315
- John R Baldwin, ‘Song in the Upper Thames Valley: 1966-69’, pp. 315-349

(The last was elaborated as ‘The Folk Song of the Upper Thames’, unpublished MPhil dissertation, University of Leeds Institute of Dialect and Folk Life Studies, 1978.)

Clissold, whose involvement stemmed from Swindon Folksingers' Club, carried out in the mid-1960s, with C H Bathe, the first rigorous cataloguing of the Williams song manuscripts following a system developed by Frank Purslow (see p. 26 *supra*); Purslow himself, also based within the 'Upper Thames' at Bampton, was at that time editing the Hammond and Gardiner manuscripts; and Baldwin had been engaged on fieldwork in the footsteps of Alfred Williams, inspired by *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*. To a greater extent than previous commentators, the symposiasts tend to connect their thoughts on Williams to the larger folk song issues, which means the discussion that follows is always in danger of mutating into a meditation on folk song as such. As far as possible, the focus remains on Williams.

IVOR CLISSOLD: 'ALFRED WILLIAMS, SONG COLLECTOR'

Clissold sets the scene, perpetrating one more recycling of Williams's exceptional life, interspersed with brief evaluative comments on the folk song collecting. His contribution is incisive and entertaining, but inclines to glibness which tends to put a slightly distorting complexion on the subject. Take as an instance:

At one time, it seemed as if the writing of Williams biographies might become a local pastime. The three mentioned below ... [i.e. Henry Byett, Leonard Clark and J B Jones—are there any others?] (p. 300)

To this it can be objected that, at the time of his letter to the *Swindon Evening Advertiser* in the late 1930s appealing for information, Clark was living at Plymstock, Devon; Jones's bundle of newspaper articles does not in any usual sense constitute a biography, being concerned almost exclusively with Williams's stature as a poet; which just leaves Byett—hardly a tidal wave of local activity. (That is, Jones is not a biography, Clark is not local. It might be more apposite to remark on what *little* attention has been accorded locally to Williams's life in the years since his death.)

Clissold leads with a statement of the important, ostensibly decisive, fact of Williams's egregiousness, social and otherwise, the way he stands out from the 'middle class' flock of his fellow collectors: 'a factory worker with no associations with the Folk Song Society of his day' (p. 293). 'Factory worker' rather loads the point: Williams was an autodidact misfit who happened to choose to earn a living as an industrial worker for 20 odd years; and 'no associations' is the sticking point encountered *supra* several times, into which there needs to be much more careful

investigation. Clissold then turns this line on its head by asserting: 'He seemed to possess an ability to ignore anything which was not in keeping with his [*sic*] rose-coloured rural scene. This again, is probably symptomatic of the "pure" attitude prevailing at that time, which so plagued the folk song revival' (p. 294). 'Symptomatic' implies that Williams is now viewed as part of the flock rather than standing out from it. Essentially, Clissold is here circling round what is arguably the core issue, without confronting it. The crucial question he fails to frame—still less explore—is: what difference does Williams's egregiousness make; or more precisely: does the evident otherness of his circumstances translate into significant difference in terms of results of collecting? If it can be shown that, at root, Williams's mediating efforts are not qualitatively distinct from those of the bourgeois flock, then the matter of his surface exceptionality becomes a trivial, rather than a defining, consideration.

This looseness is characteristic. Clissold asserts that it was while collecting for *Round About the Upper Thames* 'that he heard of the harvest reaped by Cecil Sharp and decided to investigate the folk song field for himself' (p. 295). The murky issue of how far Williams was aware of Sharp and his work is discussed at Chapter VI.1.2 (p. 405); it is certainly not the case that Williams's involvement was a consequence of such awareness. Clissold's computations are also quirky: the figure of 'over 200 songs' gathered by end of 1914 does not occur in any of the known sources; and a final tally of '7,000 miles' cycled is the interim figure at March 1916 cited by Leonard Clark (p. 93)—the fabled final total from Williams himself is 13,000 (see p. 375 *infra*). On the fraught matter of music, Clissold writes: 'Williams explained that he did not feel that he had the time available to collect the tunes, but ... he did not care much for music in any form' (p. 295). This qualification is important, but his reasons for not collecting tunes may be more involved, a topic for further elaboration.

Clissold also touches briefly on Williams's editing practices, noting a propensity to metrical 'tidying up' and to bowdlerization (p. 296). The prominence the question began to receive in the 1950s and 1960s evidently reflects the preoccupations of that period (it may seem more heinous now, post-Reeves, than in the early years of the century); and that it may be exaggerated by Williams's own, rather ingenuous, statement of 'hypocrisy' in the matter (see Appendix I). Much more extensive analysis than the single instance Clissold supplies is required to establish this point.

Errors accumulate. Delay in publication of the folk song book is attributed 'in part to Williams' sudden desire to serve his King' (p. 296). Importantly, there was nothing 'sudden' about this urge—he had long aspired to the military life.²⁰ 'Apart from one or two lectures given to local societies, Williams' interest in folk song and folklore in general seemed to decline after the publication of *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*' (p. 297), but a whole spate of articles published in the local press from 1925 onwards shows that he continued to be exercised by the topic, though he did no further fieldwork. Clissold also perpetrates the cardinal sin of mis-spelling Ranikhet ('Rhaniket', p. 297), the resonant name Williams gave to his self-built house.

On a more appreciative note, Clissold comments on a passage suppressed from the introduction to *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*: 'Williams proves himself to have been much more attuned [*sic*] than his contemporary collectors to that quiddity, that living essence which we are so apt to gloss over with the simple word "tradition".' (p. 298) Clissold's reference to 'that personal sense of ownership which is vital to its existence as a folk song' chimes further with statements of the point Williams made in articles in *Word-Lore* and the *Wiltshire Gazette*,²¹ more explicitly than in his book. (There is no indication that Clissold knew of these, not readily accessible, sources.)

FRANK PURSLOW: 'THE WILLIAMS MANUSCRIPTS'

Of the three symposiasts, Purslow enjoyed by far the highest standing: he had extensive familiarity with the folk song and broadside corpora, and his editing of Hammond and Gardiner collections (in progress between 1965 and 1974) had lent him a certain authority. On paper, then, he is possibly ethnomusicologically the most knowledgeable of all those who have tussled with Williams. Since his pondering of the folk song question was by this time mature, Purslow's exegesis of Williams's mediation will, to a greater degree than that of other commentators, tend to entwine with his own thinking. His comments, therefore, command particular attention.

Purslow's contribution takes the form of transcriptions of, and commentary on, nine noteworthy texts from the Williams collection, preceded by four pages of concentrated evaluative discussion in which he contrives to raise primary issues, beg many questions and in the process reveal much of his own hesitations and unexamined assumptions. In two lengthy endnotes, especially, Purslow offers glimpses of a credo he did not ever fully formulate, at least not in print. We begin

with the statutory minor errors of fact, here concerning serialization in the *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*. Purslow states that ‘about 500 of the songs’ were prepared for publication in the *Standard* (p. 301) when the exact total is 440. (Purslow’s figure is, however, much closer than Clissold’s ‘some 250 songs appeared in the paper’ p. 295.) He goes on: ‘The original introduction as published in the newspaper was ... expanded somewhat’ (p. 314, n. 5) whereas in fact Williams substantially reduced it, by perhaps 20%, by merging the two-part *Standard* introduction with the conclusion and making substantial cuts (though virtually no revisions to content) to form the introduction to the book. More importantly, Purslow foregrounds the weightier topic of textual editing (p. 301):

close examination of the material and comparison with other collectors’ versions of the songs reveal that it is obviously not a precise record of the actual words sung by the singers from whom the songs were noted.

If this sweeping judgement (that ‘obviously’ calls for justification) is grounded in extensive scrutiny of the manuscripts, Purslow does not deign to furnish detailed textual evidence of it, lack of space notwithstanding. Similarly, in asserting that Williams ‘apparently’ indulged widely in the practices of altering the sentiments of a song and collating several different versions (p. 302): no evidence is offered for the first claim, while in the second case Williams certainly collates texts and fully acknowledges the fact (there is no ‘apparently’ about it). Connected to this problem, Purslow observes that the field notebooks were, with one exception, ‘apparently destroyed by the collector’ (p. 302), but this is no more than an assumption: circumstantially, only one of the notebooks survives (see Appendix I)—to impute conscious destruction by Williams is to perform a large leap. This attention to editing duly modulates to the stock question of expurgation, though still with no effort at elucidation. More incisive is Purslow’s remark that Williams’s commentary on his texts is characteristically uneven, ‘in some cases displaying a curious juxtaposition of informed opinion and extreme naïveté’ (p. 302) and instancing a hopeless misreading of ‘erotic metaphor’ in the note to ‘T stands for Thomas’ (Wt 342):

it is very difficult to believe that anyone so knowledgeable of rural life and its traditions and customs—and with so many years’ experience as a “man among men” in the Railway Works—should be as unappreciative of erotic metaphor as he appears to be in this extract from his note to “T Stands for Thomas” (“The False Young Man”). (p. 302)

Purslow also usefully observes that Williams's sheepishly avowed fastidiousness at noting 'indelicate' songs sits alongside the fact that in practice he noted down 'most of the more "outspoken" popular pieces' (p. 302).

Discussion really gets interesting, not to say worryingly confused, however, when Purslow directs his attention to the selection / canon / 'folk' tangle raised with particular force by Williams's work and already touched on by earlier commentators. The whole of page 303 merits close scrutiny for the number of important questions raised, and for the give-away *glissements* in Purslow's train of thought.

Another characteristic of the manuscripts—notable to a lesser extent in *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*—is Williams' apparent inability to distinguish between songs with some degree of "folk" flavour on the one hand, and well-known popular pieces, 18th-century minor art songs and Victorian drawing-room ballads on the other. ... Admittedly, in a tradition so dependent on urban printed material as the English, it is sometimes difficult to tell where to draw the line between what is and is not to be considered "folk"; but a line has to be drawn somewhere—often depending on the viewpoint of the individual collector. In the case of Williams, it is very likely that he was so unmusical and so out of touch with what the man-in-the-street was singing and had sung in the recent past, that he had not the expertise necessary to know what to accept and what to reject, and gathered everything that came his way. (pp. 302-3)

The points at issue here are sufficiently important to justify anticipating on the main part of the thesis with counter-instances from Williams. To attribute the heterogeneity of his collection to an 'apparent inability to distinguish' is to skate over the problem. As we have seen already, there is the possibility that, to some extent at least, Williams was consciously seeking to contest the established canon, a fraught topic Purslow later raises in order to dismiss as 'probably' inadjudicable (p. 304). More to the point, there is abundant indication from his writings that Williams did work to some sort of distinction of 'folk / non-folk' (see Chapter VI.3).

Leaving aside the characteristic quirkiness of these statements (the fact that his collecting, importantly, furnishes evidence they did sing 'modern' pieces; the self-defeating condescension of 'the most stupid rustic', and so on), these formulations make the point at issue here, that Williams did posit a primary distinction between what was and was not 'folk', though—necessarily—not in the same way as other collectors, a difference of which he was conscious and which constitutes much of the interest of his work. So how is this not simply an instance of the *sine qua non* line

drawn according to 'the viewpoint of the individual collector', which Purslow posits as a routine condition of the subject? And, if so, how can it be a failing on Williams's part? As for being out of touch with 'what the man-in-the-street was singing', the logic here is unclear: is Purslow positing some urban 'average person' who sang the latest popular hits, in contrast to which 'folk' can be gauged? If so, why can these songs not 'become folk' (as he suggests below)? If nothing else, the *Standard* passage quoted above shows that Williams did have some familiarity with popular commercial song of recent vintage ('Everybody's doing it').

Having thus far pursued what is in effect a line based on the old Folk Song Society canon, Purslow now introduces, around the middle of the page, a significant shift. He emphasizes that his previously critical comments do not cancel the 'considerable interest' of Williams's collection, and continues:

Compared with the material gathered by the majority of other collectors—whose criteria were essentially based on musical considerations—the result of Williams' work is a much more human document, recording, as it does, the whole range of songs (with the exception of the more bawdy pieces) which a certain section of the population were singing at a particular point in history. It could be quite possible, in a century's time, for a not particularly well-read student relying solely on the evidence of the musically notated folk song collectors' manuscripts, to come to the conclusion that the [*sic*] country people at the beginning of the 20th century only sang certain types of songs. (p. 303)

Appended to this passage is the first of two endnotes articulating his view of the subject, noting the bias built into contemporary recordings of traditional singers:

Do these singers really sing only versions of "Child Ballads" and early 19th-century broadside songs? Many of the songs noted by Cecil Sharp were not much more than fifty years old when he first started collecting; but there are hardly any songs less than a hundred years old available on gramophone records sung by traditional singers. Did songs cease becoming "folk" some time in the middle of the last century? (p. 315, n. 6)

So having taken Williams to task for including 'extra-canonical' material, Purslow now flirts with the 'representative' line (without going so far as to employ the term), congratulating him on recording 'the whole range of songs', and tacitly berating his contemporaries for potentially misleading the future callow student by not doing so. He espouses the view that legitimacy is conferred upon a song by assimilation to an established practice of (country) music-making, rather than residing 'in' the musical artefact itself: tradition is as tradition does. (The bald, rhetorically-intended

question 'Did songs cease becoming "folk" some time in the middle of the last century?' raises more complex issues. The higher level of conscious knowledge brought to country music-making from the mid-19th century by educated outsiders—including Purslow himself—which in effect brings into being 'folk' as a subject, inescapably sets up an ironic disparity with the bearers of that music, whose knowledge is of a different order. In that sense, Purslow's question is not rhetorical at all: the 'observation alters' line says that songs ceased becoming 'folk' at the point at which 'folk' became. This is to do with the role of the mediator, still neglected at this time.)

When we distil out what Purslow is saying here, its ambivalence is glaring. He wants to knock Williams for naivety in transgressing the canon and, in the next breath, knock the canon for being too narrow, and by extension other collectors for sustaining it. To appeal to 'some degree of "folk" flavour'[Ⓢ] is, however heavily disguised, in effect to cling to the primacy of a qualitative distinction adjudicated on internal properties ('flavour') which is, if only residually, a Sharpian view. Sitting uneasily against this is 'it's folk if they sing it'. In seeking to explain this muddle, a clue may lie as much in Purslow's own complex psychology as in the complexities of the subject. Much given to sapience, his impulse is to claim the high ground of superior understanding. Instinctively setting Williams in opposition to other collectors in the period (though without making this a central issue), he deals first with Williams, mobilizing his familiarity with popular music to pick off identifiable compositions (p. 303) which Williams lacks the knowledge to spot, before twisting round to mainstream collectors, whom he takes to task for not collecting songs which happen not conform to a narrow canon of 'folk' but which crop up on the ground—the implication here being that he is more closely attuned to country people and what they actually perform. What he does not see is that while one or other line, in varying forms, can legitimately be argued, you cannot have both jostling each other on the same page with no attempt at articulation: Williams is an idiot for noting 'non-folk' songs—are the singers idiots for singing them? Williams only noted them because they were sung to him—and other collectors are idiots for not noting them. (The nearest Purslow comes to reconciling these elements is the rather

[Ⓢ] This form of words is a classic Purslovian hedge: he presumably means 'folk'. In another arch endnote, Purslow sneers at the approach of the 'modern young enthusiast': "Do you know any folk songs?" (p. 314 n5). Perhaps the formula should instead be: "Do you know any songs with some degree of "folk" flavour?"

grudging verdict that Williams 'appears' to have gone about his task 'the right way', even if only by accident; and the recognition that his lack of musical training may have had certain advantages, which touches on the 'ostensible failing has positive spin-off' paradox, p. 304.) It is a case of Purslow not looking where he is going and tripping over himself as a result. This confusion can be glossed as a further variant on the endogenous/exogenous matrix identified at the outset. Where commentators hitherto discussed largely adopt one or other position, Purslow is an odd instance of falling between the two: is 'folk' a 'flavour' or is it a performance effect? In his haste to excoriate the early collectors, he ends up twisting on the wind; or, reframing the point, he remains in hock to the very First Revival 'narrowness' he would repudiate. One virtue Purslow does acknowledge, the point previously made by Dean-Smith, is the great value of Williams's Introduction in setting song in its proper context:

Williams was no social historian, but his writings on these [customs etc] and related subjects add a warm covering of flesh and blood to the statistical bare bones which some writers are content to offer. (p. 304)

Even here, however, he is unable to resist a superior jibe: 'Williams was no social historian' but that is precisely what he set out to be. Williams's formula concluding the second paragraph of the introduction to the folk song book—'In a word, I wished to show how they lived' (p. 9)—neatly encapsulates the social history project. This guiding aim of tying in music to a wider way of life is, crucially, where Williams had such a large and prescient contribution to make. Whether his writings are good or bad as social history is a further question. It is certainly the case that his genial accounts of rural life do not amount to works of rigorous, unblinking scholarship.

Finally, how near does any of this get to the distinctive account of the subject served up by Williams? Purslow's second telling endnote elaborates on the view that the universal core repertory of Upper Thames singers is unsurprising as they 'probably learned them from ... the same broadsides ... as villagers everywhere' (p. 304):

It continually surprises me to discover that so many people (who should certainly know better) still do not realise that the English folk song tradition, as it existed at the turn of the century, was almost entirely derived from printed sources as far as the texts were concerned—broadsides, chap-books, garlands, songsters, etc—most of it dating from as recently as the early and mid-19th century. If there was an indigenous song tradition in the English countryside at that time, it was either almost completely unsuspected by, or deliberately ignored by, the collectors; only the faintest traces are discernible in the manuscript collections. (p. 315, n. 8)

Leaving aside the incriminating condescension (those who should ‘know better’), this is where Purslow is ostensibly at his most radical in relation to ‘folk’ orthodoxy: the primacy of print in disseminating the products of a kind of proto-Tin Pan Alley,²² adopted by country people who perform but do not create. Leaving aside the relative merits of this account, the point here is how close this is to the interpretation Williams was pedalling half a century previously. Those who still found this thesis unpalatable in 1969 evidently did not know their Sharp (p. 273 *supra*). However Purslow was led to frame this explanation, he would have access to materials and thinking unavailable to Williams.

The important issue here is that none of this significant convergence of thinking is acknowledged in Purslow’s discussion—quite the reverse. He makes no effort to connect his own conclusions on the folk song question to ideas Williams had framed in quite different historical conditions. This is part of the larger point that Purslow tends to focus on the results of Williams’s collecting endeavours—words of songs from the mouths of country people converted into a pile of manuscript—effectively *in vacuo*, separately from circumstance and from the terms of his enterprise, its particular purposes and specificities. There is no serious attempt to evaluate the extensive sequence of ideas set out in the Introduction to *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, still less the sizeable corpus of subsequent writings in the local press with which Purslow was evidently not familiar.

Much of Purslow’s commentary smacks of the urge to catch Williams out, which, as we have seen, often results in a skewing of the picture. This is not, of course, to deny that Williams’s mediating of the subject exhibits many naiveties, which it manifestly does. In addition, a chronic tendency to over-qualify his statements (‘appears to’, ‘probably’) lends a tentative quality to Purslow’s ruminations not calculated to produce illumination. So despite representing the most concentrated appraisal to date of Williams’s song mediation and contriving to raise many of the salient issues involved, Purslow’s four pages still do not amount to the deeply pondered, rigorously detailed, judicious evaluation the subject calls for.

JOHN R BALDWIN: ‘SONG IN THE UPPER THAMES VALLEY: 1966-69’

Of all those who have written about Williams, John Baldwin’s relation to the subject is perhaps the most problematic in that, uniquely, he combines commentary

with original fieldwork. From the mid-1960s, he made sound recordings of country singers in the Upper Thames consciously in Williams's footsteps. Baldwin's *Folk Music Journal* paper was work in progress of a project later written up more fully as a dissertation for the degree of MPhil in the University of Leeds Institute of Dialect and Folk Life Studies, completed in 1978. (The two versions are discussed here in tandem, prefixed by date.)

Finally, I am indebted to Alfred Williams, whose volume *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* (1923) provided the catalyst, encouraged me to embark on this project in the first place, and has never been very far from my elbow. (1978 'Acknowledgements')

This is a generous avowal, though Baldwin goes on to describe Williams as 'my predecessor in the Upper Thames Valley' (1978: p. 18), when he is, of course, Williams's successor. The dissertation sets out five aims (1978: pp. 1-3): to examine the notion of folk song; to correct neglect of the district; to relate music to context; to relate singer to repertory; and to gauge the condition of survival of song into the 1960s. Only the last significantly relates to Williams, in so far as he peddles the line that his efforts in 1914-16 represented an absolute last gleaning. Baldwin's dissertation is made principally from his own fieldwork and how it can be used to illuminate his primary concern with the workings and survival of tradition, which he approaches through repertory, that is, what was being sung in that place at that point by country people. It does not take the form of a rigorous exercise in comparison with Williams's earlier findings; indeed, it contains relatively few direct references to Williams, who remains a somewhat shadowy presence at Baldwin's shoulder. In this way there is a sense of uneasiness almost over how the two fieldwork stints mesh, the merest hint even of rivalry. This means that, to a greater extent than his fellow symposiasts, Baldwin raises the big folk song issues beyond what is there explicitly in Williams. For editorial purposes, Baldwin plays up the Williams connection in the Symposium (transcriptions of songs are made with an eye to comparison), though discussion is still cast in the form of a loose parallel rather than systematic cross-referencing of his yield against Williams's in the same district half a century later. His *Folk Music Journal* paper divides roughly into three sections: a descriptive survey of surviving song activity and repertory in the district checked off against Williams (pp. 315-323);

evaluative ruminations on that repertory (pp. 323-326); and 11 songs reproduced from the fieldwork, with tunes transcribed by Purslow (pp. 326-347). The most useful connection to Williams lies in the indirect possibility it offers of some testing, by a kind of reverse extrapolation, of the quality of his collecting, given that no direct comparison is available aside from a small overlap with Cecil Sharp at Bampton.

In adopting Williams's 'Upper Thames', Baldwin extends the limits somewhat, north into the Wychwoods and east towards Reading. He notes in passing the unevenness of distribution of Williams's collecting, mainly the glaring neglect of the Marlborough Downs and Vale of White Horse zones: 'whilst Williams claims coverage down from Malmesbury to Marlborough, east to Aldbourne and north to Lambourne and Wantage, he has very little from this area save the songs of David Sawyer of Ogbourne' (1969: p. 347, n. 2; 1978: Chapter 3 is an extended meditation on 'Upper Thames' as a regional entity).

In terms of fieldwork, the most obvious point of comparison with Williams is descendants of his original singers. Baldwin makes this the gambit of his Symposium article (1969: pp. 315-6, reprised in 1978: pp. 153-4). He avers of Williams's noted local singing families that 'many people with these names still abound' (1969: p. 347, n. 5), though he mentions only four instances, two of whom proved not to be musical—R[?eginald] King at Castle Eaton and F Barrett of Marston Meysey, both Wilts. 'Indeed the only 'same name' sources I have met with (i.e. close relatives bearing the same family name as those who gave songs to Williams) were John Morgan and Dusty Dawes—and their contributions are limited.' (1978: p. 154) Dawes, oddly not named in the Symposium piece, was a nephew of Eli Dawes of Southrop; John Morgan had tunes for 'Bold Sir Rylas' and 'The Parson and the Sucking Pig' noted from his father, Daniel Morgan, by Williams: 'He does not know any more of those collected by Williams from his father but he can sing parts of 'The Jolly Tinkerman', 'The Cherry Tree Carol' and 'The Banks of the Sweet Dundee' which apparently his father used also to sing.' (1969: p. 316) Baldwin's final tally of songs from these two informants was Dawes 14, Morgan 9 (1978: p. 192 and p. 195). Of descendants with a different surname, Baldwin found only one, Mr R G Cook of Purton, son of Mrs Phillips:

It is relatively straightforward to trace descendants of the same name who are still within the region, but very often a particular branch of a family dies out, or maybe just the male line, or maybe a name is changed by marriage. Mrs Phillips had already married again by the time

Williams met her, but it is her son by her first marriage who still sings 'Fair Nancy' ... Is then the return sufficient to justify the time spent in looking out such relatives? Mr Cook's repertoire is in itself, I believe, sufficient justification, although clearly one must not expect too much. (1978: p. 98, n. 1)

This is a remarkably small tally of descendants in relation to Williams's notional total of 200 informants. It should be emphasized that Baldwin was looking purely for survivals of music. Had he sought general background material, his haul would presumably have been much greater—this, of course, reflects the underlying conflict of interests identified above between furthering his own (musical) fieldwork and elucidating that done by Williams. At the very least, Baldwin can be taken to task for passing up the chance to glean biographical information about the colourful case of Daniel Morgan. (See pp. 120-1 *supra*. Baldwin's recorded interview with John Morgan is now preserved in the Leeds Archive of Vernacular Culture, University of Leeds.)

As already stated, Baldwin's focus is on repertory in a way that he terms 'functional': a full descriptive account of what was actually being sung by country people in his district, an approach which is typological rather than textual in that there is little effort to adjudicate validity of material in terms of internal properties. His Symposium discussion in effect turns on a single preoccupation, that of making the case for the legitimacy of a range of song not falling within the old folk song canon. Interest here is how far Baldwin's findings might offer elements for an adjustment of the picture served up by Williams.

Specific internal comparison between a text common to Baldwin and to Williams is confined to two instances, resting on the supposition of identity of performance between earlier and later singers. In the case of 'Old Towler' Baldwin finds:

Dave Blagrove sings a variant verse and chorus of this, and his repetition of several lines (3 and 4) in each verse raises the question of Williams's accuracy—whether, that is, it is printed as it was sung. (1978: p. 68)

In a footnote he goes on to identify three similar instances internal to the Williams manuscripts, not connected to his own fieldwork. The second instance (1969: p. 323) concerns bowdlerization. In this connection, Clissold had given the example of 'Three Maids a-milking would go', noted by Williams from Eli Dawes of Southrop, Glos:

By coincidence this is the only song remembered completely by Eli Dawes' nephew, who says that his father—who also sang the song—never knew verse four (in the ms.), but always sang—as did his brother—one not noted, apparently, by Williams [verse quoted]. This is one verse, of course, where the “hidden” sense is but thinly hidden. (p. 296)

If the song was in the family, it seems reasonable to suppose that Williams did indeed modify his text. It seems a pity that Baldwin casually slips in this rather fruitful kind of indirect comparison rather than pursuing it systematically. This approach means, for example, that he misses the fact that a fragment recorded from George Powell of Wigginton (1978: p. 45) is the chorus of Williams's unpublished text 'Union Jack of Old England' noted from the Crimean veteran John Pillinger.

Mainly, however, Baldwin deals in songs as such (that is, the fact of their being known among country singers) rather than in specific textual detail. He begins (1969: pp. 318-322) with a rather rambling, inconclusive comparative conspectus of material by type and subject matter, in the course of which he identifies in passing two useful angles on the repertory question—correlation to singers by generation, and frequency of occurrence—though his discussion is perfunctory. He makes the point that the great core of Williams's collection was noted from a handful of elderly singers with “classic” repertories, suggesting that rather skews the picture (1969: p. 317)—though Williams acknowledges as much in a newspaper article of which Baldwin would have been unaware;²³ and he notes that two items Williams found to be rare—'We're all Jolly Fellows that Follow the Plough' and 'To Hear the Nightingales Sing'—he finds quite common half a century later (1969: p. 319). Entering the minefield of evaluation, he adduces this circumstance in support of his thesis that musical tradition is the realm of relative change rather than of absolute passing, approvingly quoting Williams's note to 'To Hear the Nightingales Sing':

It is, of course, rarely sung now—there is less chance of its being revived in the future. We must march forward. There is nothing either good or bad but is so comparatively, in the folk song, as elsewhere, and if we lose in one direction we gain in another. (1969: p. 319)

In his scramble, however, to embrace the point—'Many a “folk song analyst” would do well to remember this latter phrase' (1969: p. 319)—Baldwin may have missed it. Since this is potentially a serious misreading, it is worth pausing to test it against Williams's wider thinking. What Baldwin reads as a plea for the relativizing of

value within an evolving practice of song may be quite the reverse: from the context of other reflections, Williams's 'forward march' means accession to a historical phase post-tradition, to a time when country people would no longer sing. Throughout his work, Williams displays consciousness of the pitfalls of the sentimental retrospection which potentially bedevils any enquiry associated predominantly with the past. As a corrective, he is at pains to recognize that there are larger historical forces at work whose progress we should not seek to arrest. (See Chapter VI.)

These sentiments also chime with Williams's anti-revival line, which might be clinched as: 'it is over—it should be recorded for posterity—recirculated on the printed page—but not perpetuated in performance.'²⁴ So this stands as a variant on Baldwin's uneasy relation to Williams, in this case the inverse of rivalry: in seeking to enlist Williams to confirm his own conclusions he contrives to twist the point. Conversely, on this question of relative value, Baldwin subsequently quotes Williams's assertion from the Introduction to *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*²⁵ to the effect that 'the rustic population' reject modern songs as 'inferior', condemning it as evidence of a 'fundamentally romantic approach' (1969: pp. 323-4). Baldwin comments: 'Perhaps the later products were—and are—inferior. Either way they can but be in the image of the society that produced them!' (1969: p. 324), to which the note:

And what is 'inferior'? AW notes how 'inferior' a "Lincolnshire Poacher" is, for example, to a "Bold Sir Rylas"—but equally, how 'inferior' is this latter beside "Sir Lionel" (Child 18)? In many cases "inferiority" is merely a question of personal taste or fashion or snobbery. But if it is true and this is paralleled by the state of contemporary society, no good can come of ignoring both symptoms and disease and hopefully wishing that they did not exist. (1969: p. 348, n. 21)

Quoting these two Williams pronouncements in isolation, Baldwin apparently fails to detect that they do not stack up. This makes the point that, rather than snatch at an assertion *in vacuo*, there is a need to read his writings as a totality, seeing ambivalences as significant to his grappling with the subject, not as idiot contradictions. This Baldwin fails to do. To gloss this passage dismissively as 'romantic' is essentially unhelpful. (Just to add a further twist to the tangle, Baldwin himself later mongers an absolutist judgement in citing a snatch of 'John Barleycorn': 'This is a far superior song to Williams's 'The Sower's Song', recovered from Lechlade complete with all its literary pretentiousness.' 1978: p. 63)

Throughout, Baldwin puts the case for ‘tradition changes rather than dies out’, as for example: ‘a host of songs of later date equally widely sung and equally important in any analysis of the tradition’ (1969: p. 319). He dwells on this view in his second section (1969: pp. 323-6), like Purslow making a number of primary statements in extended endnotes, and these are worth assembling. Of an unnamed younger informant, a canal worker, he writes:

his “tradition” is different from that of men who were receptive mainly in the first quarter of the century; and because he lives at the time he does, he is bound to be influenced by more modern material, in just the same way as his forbears were influenced by the broadsides, pleasure-gardens and music-halls. But like them, he sings the old as well as the newer songs and provides the student of traditional song with a fine example of the changing—not dying—tradition. (p. 348, n. 14)

Of moment here is how his progressive line offers a clue to possible silences in Williams: ‘there is the omission of *the* recent material’ (1969: p. 323, emphasis added). This interpretation turns on a number of assumptions: that popular commercial songs rapidly entered circulation in the countryside, even in the period before mass communications; that Williams’s singers knew them; that they offered them to him; and that he declined to note them down. Those assumptions are embodied in the definite articles of Baldwin’s formulation: he takes all that as given.

[Of the songs known by John Morgan] Why did not Williams collect these songs too? Because at the time Morgan did not offer them, did not know them or had genuinely forgotten them? Or did Williams ignore them? (1969: p. 347, n. 6)

time and time again I hear people say that their parents—even if not they themselves—sang many of these songs about the time of the first war. There is a theory that the majority of these music hall type entertainments gained favour primarily in the 1930s with the fuller publication of community song-sheets but, whilst accepting that these certainly helped prolong the life of many and dispersed them more widely, I would dispute that these songs never really gained popular currency until that date. Memory can be a tricky thing but I am inclined to take the word of my informants when they say that they were sung at the time of the Great War, and before it. By that score, Williams must have known they were in existence but, being of that generation himself, presumably could not view the material objectively enough to decide what was sufficiently good to catch on in popular tradition. (1969: p. 348, n. 18)

It remains, however, far from clear precisely what kind of material Baldwin has in mind here. To test this (important) point meaningfully would involve setting extensive knowledge of popular musical hits of the period against the Williams manuscript

collection, in the context of modes of dissemination—a large study in its own right. The significant point for Williams, surely, is that he did not think there was any more ‘tradition’ for modern pieces to catch on in? Baldwin remains convinced, however, that newer material did exist in ‘tradition’, though he is equivocal (1969: pp. 325-6) over reasons for Williams’s putative ignoring of it. Here is the summa of his case:

It is quite clear that any contemporary collection—if it is to be at all representative and comprehensive—is going to contain a deal of material either unknown, unseen, or ignored by fieldworkers at the turn of the century. To include such material does not imply a failure to distinguish the gems from the dross, merely the ability to recognize both the nature and movement of live tradition, and the sociological as well as purely folkloristic implications of so-called “folk” song collection. (1969: p. 326)

To his credit, Baldwin applies this principle of exhaustivity in his own fieldwork (‘just because [songs] are relatively recent and perhaps not to our current taste is no reason for the collector to ignore them’, 1969: pp. 324-5), squeezing out extensive repertories where many collectors would merely take half a dozen gems. (An appendix to his dissertation gives a complete listing of material recorded.)

In conclusion, Baldwin’s ruminations add little to our understanding of Williams’s collecting, but reveal much about his own view of the subject. In the process many central questions about the nature of song tradition are raised, which can only briefly be examined here. Baldwin’s model of tradition as multi-layered, a multi-layering which is generation-specific, offers a useful corrective to the monolithic conception (see references to ‘the old tradition’ 1969: p. 322 (his italics) and ‘a later tradition’ p. 325). Also useful is the evidence Baldwin supplies that country singers not only circumstantially embrace new material, but distinguish by vintage without that prejudicing adoption (1969: pp. 324-5). To this view of regular renewal of contents it can be objected that it erodes the continuity which the notion of tradition supposes.

A further difficulty arises over the issue of validity. As we have seen, Baldwin makes the case single-mindedly for unrestricted legitimacy of contents, of whatever provenance or date. (This perhaps reflects his purposes: the collector must have something to collect. So there may be an element of special pleading or, more sceptically, of desperation, a sense of clutching at any bit of popular song that was ever in the mouth, however transiently, of anyone who could be construed as a country singer. Significantly, this is a mirror image of Williams’s line that it was all over.) In

the process, however, he unwittingly problematizes the very existence of the object. If a discrete realm of activity only exists by virtue of some degree of restriction, then that restriction must be located elsewhere than in the material performed, a problem he does not address or apparently identify. (In this sense, the argument that validity of newer material is conferred by being in the image of the wider society that produced it (p. 321 *supra*) becomes self-defeating. The point at issue is not the wider society but one specific part of it. What does Baldwin take his subject to be? When he elected to engage in fieldwork he did not make his way to Wapping and record dockers singing snatches of popular numbers as they unloaded ships but gravitated instead to the Vale of White Horse in search of country singers—which is what Sharp would have done.)

He adopts, on the face of, it the enlightened line ‘tradition is as tradition does’:

“I always likes a good tune ... I likes Irish tunes” ... the statement pinpoints ... the prime motive of the majority for learning a song at all. (1969: p. 321)

The average singer may have a feeling that one song is more recent than another, but this is not the point: if he likes the song he sings it. (p. 325)

This, however, is to take both the notion of tradition and the condition of (traditional) singer as given, which is to assume a great deal. Baldwin indulges the stock Second Revival pretension to ‘radicality’ in relation to First Revival orthodoxy but the focus of his putative radicality remains squarely on *what* is being performed. This is to skate over the possibility that the true locus of validity may lie in who is performing, which means, by extension, how. Also omitted from the equation is any sense of the mediating activity of the collector—the next great shift in thinking, as we shall see in the section on Harker.

In terms of the trajectory of thinking which this survey seeks to trace, Baldwin marks a notable stage. He states his credo in the dissertation: ‘For folk song, like all folk arts, is nothing if not eclectic, and a large part of its individuality, meaningfulness and value springs from the eclecticism.’ (1978: p. 3) Williams is adjudged to have ‘behaved better than most collectors of his time’ (1969: p. 323) in relation to this defining eclecticism, but still to have fallen short. This represents the opposite pole to that adopted by *The Times* review of 1923. The path leads from that reviewer’s ‘hotch-potch’ (an unequivocal criticism), through Dean-Smith’s ‘heterogeneous’ (an

equivocal position, shared by Purslow), to Baldwin's view that Williams's collection is insufficiently 'eclectic'. Where Purslow derides the early collectors for their narrow conception of "folk"—then takes Williams to task for incapacity to distinguish "folk"—Baldwin finds Williams wanting because he did not collect enough recent popular commercial stuff, the existence of which among country people is assumed rather than demonstrated. ('Eclecticism', of course, throws up theoretical problems of its own. The notion supposes some putative 'purity', which can only be a projection by the mediator: *mutatis mutandis*, it is not 'eclectic' to the tradition bearer.)

In sum, the Symposium fails to effect the significant revaluation it appeared to mark. Between them, the symposiasts contrive to raise most of the salient questions—Williams's editing practices, his contacts with other collectors, whether his work perverts or promotes 'folk'—but little more. Commentary is littered with small factual errors and glib assertions ungrounded in rigorous scrutiny, and remains largely confined, despite token nods to the manuscript collection, to the folk song book. Clissold suggests (p. 300): 'A complete bibliography of Williams can be found in the Clark biography' but this is far from being the case. There is also more than a hint that the commentators are airing their own pet views on the subject, reducing Williams to the condition of pretext. Editorially, the effect is of the principal subject—Williams—rather falling between three stools.

INTERLUDE: THE 1970S AND EARLY 1980S

Presumably by coincidence, the year following the *Folk Music Journal* Symposium saw the reprinting of *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* by S R Publishers of Yorkshire in their Dialect Reprints series. The reprint contains a new preface by Stewart Sanderson, then director of the University of Leeds Institute of Dialect and Folk Life Studies, which will be discussed at the end of this chapter. (Williams's book had earlier been reissued by the Singing Tree Press of Detroit, USA, in 1968.) Whether this publishing circumstance had the effect of further raising Williams's profile in the subject is difficult to gauge. Locally, a lengthy, handsomely laid out review by Anthony Wood, 'Reaping a Folk Song Harvest', appeared in the *Oxford Mail* of 10 December 1970. The piece is the usual mixture of breezy potted biography inclining to glibness—was Williams's 'ambition' really to 'follow in the footsteps of Cecil

Sharp, Ralph Vaughan Williams and the rest?—and quirky quotation from the book. The reviewer's hopeful prognosis, however ('I doubt if the original 12s 6d edition was anything like as popular as the three guinea reprint just issued ... will prove'), did not translate into increased scholarly attention to Williams's work.

No significant printed reference has been found in the 1970s, but Robert Thomson included a lengthy passage on Williams at the end of his unpublished PhD thesis, 'The Development of the Broadside Ballad Trade and its influence upon the transmission of English folk songs' (University of Cambridge, 1975):

One collector is omitted who was not in any way associated with the Folk Song Society and whose work will be considered in greater detail since he collected across the districts covered by the Dicey and Raikes chapmen in the eighteenth century and one might reasonably expect to find evidence of their activities in his manuscripts.

Alfred Williams, ex-railwayman, author, poet and folk song collector, was a 'loner'—so much so that when offered hospitality he had been known to write a letter of thanks, enclosing a ten-shilling note to cover the cost of his meal, despite his own impoverished circumstances. Between 1914 and 1916 he travelled throughout the upper Thames valley noting the texts of songs from village folk. A total of seven hundred and fifty five texts survive in his manuscripts at Swindon Public Library. Of these he selected two hundred and sixty-five which he published in *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* in 1923. Even though working in a large region of his own choice, he found that a small number of villages and towns, and a limited number of informants were to be found. His experiences are well detailed in his introductory essay which is one of the few extended statements we have of a collector's methodology and his observations upon the people and places he visited. Like previous collectors, he notes that broadsides had played a part in the transmission of songs but unlike his predecessors, he did not undervalue their contribution. He explained that songs mentioning a particular locality were the result of printers and hawkers adding a nearby reference to entice their customers. (pp. 273-4)

Roger de V Renwick draws in passing on an account in *A Wiltshire Village* of rustic responses to kinds of weather (*English Folk Poetry* (1980), p. 146). Michael Pickering, in *Village Song and Culture* (1982), cross-references to Williams *passim*, most glibly in invoking the distinctly unlikely trio, 'men such as Cecil Sharp, Alfred Williams or Percy Grainger' (p. 166). Thomas Pettitt comments on Williams's habits as textual editor: 'As Williams' notes do not survive it is not possible to check the fidelity of his printed text to the song as it was sung, but in his vigorous and moving introduction to the collection Williams asserts firmly that he has not interfered with the texts, and provides an eloquent justification for not doing so.'²⁶ (See Appendix I.)

The most intriguing work of this period is the one which did not happen. The Sussex singer and author Bob Copper recalled an abandoned project in a radio interview with Vic Smith, transcript published in *Musical Traditions* 3 (summer 1984):

VS: You did at one time outline to me a plan for what seemed potentially a very interesting book, almost a sort of "Alfred Williams Country—Revisited".

BC: Yes, we even got started on that, yes, but unfortunately at that time my wife's health cracked up and we had to abandon the whole plan. I was hoping very much to go to the Upper Thames area, yes, Gloucestershire, Oxford, Wiltshire and all up there. A lovely part of the country. Yes, to go to the villages where Alfred Williams went. He went on a bicycle, of course, in about 1910–1912 [*sic*] about that time and he wrote his books after the war, the war intervened. ... it's still not too late, I think, because if I went around, or if anyone went around in these villages, you'd find descendants in the villages, people don't move from these kind of isolated country areas. You'd find somebody that would remember the songs and interesting stories relating to them.

Copper elaborates on the circumstances of abandonment in a private letter:

I am afraid I have absolutely nothing to offer you with regard to your researches into Alfred Williams and his *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*. Having been commissioned by Wm Heinemann Ltd I did indeed set off with my wife in the early 1980s to research the same subject with a view to writing a book in due course. Sadly, after only one night away, in an hotel in Cricklade the whole project had to be aborted as my wife was taken ill—which eventually led to her death in 1983.²⁷

The form this publication might have taken remains a matter of speculation.

DAVE HARKER, *FAKESONG* (1985)

With Harker's polemical, demythifying conspectus of outsider intervention in the music of country people, matters took a distinctly political turn. Harker engages the hermeneutics of suspicion, an agenda apparent from his sub-title: *The Manufacture of British 'Folk song' 1700 to the Present Day*. ('British', however, proves a little misleading: while the book attends to Scots contributions alongside English, there is nothing on Wales.) Proceeding from the premise of the constitutive role of 'mediation', and that no mediation can be ideologically innocent, his revisionist study sets out to insert the principal 'folk song' mediators firmly into the equation:

No song-mediator produced a book without an intellectual reason, even if their primary aim was material gain, and none of them was free of an ideological tendency. So, no song-book could fail to be, however marginally, a kind of ideological intervention whether its producer admitted it or not. (p. 2)

The implications of this ground-breaking approach for Williams's place in the pantheon are ostensibly far-reaching, with an entire chapter (10) being dedicated to 'Alfred Owen Williams and the Upper Thames'. Swapping the barometer for the chessboard, Williams now turns into a pawn in a more overtly political discourse to do with the problematics of the collector's relation to what is being collected. Though he opens with the statutory observation of Williams's standing out from the Edwardian flock—'Williams' aims were somewhat different to those of Sharp and the Folk Song Society'—Harker's line of attack is engagingly divergent from all other approaches so far discussed:

His [Williams's] work cannot be understood without an analysis of his form of working-class consciousness, his relation with literary elements in bourgeois culture, and his attitude towards country workers. (p. 211)

This attention to the wider conditions within which any mediating project is situated defines a cogent, compelling agenda, but, as we shall see, one which remains sadly unfulfilled here. Harker divides his discussion into three parts, 'Life and Ideas', 'Song-collecting' and 'Song-publishing', the middle part being the most substantial.

(1) 'HIS LIFE AND IDEAS' (pp. 211-215) This background section exhibits the usual mixture of factual error and loaded summary, which invites correction at the risk of nitpicking. 'Alfred Owen Williams was born ... Their [his parents'] marriage ended when Elias ran away in 1880' (p. 211).⁹ The birth certificate preserved in the Williams Collection quite distinctly gives the form of his name as 'Owen Alfred Williams', though he appears to have been known by his second name from the outset (1881 census for South Marston lists him as 'Alfred O Williams', aged 4). The neatest form is perhaps '(Owen) Alfred Williams'. Williams *père* was still in residence at the time of the 1881 census (attested 9 April) with seven of eight children—the youngest, Ada, may have been even then in the womb. So his departure took place sometime after this date. (Williams's biographers are suitably reticent on the point.) Proceeding to a potted account of Williams's employment as a hammerman in the GWR works at Swindon, Harker writes: 'He had come to accept, with extreme bitterness, that the most he could hope for was a life as a hammerman ... his own 23 years' continuous service and his steady promotion indicate a high level of acceptability to the works foremen and management.' (p. 212) On the latter count, the evidence

⁹ See Praeludium (p. 6) for the family's corrective to this biographical cliché.

from Williams's own account in *Life in a Railway Factory* is that his stance towards shop floor management was one of productive recalcitrance, a determination not to be ground down by the forces of philistinism; and rather than 'steady promotion', he actively resisted any advancement beyond chageman. The first count, of 'bitterness' at his condition, represents a more serious misconstrual: he only reluctantly quit the works through ill-health in 1914, since a primary tenet of his credo was the therapeutic virtue of physical labour as a useful counter-balance to the life of the mind, a moral prescription he extols throughout his writings and one echoed in his reading of the classics (see p. 240 *supra*).

Harker goes on to pose the question: 'What, we might ask, did he do about this situation [industrial exploitation]? Very little, it seems'. (p. 213) What, we might respond, was he supposed to 'do'—foment revolution on the streets? What he did was write a book denouncing contemporary industrial practices, which, he later believed, contributed in however small a way to the gradual amelioration of working conditions in the GWR. Given the power the company wielded at the time, this was in itself a courageous act. Harker also notes, quite accurately, that Williams tends in his writings to gloss over the class-struggle, contrasting this with the characteristic rosiness of his portraits of country life:

His individualism, linked as it was to a profound respect for bourgeois literary culture and its essential individualistic ideology ... He did not, for example, write a book like that on the GWR works about *Life on a Wiltshire Farm*. (p. 213)

As far as it goes, much of this is fair comment, except that it needs to be mobilized as part of a larger project to understand Williams's peculiar (unique?) situation, rather than indulging an urge to catch him out. On the latter point, for example, it can be argued that he did produce descriptions of life on Wiltshire farms: there are fascinating accounts in particular of agrestic employer/employee relations such as obtained at Launcelot Whitfield's Burton Grove Farm, South Marston, in chapter six of *A Wiltshire Village*, or on Squire Archer's Castle Eaton estate in *Round About the Upper Thames*, Chapter 12. What is at issue here is that Williams adopted a quite different line on the issue of capital-labour relations in his country works to that taken in *Life in a Railway Factory*, a difference which says much about his world-view.

‘Williams not only had to make sure that his books sold, but they had to make a profit on which he could live.’ (p. 214) It is very unlikely that Williams ever seriously believed that he could make a living from his writing alone, which is why he pursued market gardening once he had left the railway works.

When the First World War began, he did not enlist, and in 1916 he was using his patron’s good offices to try to extract a grant from the Royal Literary Fund to enable him live. He had shown his loyalty to this imperialist war by producing *War Sonnets and Songs* (p. 214)

This also is seriously deforming: Harker imputes that, not only was Williams shirking military service, he was also sponging off the government. He had worried at not being a combatant from the onset of hostilities; any hint of charity tended to stick in the throat; and his war poems were no more than dutiful: he regarded them as artistically poor stuff and later regretted publishing them, on those grounds.²⁸ Of army life in India once he had been accepted for military service Harker refers to ‘Williams’s habitual deference to enlightened paternalism.’ (p. 214) Was it ‘habitual’, or did he just happen to be sympathetic to the military ethos? (As for ‘enlightened paternalism’, that is a truism of the regimental system.)

On the issue of politics proper, Harker is paradoxically at his least illuminating, precisely because this is where he is keenest to score the point. Williams’s generally reactionary stance is not in question, but Harker’s sketchy, highly selective discussion gets nowhere near what is a complex topic. Quirkily, he focuses on the industrial unrest of the mid-1920s, imputing hostile reactions by Williams for which there is no record: ‘no doubt Williams rejoiced’, ‘How he would have crowed’ (p. 215). By this period Williams’s published output was effectively complete, including the folk song book, and it is not clear how Harker’s comments are designed to promote understanding of his mediation of working people’s music-making, the ostensible subject of *Fakesong*.

(II) ‘SONG-COLLECTING’ (pp. 215-228) On the detail of song collecting proper, Harker leads with the observation of Williams’s egregiousness in relation to his contemporary collectors, apparently setting a comparative agenda for discussion:

Williams is known to have had some admiration for Sharp’s collecting work, but his own class-position and his ideology encouraged him to adopt notably different aims, methods and practices. (pp. 215-6)

In this section, too, we find the statutory mix of glib factual error and partial interpretation. He asserts that Williams ‘was constrained by the lack of leisure-time’ (p. 216) when the whole point is that he was in a limbo period between leaving the GWR and entering the army and so could devote himself full-time for two years to song collecting. This misconstrual he then adduces in explanation of the uneven distribution of Williams’s collecting within his area as defined; and the fact that ‘Swindon was totally ignored’ is considered a ‘prejudiced anomaly’ (p. 216). But the under-representation of the southern portion of the ‘Upper Thames’ is not the result of lack of time (this important issue is addressed in some detail at pp. 360 and 381 *infra*); and which collector in the period looked for ‘folk’ songs in a large industrial conurbation? Harker stumbles haplessly into further error: ‘Most of his 559 locatable texts—he seems to have paid little attention to music’ (p. 216). The tally of items ascribable to a singer and/or location is 521; and he paid *no* attention to music—and made no particular bones about it.

He then modulates to quantitative evaluation: distribution of texts by location, singer and age of singer, and correlation with the transport nexus. ‘As with Sharp, we find that certain settlements appear to have been more productive than others. ... Over a quarter [of texts] came from the 20 square miles in the triangle [*sic*] formed by Inglesham, Aston and Lechlade’; the fact that ‘nearly 300 of the songs came from within a mile of a turnpike road’ is offered as evidence that ‘“remoteness” was far from being the key criterion Sharp maintained’ (p. 216); and ‘the size of singers’ repertoires seems to have been somewhat smaller than that found by Sharp’ (p. 217). To these assertions it can be objected that: it is not so much that Inglesham, for example, was a noted ‘settlement’ for singing as that Elijah Iles happened to live there, and only then at the end of his life to live with his daughter; a glance at the map shows that Inglesham / Aston / Lechlade forms, geometrically, a distinctly peculiar ‘triangle’; the whole issue of the correlation between song quality and the beatenness of tracks needs looking at more extensively, in relation to Williams’s own evolving thoughts on the point, of which Harker is evidently unaware;²⁹ and the supposedly ‘thinner’ song-to-singer ratio than that found in Sharp skates over the fact that most, if not all, informants would have known more songs than the one or two Williams noted from them. Harker dabbles here in some core issues, but analysis needs conducting

in greater detail to be useful. What is at issue is not his arithmetic as far as it goes, only the use to which it is put: statistics, notoriously, is a question-begging science. Essentially, he computes quantities independently of considerations of quality.

On the issue of singers' occupations, Harker's conclusions can be tested against original research from demographic records. Williams claims that his singers came generally from the 'middle class of the working people', a claim Harker takes to be borne out by the mixture of occupations specified by Williams in headnotes to song texts: 'Only Henry Serman appears to have been a life-long agricultural labourer' (p. 217). This also neglects the fact that notations of this order are rare in Williams: on 200 named singers, an occupation is specified in fewer than 30 cases, presumably because it struck him as out of the ordinary. The main independent source for information of this kind is census, which overwhelmingly list his informants as 'agricultural labourer'. Admittedly, this enumerator's catch-all category requires careful qualification, but, *mutatis mutandis*, provisional findings from research suggest that at least half worked as labourers (see Chapter II). Throughout this section, Harker perpetrates the cardinal sin of basing sweeping judgements on partial information in a way which is at best unilluminating, at worst positively misleading.

He next addresses the crucial question of Williams's relation to his sources:

From the first he was referred to as 'sir' by all and sundry ... His dress, bearing, and perhaps his speech persuaded Gramp Iles that he was a curate when Williams first called; and this can't have been an isolated example of the distance between the self-educated factory-worker and even the most self-confident country worker. (pp. 216-7)

As evidence for this deferential arrangement Harker cites a pair of examples from the prose works, but these will not bear scrutiny: firstly, in his account of a visit to the neighbouring workhouse at Stratton St Margaret, Williams quotes a brief exchange with an inmate (not a song informant) in which he is addressed as 'sir'; the second instance does not involve Williams at all—a young farm worker refers to an old hand as 'sir' as part of an old chestnut about townies being clueless at farm work. This one, marginal, instance hardly constitutes 'all and sundry'. The curate story (see Chapter VI.1) Williams tells as a mock confidence with the reader, as a piece of self-irony (not, admittedly, his strongest suit).

As for 'distance', that raises bigger questions: we only know country culture

through its recording, which has to be conducted by someone; and chronicling, which can only be consciously performed, *ipso facto* sets up a distance between subject and object. So if this effect of removal is inexpungibly built in to the enterprise, how can it be a fault in any individual mediator? What can be explored is the particular form that distance takes in any given case, and how it colours the results of collecting. To characterize Williams as a 'factory-worker' is simplistic. In one sense, he was by the circumstances of birth and upbringing an authentic countryman; in another sense, he was removed from country people by his exceptional constitution and his obsessive efforts at self-education. So he is, uniquely among collectors in the period, an insider-outsider. This is a condition more complex and ambivalent—and engaging—than 'factory-worker' suggests.

On the scope of Williams's collecting, Harker proves unusually complimentary:

he paid little heed to the arbitrary criteria promulgated by the more pretentious collectors. ... in general, he seems to have collected what singers sang. ... Implicitly, folk songs were those songs sung by the folk, and the latter category was much more liberal, and thus, more historically-specific than any of the contorted formulæ produced by Sharp. (p. 218) ... rather than pick and choose song material from his sources after the manner of Sharp, he seems to have taken down almost everything that was offered. (p. 219)

That 'seems to have collected' accords a benefit of the doubt pointedly withheld from virtually every other mediator under discussion. These passages confirm the line already taken by Plunkett and Wilgus: Williams becomes a Second Revival hero for the way he pushes beyond reviled First Revival 'narrowness'. Gratifyingly generous as this account is, the position is a little more complex than suggested here—almost that Williams achieves a kind of transparent mediation. The contrast with the Sharpian paradigm may not be as clear cut as Harker would have us believe. Thus, for example: 'There is no attempt [as with Sharp & Co] to seek to isolate particular ... singers ... from the 'contamination' of formal education' (p. 219), yet there is some indication that Williams did cling to the romantic view of formal education as an agent of corruption:

if they [folk songs] stand any chance of being remembered and held as cherished possessions it will be by the simple peasant folks, those who have *not been educated out of their nature*.³⁰ (Emphasis added)

He also emphasizes that Williams's pioneering effort to contextualize song extends beyond the restricted domain of pastimes, a virtue which had already been recognized by Howes and Dean-Smith, to the wider topic of informants' work. On this point of context Harker is most positive in his verdict:

Apart from the special pleading and expurgation of repertoires, Williams' account of country culture in his various books represents a remarkable step forward on other mediators' accounts or assumptions. Although he doesn't systematize his description of country culture, he does provide us with some materials for the historical reconstruction of some of its key elements. (p. 220)

In the ensuing section (pp. 220-228), Harker considers some of these 'elements' of country culture—turning on topoi such as occasions, mechanisms of transmission, dialect, canonicity, decline—but his account is inherently unsatisfactory. His technique is to pick out extracts from throughout Williams's writings and stitch them loosely together with brief comments, approving or sceptical, rather than attempt a tight evaluative weave, critically synthesizing the terms of Williams's intervention. The effect of this is *décousu*, a rather quirky patchwork in which important connections are glossed over. Though there are cogent isolated perceptions, as sequential argument Harker's discussion smacks of sleight of mind. The muddled cast of his logic makes it hard to discuss briefly; as line-by-line analysis would fill many pages, one or two instances will suffice to make the point.

Throughout, Harker strives valiantly to read Williams's work as a totality, but the result is a jumble of snippets served up out of context, as in this casual misreading:

And if Scamp, at a Harvest-Home, wanted to render the Miner's Dream of Home, Williams saw no occasion to patronize a culture he knew mostly from the outside. (p. 220)

The reference is to the end of Chapter Six of *A Wiltshire Village* (1912), in which Williams gives an account of a harvest home on a South Marston farm. There are two points at issue here. To suggest that Williams consciously chose not to 'patronize' a country singer—that is, reject his song as not qualifying as 'folk'—is inapposite in context: in 1912, a good two years before he embarked on song collecting, Williams did not possess the term (value judgement) 'folk', or any knowledge of music. In that sense, the conditions did not, or did not yet, obtain in which he could have presumed

to patronize a country singer, even had he elected to; so this passing instance cannot represent any conscious challenging of the Sharpian paradigm. (Williams's acquisition of the term is a further, delicate matter. Briefly: as late as *Round About the Upper Thames*—researched during 1913, original version composed during 1914 incorporating many song texts—he was not yet employing the term. His first use in print comes with the *Standard* serialization starting in October 1915 under the title 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames'.) Secondly, 'a culture he knew mostly from the outside' is untrue. Rosified though it may be, every line of Williams's harvest home account resonates with his own experience: as a boy he toiled on these farms and participated in these customary occasions. He even concludes his narrative on a personal note: 'The old church clock struck ten as we came away home down through the fields.'³¹ What Harker might have emphasized is the way, instinctively at this stage rather than consciously, Williams ties in musical fragments with social circumstance.

Furthermore, Harker is given to generalizing from throwaway, often slightly eccentric, comments in Williams such as this sketch of a retired schoolmaster with which he concludes a chapter on the Wiltshire village of Chiseldon:

The schoolmaster remembers when the ballad-singers went from village to village singing their rhymes; he had helped to train them when he was a young man.³²

Harker foregrounds this isolated and rather opaque one-liner (p. 225), which by the following page has been inflated into 'what he [Williams] had written elsewhere about the role of schoolteachers in the propagation and training processes' (p. 226), creating the impression of widespread intervention by pedagogues in country music-making. This distortion looks like a function of Harker's concern at what he styles 'ruling-class penetration of aspects of rural working-class culture' (p. 222). Furthermore, the polemicist in him cannot resist the urge to snipe: Williams's view that a song rated inclusion on grounds that it had been 'sung with folk-songs' is glossed cynically as 'guilt by association' (p. 225), whereas the anti-Sharpian line otherwise espoused would suggest 'legitimacy by association' as a more apposite reading. Harker is certainly right to point out that Williams's accounts of country ways and their demise do not amount to 'thoroughgoing analysis', though whether that results from 'incapacity' (p. 228) is open to dispute. Perhaps he did not see it that way?

(III) SONG-PUBLISHING (pp. 228-230) In conclusion, Harker circles round to his chosen ground of ideology, in the sense of a mediator's motivation for collecting and publishing in the first place, given all that that unavoidably entails. Yet this final, rather perfunctory discussion of Williams's work is no more satisfactory than the foregoing, and can be shown to furnish further exemplification of the grasshopper manner described above.

He starts by accepting that Williams's purposes were not 'scientific', but then asserts that he ends up producing the very 'more or less undigested mass of materials' he goes out of his way to disavow; what might constitute 'digestion' in terms of these materials Harker does not explore. He then jumps to Williams's concerns over extractionism, citing a deleted passage in which he had written of 'restoring [the songs] to the peasantry to whom they belong'. Harker follows this with the statement: 'In his song-book aimed at an essentially bourgeois market' (p. 228), then cites a further suppressed passage in which Williams states his ideal that 'not a cottage in the land but possessed a book of the ancient national folk songs and ballads'. Finally, Harker suggests: 'Probably out of this impulse, many of the texts which later formed his song-book first appeared in a Swindon newspaper'. (p. 229) As a sequence of argument, this seems hopelessly garbled, making no effort to get the pieces to fit together: how does the stated urge to return the songs to country people constitute aiming at an essentially bourgeois market? (On the question of newspaper serialization: leaving aside the fact that the organ concerned was the *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard* which has always been published in Cirencester not Swindon, 'probably' is the usual dud qualification—Williams was *certainly* attempting to recirculate the songs by adopting this vehicle of publication.) Taking up this example as illustration, the following reading can be suggested. Conscious of the evils of extractionism, Williams sought to give the songs back to the working people of 'his' Upper Thames, not as Sharpian revival but in handy printed form, with a further eye on securing a modest niche in the literary pantheon in the process; if the result was to reach a 'bourgeois' market, it was not as ideological appropriation but because that is how publishing works. Or: partisan quixotry overlaid with personal aspiration (the Horatian *exegi monumentum*) compromised by imperatives of commerce obtaining beyond the quality of individual intentions. These strands do not 'contradict' each

other, but form an uneasy tangle in a way entirely characteristic of Williams. Harker has clearly pondered the subject insufficiently to frame the point in these terms.

In customary patchwork fashion, Harker also uncritically quotes (p. 229) the passage from Leonard Clark to the effect that the Folk Song Society had offered Williams help with publication in 1923: as discussed at Chapter VI.1.2 (p. 406), there is no extant evidence of this putative exchange having taken place.

Finally, Harker confronts the core issue of what were Williams's purposes in collecting, editing and publishing: 'Williams' purpose was overwhelmingly and unmistakably literary.' (p. 229) Citing Purslow's view of his reputedly cavalier editing practices, Harker comments: 'This is the less surprising, given the real nature of Williams' purpose in publishing the texts at all.' (p. 230) While it is certainly the case that Williams's terms of reference were predominantly literary (as student and poet) rather than musicological, his purposes in pursuing folk song fieldwork were not exclusively, or even primarily, literary but probative-apologetic: he set out to show that working country people in 'his' Upper Thames were as musical as any in the country, in which enterprise he surely succeeded.

Harker's last word also invites close attention. Quoting a paragraph from the Introduction to *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* in which Williams suggests that 'folk song' might offer a corrective to over-sophistication in art,³³ Harker concludes:

The correspondence with Sharp's advocacy of the music of 'folk song' as 'raw material' for bourgeois art-music, and as an 'instrument for civilizing the masses', is striking indeed. In that sense, and in spite of his pioneering attempts to give a rounded account of Upper Thames rural culture which included songs and singing, Williams remained substantially a prisoner of the 'folk song' consensus, ... as he did of the bourgeois ideology on which it was based. (p. 230)

Throughout this chapter, Sharp, the *bête noire* of angry, politically-driven revisionism, is invoked as touchstone: Harker approvingly notes divergences, and disapprovingly points of convergence, between Williams's thoughts and those of Sharp. In these concluding remarks, he too readily tars Williams with the brush. In the first place, Williams's suggestion that 'the spirit of the old poetry' might be 'revived to advantage ... as a basis for future work' is simply one more expression of a 'back to basics' line in poetry—not music—that stretches back through Wordsworth and beyond. Secondly, 'civilizing the masses' by means of folk music is an aim quite

alien to Williams's thinking. In the third place, this passage needs to be seen in the context of his whole output: it occurs as an isolated, quirky pronouncement which never becomes a defining project, in contrast to Sharp. As for remaining a 'prisoner' of 'bourgeois ideology', the contents of Williams's consciousness need inspecting in much greater detail than Harker manages. Equally, the issue of Williams's relation to the folk music establishment, which Harker announces at the start of this section, is of the first importance but calls for more extensive comparison.

So what, finally, are we to make of what is easily the most sustained serious attention to date to Williams's work? Harker starts from the need to rescue Williams from the margins of the subject: 'His work is mentioned, if at all, by way of an aside, an aberration even' (p. 211), plugging the line that it represents 'a qualitative advance' (p. 211) and 'a remarkable step forward' (p. 220). By according him a whole chapter in a larger comparative study, in contrast to the isolation of the *Folk Music Journal* Symposium for example, Harker effectually puts Williams on a par with other mediators. Yet paradoxically, this commendable effort to raise Williams's profile ends up doing more harm than good: despite putting down some useful markers for further enquiry, he is insufficiently versed in the materials to produce the rigorous, deeply pondered appraisal of Williams's mediation hitherto lacking. In addition, the scope of Harker's study means that he is over-dependent on feeble secondary sources, often rosy bourgeoisification of the subject purveyed by such as Leonard Clark, a dependence which tends to betray him haplessly into error, as we have seen. (Politics undone by shoddy scholarship? A neat irony.) There is a sense here that Harker has bitten off more than he can chew. At the end we are left with still no clear picture of the quality of Alfred Williams's contribution to the folk song question.

THE PAST 20 YEARS

Little significant attention has been devoted to Williams in the 20 years since *Fakesong*, a return to a token nod here and there. Bob Arnold reappeared in a further broadcast, this time interviewed on BBC Radio's *Folk on 2* programme, 4 June 1986. The principal addition is Arnold's story of how he came by a set of song cuttings from the *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard* serialization via a neighbouring farmer in Oxfordshire, and how he came to use them as a collecting tool (see Chapter VI.4).

The most surprising, not to say most bizarre, of all printed pieces on Williams's collecting appeared in 1987 in an issue of *Treoir*, the organ of Chomhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann (the Irish Musicians' Association). Bryan McMahon's three-page article 'The Tommy Who Loved Ballads' is an admiring but hopelessly twisted reading of Williams in terms of the Irish song experience. Leaving aside the statutory slew of factual errors—he did not learn Sanskrit in India (p. 32), *Songs of Wiltshire* should read *Songs in Wiltshire* and is a volume of original poems not songs noted in the field (p. 33)—McMahon forces the Irish connection: Williams the soldier did not march through the post-uprising rubble of Dublin in 1916. What can be salvaged from the wreckage is the way McMahon's own collecting in Ireland offers confirmation of points made by Williams: the spectacle of ballad-singers at local fairs, the extraordinary power of some singers' memories, the sensitive issue of expurgation (p. 33)—all find an echo in the author's own experiences. Perhaps most usefully, McMahon notes how much of the material found in the Upper Thames also occurs in Ireland, a fact Williams himself emphasizes. This extensive, extra-parochial distribution of core repertory is an important topic demanding a study in its own right.

Ironic recognition comes with inclusion in a composite entry headed 'Folk Revival' in *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English* (1988)—'ironic' in that Williams sought literary canonicity as a lyric poet, but rates inclusion on other grounds:

In the early 20th century, the work of collecting was continued and expanded by such influential young musicians as Ralph Vaughan Williams, Percy Grainger and E J Moeran, and by literary amateurs like George Gardiner and the Hammond brothers in Hampshire and the South, and Alfred Williams in the Upper Thames Valley (p. 359)

The entry goes on to mention *Fakesong*, then recently published, so this may represent a small glimpse of the murky process of canon-formation, as Harker's attempted rehabilitation starts to feed through into wider recognition.

One quarter of Williams's collecting district qualifies for a rather perfunctory page (p. 246) in Roy Palmer, *The Folklore of Gloucestershire* (1994), plus brief references *passim*. The circumspection of Palmer's remarks mean they are accurate but largely unilluminating. He focuses on mechanisms of song transmission, by individual singers and by means of country gatherings, merely citing notations in Williams.

SANDERSON'S BALANCE SHEET (1970)

As indicated above, consideration of Stewart Sanderson's new preface for the reprint of *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* in 1970 has been kept till last on the grounds that it furnishes a useful matrix through which to evaluate Williams's contribution, namely a balance sheet of merits and demerits. In the course of five and a half terse pages in which he raises most of the key issues, Sanderson also perpetrates the usual factual errors, which demand to be corrected given the prominence of his piece. 'Early in life his imagination and literary ambitions were fired by the work of ... Richard Jefferies' (p. v): oddly but importantly, Williams did not discover Jefferies's writings until 1909, by which time he had already read much and embarked on his own literary career.³⁴ Williams's first published volume of poems (1909) was not entitled *Songs of Wiltshire* but *Songs in Wiltshire* (p. vi: this is the error McMahan perpetuates, *supra*). *Round About the Upper Thames* was serialized in the *Standard* from January to August 1915, not in 1914 (p. vi). 'While collecting material for these sketches Williams became aware of the work of Cecil Sharp ... He was, however, too busy with his newspaper articles to pursue matters further.' (p. vi) The issue of Williams's familiarity with Sharp's work has been discussed above (Sanderson is evidently parroting here); and exactly when he began song collecting is open to dispute—though he certainly was already in possession of the necessary bicycle, contrary to what Sanderson implies. The *Standard* song serialization ran to a total of 440 texts, not '250' (p. vi). Finally, Sanderson serves up further unfounded midrash on putative establishment response to the appearance of Williams's song book: 'it caught the attention of the Folk Song Society and involved him in rather crotchety correspondence with certain of its members' (p. vii). In all these instances, Sanderson offers further exemplification of the point made above about the distorting clout of the printed word.

Turning to the balance sheet model, Sanderson takes Williams's social anthropology slant as a matrix through which the quality of his work can be evaluated:

he shared and intimately understood the background of the singers whose songs he assiduously collected. Indeed he was more interested in the background of rural life than in the songs themselves, an attitude which is reflected in both the virtues and defects of *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*. (p. v)

The case is weighted in Williams's favour by getting the 'defects' out of the way

as a preliminary to emphasizing the strengths. He identifies three perceived failings (pp. viii-ix): against Williams's claim to integrity as chronicler, Sanderson sets the fact that he did 'deliberately vitiate the value of his work by suppressing certain songs and bowdlerising others' (p. viii); he lists the failure to note music as a definite shortcoming; and he points up the apparent contradiction between Williams's avowed desire to redisseminate the songs and his strong anti-revival line. This latter, however, is not as glaringly disparate as made out: in Williams's eyes, circulation of the song texts in accessible printed form as a historical curiosity was fully compatible with his belief that performance had outlived its time. In so strongly making a case against this view, including a veiled allusion to John Baldwin's then recent fieldwork, Sanderson is clearly prompted by his own pro-revival stance. On the credit side, two principal virtues are deemed to make Williams's book of song texts 'a major landmark on the English scene' (p. ix): following Wilgus and Plunkett, the collection is hailed as 'widely representative of the stock of folk song current in the English countryside at the beginning of this century' (p. ix); and Williams's pioneering contextualizations are given pride of place:

But it is in his descriptions of village life, and of the role of the folk song tradition in rural society, that Williams truly excels. His introductory essay is full of shrewd insights into the nature and function of folk song and the practical problems which face the collector. ... The picture which he sketches in these pages is one of permanent historical value. (pp. ix-x)

The balance sheet gloss can usefully be extended to cover all the responses surveyed in this chapter. In particular it offers a variant on the barometer figure: the virtues/faults distinction is subject to historical shifts, the valorization of any given property mutating into its inverse with changes in the climate of thinking.

Sanderson's gambit is the customary nod to Williams's egregiousness (p. v), going on to assert: 'Endowed with an original talent, he sometimes skirted close to eccentricity in the originality of his views.' (p. vii) His most useful perception, however, is of the 'ambivalence' (p. viii) which characterizes much of Williams's writing: 'he was not always able to resolve ambiguities of personal stance and attitude to his subject' (p. vii). This emphasis on the ambivalent, coupled with Harker's foregrounding of the mediation issue, may well offer the most productive way in for an understanding of Williams's work.

In conclusion, the commentators surveyed above contrive to identify most of the salient questions, without managing significantly to extend understanding. There is a notable tendency to acquiesce in frequently misleading printed pronouncements by Williams and by his principal biographer, Leonard Clark, rather than carry out detailed scrutiny of the primary materials. This becomes most marked in Harker, whose doctrinal stance is the very inverse of acquiescence. Close inspection shows an uncertainty quite what to make of him: Clissold is not sure whether to celebrate his social egregiousness or to tar him with the brush of period rosification; and Purslow evidently has difficulty believing the 'radicality' of which the Williams collection potentially furnishes elements. This hesitancy follows from the essentially potted character of what has been written, often little more than a catalogue of factual error and sloppy assertion. Ninety years after Alfred Williams so determinedly scoured the Upper Thames for song, it is time to accord his work the rigorous examination it invites.

1914: A PRICKLY ZEALOT ENTERS THE FIELD

Cecil Sharp, writing in 1907, drew attention to the magnitude of the task which had been opened up by recognition of a hitherto unsuspected trove of rustic song:

The larger part of rural England is still virgin soil; while of those districts that have already been visited, very few have, as yet, been explored with any degree of thoroughness.³⁵

He goes on to voice his confidence that the 'important national work' would be 'prosecuted with vigour and earnestness'. To this pious hope his biographer adds:

for folk-song he [Sharp] had Somerset and Devon, leaving Wiltshire and Cornwall to any other man [*sic*] of abounding energy with short holidays and short purse, with a fund of patience and a sense of humour.³⁶

Fox Strangways could not have guessed that the revealing reflex of fieldwork-as-holiday-activity would be so ill-fitting to the man who was to fill one of these holes. Alfred Williams certainly qualified as *vigorous* and *earnest* (he did not, of course, consider the subject in *national* terms), although his capacity for humour has been routinely—perhaps mistakenly—questioned. Circumstance and prior pursuit ensured that he did not so much hit the ground pedalling as redouble his days in the saddle.



NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

- 1 Alfred Williams, 'The Local Distribution of the Folk Song and Folk Music', *Wiltshire Gazette*, 26 August 1925, p. 3.
- 2 Letter to Henry Byett, 18 April 1923 (WSRO 2598/38).
- 3 This form of words is a paraphrase of Williams's reference to 'that which amused, cheered, consoled, and so profoundly affected the lives of the people of an age that has for ever passed away'. *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 29.
- 4 Williams wrote to Jones on 11 May 1923 (WSRO 2598/74) thanking him for his review in the *Swindon Evening Advertiser*.
- 5 Cecil Sharp, *English Folk Song: Some Conclusions* (London, 1907), p. 2 and *passim*.
- 6 Lecture notes (WSRO 2598/36). For Williams's further remarks on this song, see Chapter VI.3.
- 7 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 12.
- 8 J B Jones also knew Williams personally for many years but his book *Williams of Swindon* (Swindon, 1950) is principally concerned with Williams's standing as a lyric poet rather than with his life.
- 9 Quite the reverse, as Williams himself acknowledges: 'If I had been in the habit of attending the inns I should certainly have heard many old ballads. As it was, I missed them, and remained in profound ignorance of what was happening around me.' 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames District', *Word-Lore*, vol 1, no 1 (January-February 1926), p. 12.
- 10 *A Wiltshire Village*, pp. 166-7. Bridges was baptized at South Marston on 3 August 1828, and buried there on 9 May 1923, aged 95. Williams wrote to his Swindon acquaintance Harold Hollick on 8 May 1923: 'We are burying old William Bridges (at the age of 95) to-day.' (WSRO 2598/38) In the passage quoted, Williams seems to have his lines crossed over the identity of his wife: Elizabeth was the wife of William Bridges *fils*, Letitia being the spouse of William *père*. See 1891 census for South Marston, schedules 29 and 30.
- 11 The original preface to *Round About the Upper Thames*, dated 14 December 1914, appeared in the *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard* of 2 January 1915, p. 2.
- 12 Some correspondence survives between Williams and Jonathan Denwood, though not apparently on the issue of folk song. (Williams Collection, WSRO 2598/56 and /60.)

- 13 A letter from Albert Gascoigne at the front, son of Williams's informant Herbert Gascoigne of Kemble, Glos, was printed in the *Standard* of 4 December 1915, p. 4 (reproduced at p. 138 *supra*); Bingham's letter appeared on 15 April 1916, p. 3.
- 14 A H Fox Strangways and Maud Karpeles, *Cecil Sharp* (London, 2nd edition, 1955), p. xv.
- 15 The 1996 issue of the *Folk Music Journal* carries an obituary of Marie Slocombe: 'After her retirement Marie worked for years on a monumental and minutely annotated catalogue of recordings of British folk music. This occupied three or four large box files.' (*Folk Music Journal* 7, 2 (1996), p. 271.)
- 16 *Cecil Sharp 1859-1924*, BBC Home Service, 9 December 1959.
- 17 Harold Rogers, 'The First Folk Song Collectors', *Radio Times*, 25 December 1959, p. 6.
- 18 The singer in question was Thomas Holmes, styled 'Wooden-legged' for evident reasons. The text (Bk 7 in the Williams catalogue), which remains unpublished, is not in Williams's hand, being presumably submitted by the informant. Holmes was baptized at Highworth, Wilts, on 7 July 1844 and buried at Coleshill, Berks, on 6 April 1931. He signed his name when he married Sophia Jordan at Highworth on 31 July 1865.
- 19 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 20.
- 20 Williams himself writes: "They say "everything comes to him that waits". All my boyhood I had tried to join the NAVY or the Artillery, but was rejected through varicose veins. I had shed many tears over it. But now at nearly 40 years of age I just went in flying. (It didn't [*illegible*] varicose veins then or anything else) I might have gone back to the forge [*illegible*] but folks called that ducking the issue.' Lecture notes (WSRO 2598/36). On his early attempts to join the forces, see Clark, pp. 11 and 13.
- 21 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames District', *Word-Lore*, vol 1, no 1 (January-February 1926), p. 14 and 'The Folk Carol in Wiltshire', *Wiltshire Gazette*, 29 December 1927, p. 7.
- 22 This analogy is employed, for example, in Purslow's *Marrowbones* (London, 1965), p. 105.
- 23 'The Local Distribution of the Folk Song and Folk Music', *Wiltshire Gazette*, 6 August 1925, p. 3.
- 24 This is the sentiment expressed in *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, pp. 28-9.
- 25 *Ibid*, pp. 17-18.

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- 26 Thomas Pettitt, 'Bold Sir Rylas and the Struggle for Ballad Form', *Lore and Language* 3, 6 (1982), p. 45.
- 27 Private letter from Bob Copper, 23 June 1998.
- 28 See Clark, p. 94 (war guilt), Clissold, p. 299 (averse to charity), and Clark, p. 92 (regret at publishing war poems).
- 29 See articles in *Wiltshire Times*, 1 May 1926 and 28 August 1926.
- 30 Introduction to serialization of 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames', *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 2 October 1915, p.2 (deleted from book version).
- 31 *A Wiltshire Village*, p. 122. Earlier in the same chapter he writes of the 'hay-home', a tea rather than a supper: 'We youngsters went attired in Sunday-best' (p. 111).
- 32 *Villages of the White Horse*, p. 104.
- 33 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, pp. 10-11.
- 34 On Williams's belated discovery of Jefferies, see Clark, p. 27; also *A Wiltshire Village*, p. 183.
- 35 Cecil Sharp, *English Folk Song: Some Conclusions* (London, 1907), p. vii.
- 36 A H Fox Strangways and Maud Karpeles, *Cecil Sharp* (London, 2nd edition, 1955), p. 94.

CHAPTER V

PROSPECTING

Discovery & Pursuit

36.
had as my name in Billy
No longer will of Tony
Aunt ~~to~~ about with Tony
had ~~some~~ with many time
The weather ~~is~~ pleasant -
To check that ~~could~~ ~~proven~~
and now they ~~are~~ ~~got~~ ~~married~~
Tony looked for some old
lost -
*(must walk
Mary with field)*



AN EXTRACT FROM ALFRED WILLIAMS'S SOLE
SURVIVING FIELD NOTEBOOK ('BILLY & NANCY')



PART I : FAREWELL VULCAN, WELCOME AURORA

When morning stands on tiptoe 'twixt mountain and sky,
How sweet 'tis to follow the hounds in full cry!
Folk Songs of the Upper Thames

‘WILLIAMS STRUCK A VERY RICH FIELD,’ OBSERVES MISS DEAN-SMITH APROPOS his quest for rustic song in the Upper Thames;¹ but the particular conditions of that happy discovery invite elucidation. Throughout the classic period of fieldwork by the folk song pioneers, c. 1890–1914, Williams toiled by day in Swindon works and exercised the mind by night, oblivious apparently to the great musical salvage operation in progress, though astutely engaged in salvagings of his own. Then, with customary egregiousness, he joined the chase at the very moment when his fellow huntsmen were severally suspending their efforts in the face of apocalypse.

Is there ever a Pauline moment? Perhaps our cherished ‘discoveries’ habitually take the undramatic form of glimmerings and gropings rather than a blinding flash. That there is no indication Alfred Williams experienced a revelation on the lonely road to Inglesham finds confirmation in his elective figure of a gentle dawning:

They [the songs] are there, although their presence was unsuspected. The knowledge that many of them still existed dawned upon me gradually. At first I noted speech and story, local lore, and rhymes. And while I confined my attention to these matters I got nothing else.²

This gradual emergence into the light is, of course, in any degree of detail all but untraceable. Glimpses are afforded in headnotes, and in comments scattered through *A Wiltshire Village* and the later newspaper articles; but full recognition derives from Williams’s extension of fieldwork for his country chronicles:

It was while collecting materials for *Round About the Upper Thames*, in the year 1913, that I realised there might be some considerable remains of folk-songs in the locality of the Thames above Oxford, though a prolonged search for them was not at that time possible.³

It was while writing prose chapters in the Upper Thames neighbourhood in 1913 that I first became aware of the large amount of folk-lore relics and folk songs surviving in that district.⁴

People have often said to me—How did you COME TO START GETTING FOLK SONGS—How I came to start getting Folk Songs was like this. I was at Swindon works till the beginning of 1914. All that winter I had been getting about the Cricklade & Fairford district writing a book called *Round About the Upper Thames* in my spare time.⁵

This unfolding is manifest in the significant number of song texts woven, in full and fragmentarily, into the design of *Round About the Upper Thames* (more in the original version), some of which were then incorporated into the *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard* song serial.⁶ By contrast, *Villages of the White Horse*, the previous work covering a downland tract further south, contains no more than shards. A letter to one of his sisters mentioning this book reveals Williams's growing interest in song:

I wish you knew more of that song old Jemmy Boulton sang. I am writing that verse into my new prose I am doing, as I think it very pretty and suggestive.⁷

As published, the work incorporates nine song texts: the five verses of 'Wait for the Waggon' stand alongside snatches of 'Thornymoor Fields', 'Come, landlord, fill the flowing bowl', and 'Jim the Carter's Lad'.⁸ Tracing the trajectory a stage further back, *A Wiltshire Village* has a mere four snippets of song, two of which derive from childhood experience of a harvest home gathering at South Marston:

So the evening was spent in wholesome fun and merriment. The girls sang of lovers and rivalries, several woeful ditties, in which the "dark beauty" won the erewhile "constant and true" swain. The forsaken one died of a broken heart, and was laid to rest.

And on her grave was a turtle-dove,
To show the world that she died in love.

Scamp sang "The Miner's Dream of Home"; and somebody else followed with "The Soldier's Letter" and "The Harbour Lights," and Jemmy stood up with half-shut eyes, and, after some little hemming and hawing, provided the treat of the evening,

The zun was zettin' be'ind tha 'ills,
Acrass yon starmy moor.⁹

Progressive incorporation of song texts thus embodies the process of discovery.

Once embarked purposively on the pursuit of song, these childhood remembrances multiply, slipped in to headnotes dating from 1915–16. The occasion cited above is reaffirmed in Williams's note to 'There is a Tavern in the Town', obtained in his native village from Mrs George Lee: 'I remember hearing it sung at the first harvest home I attended, at South Marston, when I was eight years of age.' Other instances from this source are: 'Wait for the Waggon' which 'was very popular in most villages of the Thames Valley when I was a boy, and I often sang it on the way to the hayfield at the time I worked for the farmer'; of 'It's my Delight of a Shiny

Night' he avers, 'I had known a part of it from childhood'; and of 'When shall we get Married', 'My first recollection of this was when the military manoeuvres were being held on the Wiltshire Downs about the year 1893. Then I heard it sung, or rather chanted, by a large crowd of soldiers, sitting on the ground, at Coate, near Swindon'.¹⁰ Further childhood memories occur in press articles of the mid-1920s:

Curiously, the first folk song and folk music I ever heard was by listening to a German band that came regularly to the village once a year when I was a boy. At that particular time I was no more than five years of age; but I have a good recollection of the occasion, and I remember a portion, at least, of the music. After playing awhile the instruments ceased, and one of the company sang the words—"Cuckoo, cried I, Cuckoo, cried I"; then all cried "Cuckoo! Cuckoo!" and the strain proceeded. Village bands also played a large amount of folk music; there was not then such a ready recourse to standard works, classical pieces, and so forth. Rustic people understood and appreciated the folk music.¹¹

I had this advantage: I was born in, and I had slept in a village all my life. I remember hearing my mother sing "Brennan on the Moor" when I was a child; and the village band, at festival times, always played a certain amount of folk music. An old soldier, who had been in many wars, sang snatches of songs learned aboard ship, or at the ports; but, as was often the case with men of this type, he could not well be depended upon for versions, being defective in memory, and careless as to tune.¹²

Collectively, these scattered notations witness Williams's early exposure, if only intermittently, to vernacular singing, embracing even—perhaps most notably—the domestic *foyer* itself. This testimony stands, however, in apparent conflict with an avowal that benightedness extended to the very point of aggressive engagement in his late thirties: that nothing hitherto in his experience, whether studied gleaning or the simple fact of having always dwelt in a village, had led him to suppose that countryside dwellers might be the bearers of a sizeable corpus of popular music. If he was not looking, the hallmark elusiveness of song known to country people had given him no reason to look (though this apparently sits oddly with the 'advantage' proclaimed *supra* of being a villager):

If I had been in the habit of attending the inns I should certainly have heard many old ballads. As it was, I missed them, and remained in profound ignorance of what was happening around me. It is the search that reveals. I was never more surprised than when, after I had shown myself interested in folk songs, a farm labourer who had lived near me for thirty years told me his favourite piece, which was "The Prickly Bush." I had never suspected him of singing anything; and this may be taken as an example of the peculiar elusiveness of the folk songs.¹³

It is the search that reveals ... a clue is furnished to reducing the apparent disparity between boyhood memory and positioning in print. The search may reveal in the present, but it also works retroactively to confer significance not at first evident. Purposive pursuit generates a conceptual-evaluative frame, however hazy its terms, within which meaning is enabled; a coming-to-consciousness which alters perception of value. Whatever the case, occasional texts encountered and incorporated into *A Wiltshire Village* and *Villages of the White Horse* proved not so much meagre last gleanings as harbingers of the abundant harvest to come, though it was to be gathered predominantly further north and west, a zonal imbalance of record which may evidence greater incidence absolutely of song in the northern half of Williams's locale: even when collecting more purposively, he unearthed few singers in the wind-swept, sparsely populated southern zone. (John Johnson of Hinton Parva, Wilts, who sang 'Twankydllo' (Wt 373), makes an appearance in *Villages of the White Horse*:¹⁴ did Williams note the song at the time or did he return for it? On unevenness of distribution, see p. 360 *infra*.) What is evident is that location of the point of *discovery* to the Thames Valley in its narrow sense results from a circumstantial stumbling upon the cardinal songsters of extreme north Wiltshire while preparing *Round About the Upper Thames*: fireside communings with such as old man King at Castle Eaton, "Wassail" Harvey at Cricklade, and Elijah Iles at Inglesham opened Williams's ears to what had once been, and propelled him on his vigorous voyage of recovery.

AT THE THRESHOLD OF COLLECTING

Conscious, at last, of this rich seam of song, the question remains more exactly of the date at which Williams began the work of collecting. The key was occupational circumstance: the great demands of time and effort entailed in seeking out and recording musical performance meant recognition could not modulate directly into pursuit. In the event, ill-health was to provide the enabling 'accident' releasing him from regular employment, fortuitous for the purposes of the moment though inaugurating a descent into penury and anguished demise in the longer term:

just after the outbreak of the war, when, by the accident of ill-health, I did what I could, in a short time, to scramble up a few pieces which I found were still in evidence near the Thames-side.¹⁵

If song collecting proper was contingent upon quitting Swindon works, this would seemingly locate it to early September 1914.¹⁶ The biographers confidently posit this correlation. Henry Byett has: 'He therefore commenced gleaning late in 1914';¹⁷ while Leonard Clark expresses the matter in these seasonal terms:

Before the year was out and while snow still lay on the roads, he began cycling methodically to various nearby villages in search of the old people and their songs.¹⁸

The picture is complicated, however, by the fact that the moment of Williams's relinquishing of the leather apron may not have been quite so clear cut. From the early months of 1914, the dread spectre of a breakdown in health begins to haunt his letters:

I have been very poorly this last month, and have been in bed all day today with something that troubles me much: violent pains below the heart, and I have not been able either to read or write. I have been over-exerting myself—I expect—and shall have to lie up for a week or two.¹⁹

I have been at home for 3 weeks with acute dyspepsia, but I shall start again next week, I hope. I had not been feeling well since that very cold fortnight, but I kept moving, until I was forced to give up. A complete rest was what I needed most of all: with a cessation of hostilities I have been able to recuperate somewhat, though Dr Muir says I must be more careful of myself or else be content to become a confirmed invalid. I have for many years suffered from indigestion—especially at Swindon.²⁰

I should have started yesterday (or today) but the weather was so bad, and I didn't take the risk. As it is I shall be at home this week though I am off the sick list.²¹

Hopeful announcement of a return to the forge in mid-March proved delusory:

Thank you: I am much better. I got off the Club last Sat., and have had a few days of recuperation after my own manner. I hope to start at Swindon on Monday next.²²

I am sorry to say that I have been ill this six weeks with dyspepsia, and rheumatics. I do not seem to keep well any time together lately.²³

May 1914 was occupied with a holiday in Devon and Wales, provided by concerned acquaintances and recorded in breezy postcards to Henry Byett.²⁴ The main part of the summer is a documentary blank, with no letters apparently extant between late May and early September 1914. Clark covers this period, but unverifiably: Williams resumed employment in June, but before the month was out 'there was a severe recurrence of the dyspepsia and indications of heart trouble'.²⁵

This is borne out in a despondent letter of early September to Alfred Zimmern:

I have been disappointed with myself this summer. I was hoping—by staying from Swindon, to recuperate solidly, but I have not been able to do so. I did a little work in the fields but was surprised to find I was very easily knocked up, though the work was not hard: I cannot endure much physical effort. With all my books put on one side: poems, Factory prose, and Thames Valley Villages, I have been hit rather hard, and the war distracts me badly. I am writing a few little pieces on the war as a pastime. I do hope it will soon take a turn for the better. It is dreadful to have to feel “bloody”, but this is a very stern business.²⁶

This complication helps make sense of Williams’s avowal, twice, that he left the works not, as the biographers have it, in September but in the *spring* of 1914:

People told me that I was overworking (perhaps I was) and I was advised to get out of the factory into pure air. This I was at last compelled to do (at Easter, 1914). After resting a few months ~~I worked for a farmer at hay cart that summer.~~ After resting a few months remembering that I had found many traces of folk songs, rhymes, & sayings, I decided, as soon as I was able, to make a careful examination of my locality and see what I could recover.²⁷

The occasion [of collecting] was provided by my being compelled, through ill-health, to leave the Swindon Works. This was in the spring of that fateful year, 1914.²⁸

Clarification of the disparity of dates is provided in this account to A E Withy:

Yes: I have left the Works. I have been out since just after Easter: and handed in my notice about 3 weeks ago. Dyspepsia playing on the heart has been the trouble, but doctor Muir tells me that I “burnt the candle at both ends for too long”. I have been very seedy all the summer and autumn and cannot get any stability.²⁹

The apparent anomaly of dating is thus resolved into a reluctant *de facto* bowing out in spring not formally confirmed until September.

Williams was enough of a smith to know when to strike while the iron was hot, or at least still moderately warm. The point at issue is whether, alongside a brief revisiting of farm work, he seized the opportunity of enforced leisure to begin the pursuit of song during that famously fine summer. In that he twice proclaims direct linkage of GWR departure and collecting—*Word-Lore* article and lecture notes quoted *supra*—the commencement could well fall some months earlier than supposed by the biographers. In the absence of manuscript datings, the record is no more than circumstantial. On the one hand, none of the epistolary statements

bearing on this summer of uncertainty quoted above makes mention of any song activity. On the other, passing comments suggest collecting was under way in 1914, as in these two instances recalled in post-war press articles, indicating he had already pushed beyond the environs of South Marston:

In 1914 at three separate points on the Thames I heard a version of the song 'Of all the Brave Birds'.³⁰

In 1914 I obtained the song of the "Croppy Boy" at Filkins, near Lechlade. This was in an imperfect and corrupt condition. At Fermoy I corrected the copy with the help of an old Irishman who had been to the front and was wounded at the battle of the Somme.³¹

Of greatest moment, however, is the first extant direct mention of song collecting in the correspondence, dating from the middle of October 1914 (which also, importantly, marks a first known use of 'folk song' by Williams). Announcing to his patron, Lord Fitzmaurice, the quitting of Swindon works, Williams goes on to report:

I should have printed two "Factory" books this autumn, "Upper Thames Villages" next year and a book of old folk songs which I have gathered from the old men and women in this neighbourhood. What I most like to do is to depict the lives of the villagers and write of the countryside, and in this direction I feel that there is much useful work that may be done, and which I am hoping myself to do.³²

This is a clear indication he had already ('which I *have* gathered') amassed song sufficiently to contemplate a book;³³ though if he thereby supposed he had 'done' this shadowy dimension of country life, the unfolding months held a pleasant surprise in store. In the murky matter of beginnings, scrutiny of meagre record suggests not neat threshold crossing, but the summer of 1914 serving as transition period during which Williams was able leisurely to segue from general fieldwork into the single-minded quest for song which was to occupy the next two years without stint.

© Research into the biographical circumstances of Williams's singers throws up two cases in his home village of South Marston which appear to suggest some collecting *before* 1914, in that both had died well before that date. Ephraim Head, a shoemaker, was buried at South Marston on 24 May 1906, aged 67; and William Warren, a thatcher singled out in the Introduction to *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* as ranking among the local singing match champions, was buried there on 21 August 1909, aged 70. This must mean, either that Williams noted the texts at a very early stage—which on balance seems extremely unlikely—or that he noted them from a relative (or neighbour?) and attributed them to the deceased on the grounds that it had been 'his' song. Headnotes offer a clue to the conundrum. One text only, 'Rosin the Beau' (Wt 508), is directly attributed to Warren, the note to which reads: 'The favourite song of the old thatcher—William Warren—and his wife Patty'; whereas a further seven are attributed to Warren's son Edwin. Of these, two are said to have been acquired from the father: 'John Barleycorn' (Wt 503), and 'The Bold Privateer' (Wt 501), the anecdote attached to which suggests a second-hand source: 'A few hours before the old man's death, a neighbour told him that he could not sing "The Indian Lass," and, to the surprise of those at hand, he sat up in his bed and sang it through perfectly, in a good tone of voice. He died the same night.' As with Wt 508, the note to 'To Milk in the Valley Below' (Wt 494) reads: 'it was the favourite song of Ephraim Head, the village shoemaker.' The repeated phrase 'the favourite song of' may be a coded way of saying that the piece was obtained from a descendant, who especially associated it with the old man. Two further minor mentions of earlier hearings—'The Gipsy Girl' (Ox 247): 'This song I first encountered at Longworth, Berks, some few years ago, where it was sung by an old man named Polebrook', and 'Butter and Cheese and All' (Ox 304) which he claims to have heard at Inglesham and Buscot 'several years ago'—do not significantly alter the picture.

PART II: UPPER THAMES (3), COUNTRY OF THE BICYCLE

The idea of a discrete locale forming around the upper reaches of the river Thames which obtruded into the Alfredian *œuvre* with the design of *Round About the Upper Thames* (Chapter III.3) portended its resonant enlisting as an arena of song collecting. By the end of a year's fieldwork (October 1915), when the *Standard* instalments were launched, Williams had realigned this emblematic constituency, as he goes to some trouble to specify in his introduction to the serial:

I have set out with the intention of depicting some portion of the life of the Upper Thames Valley. ~~That is my field, or canvas — call it what you will.~~ The ground is limited. It might rather be called the "Upperest" or "Most Upper Thames Valley." Some people would drop the idea of the Thames altogether and say the Valley of the Isis; ~~but I do not like the word Isis.~~ Some particular definition is necessary, since the Upper Thames Valley may be considered as extending as far as to Wallingford or Reading. What I mean by the Upper Thames Valley is that part between Oxford, Abingdon, and Wantage on the one hand, and Swindon, Purton, and Cirencester on the other. ~~This includes the Vale of White Horse, which, strictly speaking, is the tract lying between the slopes of the chalk downs of Wiltshire and Berkshire from Swindon to Wantage, and the stone ridge running from Blunsdon past Highworth and Faringdon to Cumnor.~~

~~I have not yet covered all the ground, though I hope to do so in the future, if circumstances permit. For the sake of making myself understood, and having my design clear, I will briefly show what I have done to date. First, however, I will take the opportunity of mapping out the area. Generally speaking, for the purpose of the folk songs, I might draw a line from Cirencester to Tetbury, turning thence by Malmesbury and Wootton Bassett to Marlborough, and continue eastwards, encircling Aldbourne and Lambourne [*sic*], to Wantage. From Wantage the line would run east of Hanney to Abingdon, touching Oxford, and, veering round, include Witney, Burford, Lechlade, and Fairford, and so back to Cirencester. I am situated about in the centre of this region. My book, *A Wiltshire Village*, deals with South Marston and its surroundings. *Villages of the White Horse* comprehends the whole of the down-side between Hay Lane and Kingstone Lisle, east of the White Horse, and treats of some twenty villages. *Life in a Railway Factory* deals with the town of Swindon, and *Round About the Upper Thames* covers the north-western portion of the inner area, and especially that part through which the Thames flows from Kemble to Eaton Weir.³³~~

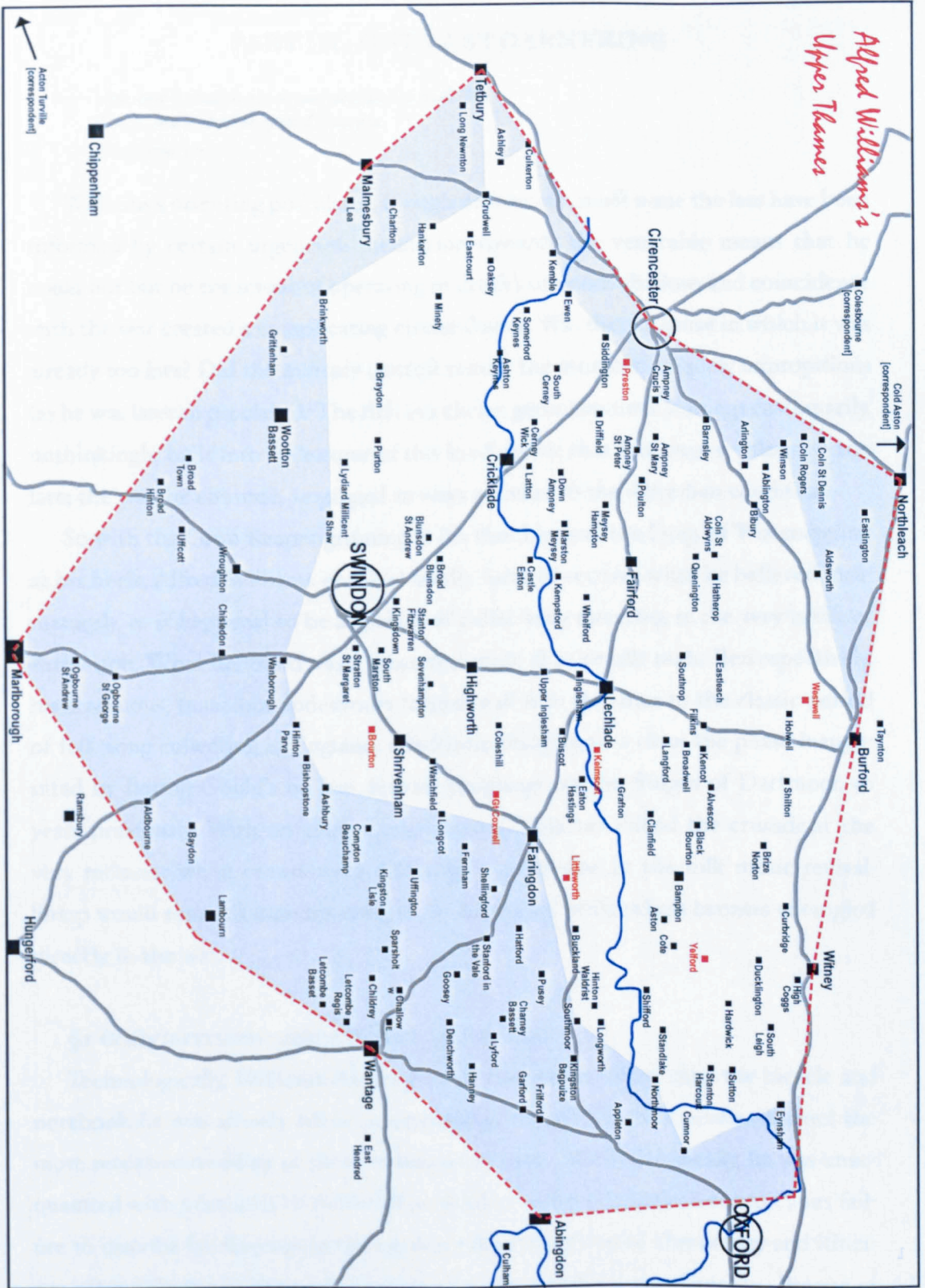
Accordingly, he substantially enlarges for song collecting purposes his 'Upper Thames' hitherto demarcated (see Chapter III.3, especially map at p. 236), marking out a zone some 50 miles wide and 25 deep at the junction of south-east Gloucestershire, south-west Oxfordshire, north-east Berkshire (Oxfordshire since 1974) and north-east Wiltshire, with the Thames-side township of Lechlade, crossroads in

decline, at the *de facto* hub.[□] At issue is whether this distension of a riverine core vitiates the putative integrity of his bailiwick. Plotting on a map (see p. 356) the outer points he specifies results, in purely geographical terms, in some arbitrary axes. Especially vague are the south-west and eastern sides, making it often difficult to determine which villages are embraced and which not. It is evident that no part of the rim as posited corresponds to a natural (topographical) demarcation, each side bleeding away into a larger landscape; and only two sides align on a man-made feature, the modern A40 in the north and the Fosse Way (A429) in the north-west.

Some explanation of this less than topographically exact pale may be sought in the connection with Williams's preceding explorations, contained in two excisions in the Essay passages cited above: the ending of the first paragraph picks up the gloss in *Round About the Upper Thames*³⁴ in which an already augmented Upper Thames Valley is characterized as a pair of parallel vales either side of a spine of irregular hills dipping and swelling from Purton in the west to the outskirts of Oxford (Cumnor) in the east (west-east, rather than north-south, is Williams's favoured orientation); and, more pertinently, the excision in the middle of the second paragraph shows that he came to conceive his prose works as an informing totality—though one likely to be a cumulative cobbling together not an overarching scheme in place *ab initio* (1911)—in terms of which an engagement with song could, by implication, be set. Within this framework of a stitching together of patches previously (and, in the case of *The Banks of Isis*, prospectively) explored in the country books, with a western tract tacked on (the country between Swindon and Malmesbury), the complexion of what might be termed the Greater Upper Thames of the song collecting as quilt of baggy rather than taut dimensions assumes an expedient logic.

Whereas materials for the books on country life had been abundant, the sparser spread of song remains induced Williams to widen the orbit of gleaning as the enterprise sucked him in. Enlargement, however, was restricted by the means of locomotion: with the most distant points—Eynsham in the north-eastern corner and Tetbury in the west—lying 20 miles as the crow flies from his hearth at South Marston, Williams was now operating close to his pedalling limit, a circumstance as determinant as any.

□ Williams himself employs this gloss: 'This was a pretty big work to undertake. The ground is about 50 miles long & 25 miles wide.' (Lecture notes, WSR0 2598/36) Leonard Clark's claim (p. 94) that the zone was later extended west to 'Chippenhams' and east to 'Wallingford' is unfounded both in record and in terms of what was practicable by bicycle.



‘Upper Thames’ as theatre of song collecting: how Williams extended his prior fieldwork patches (see p. 236) when he set out to find and record song. The boundary indicates his delimiting of the zone; the shaded section marks the areas where he did not, apparently, collect (that is, settlements not represented in the collection as it survives). The central theatre of operations shows locations where he found singers, those in red indicating no singer found.

PART III : ONE LAST GARNERING

*Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find;
knock, and it shall be opened unto you.*

Matthew 7:7

Williams's orienting postulates, though deliquescent, must none the less have been informed by certain urgencies: inclination towards the venerable means that he could not but be conscious of operating in death's ominous shadow; and coincidence with the war created a complicating circumstance. Was there a sense in which it was already too late? Did the military contest render the moment uniquely unpropitious (as he was later to proclaim)? The first is a cliché: gerontocentric leanings customarily, unthinkingly, built into endeavour of this kind decree that it is always—almost—too late; the war, by contrast, impinged in ways peculiar to the Alfredian condition.

So with the Grim Reaper grinning at his shoulder and the Dogs of War snapping at his heels, Alfred Williams pedalled boldly forth to recover what he believed (prematurely, as it happens) to be a species of rustic song teetering at the very brink of extinction. What he found was a great deal more than candle ends. Retrospectively, his strenuous, tenacious endeavours furnish a *de facto* terminus to the classic period of folk song collecting in England, effectively bringing to a close the phase inaugurated by Baring-Gould's no less zealous traipsings on the fringes of Dartmoor 30 years previously. With unfailing egregiousness, Williams joined the crusade at the very moment when events were dictating a suspension in the folk music revival: Sharp would soon relocate his energies to Kentucky, while others became entangled directly in the war.

§I (RE)VISITINGS: CHRONOLOGY / ITINERARY

Technologically, Williams the song hunter needed no more than the bicycle and notebook he was already adept in employing, though this new phase required the more intensive wielding of these rudimentary tools. Methodologically, he was unacquainted with principles of fieldwork now taken to be axiomatic: a conspicuous failure to inscribe his findings in time renders reconstruction of chronology and itinerary, ostensibly the most banal of exercises, a messy task for the detective. Precise or even approximate datings of movement, often only inferentially apparent, are fewer than a dozen, as the table on page 357 shows.

TRACES OF DATING IN ALFRED WILLIAMS'S SONG COLLECTING

DATE	SONG AND SOURCE	LOCATION / INFORMANT
'1914'	'Of all the Brave Birds' 'Folk Song and Locality', <i>Wiltshire Times</i> , 28 August 1926, p. 9	'3 points on Thames'
	'The Croppy Boy' 'Upper Thames Folk Songs', <i>Oxford Times</i> , 20 January 1928, p. 10	'at Filkins'
'1915'	'God sent for us the Sunday' (Gl 124) 'The Folk Carol in Wiltshire' <i>Wilts Gazette</i> , 29 December 1927, p. 7	Jane Ockwell, Poulton
'June 1915'	'The Seeds of Love' (Wt 372) Note on manuscript	Mrs Goodfield, Crudwell
14 Sept 1915	'Buttercup Joe' (Mi 540) Note on (submitted) manuscript	unspecified
c. Oct 1915	'Eynsham Poaching Song' (Ox 256) Note to 'Southrop Poaching Song' (Wt 347, WGS XII, 1 January 1916): 'When I first met with the following piece I imagined it might be of purely local origin and labelled it, in my mind, of that class. Two months ago, however, I found another song, or rather, the same song in a different guise, at Eynsham, near Oxford.'	Henry Leech, Eynsham
11 Dec 1915	'two pretty songs' Williams's letter of thanks	Mrs Phillips, Purton
29 Feb [1916]	'Turpin and the Lawyer' (Gl 94) Letter from informant enclosing text(s)	Herbert Gascoigne, Kemble
Early May 1916	Unspecified Williams's letter in reply to Mrs Field at Winson, 5 May 1916	'at Bibury'
28 May 1916	'Lass of Richmond Hill' (Ox 281) Letter accompanying submitted text	James Thorne, Langford
12 June 1916	Solicits song about 'wren' (<i>infra</i>)	Mrs Field, Winson
27 June 1916	Receipt of 'Richat & Robat' (Gl 167) Williams's letter to Mrs Field	Mrs Field, Winson
26 July 1916	Unspecified Williams's letter to Mrs Field	David Sawyer, Stratton St M (late Ogbourne St Andrew)
8 Aug 1916	Receipt of 'The Volunteer Maid'* & 'Old Mother Hodgkin' (<i>sic</i>) (Gl 166) * text not apparently extant	Mrs Field, Winson

These nugatory indices defy conclusion, though some of the documents incidentally supply engaging colour, as in James Thorne's letter (rendered as written):

Dear Sir sorry i was not at home when you called but i have wrote the song you wanted the same as i used to sing it hope you will get it alright what lovely weather we are having³⁶

Beyond that, two orders of extraneous dating by means *terminus post quem* are so approximate as to be of little moment. One is the exceptional circumstance of newspaper serialization partially co-extensive with fieldwork. Since, however, Williams had already amassed a year's texts before the serial began, date of publication is no necessary guide to date of noting, though it may be. (The notes to each text were, however, composed week by week.) The other results from the attentions of the Grim Reaper, of which Williams was so conscious: the ultimate case of *point-after-which-collecting-could-not-have-occurred* is furnished by death. Six informants are known to have expired during the fieldwork period (dates given are burials): Thomas King (Castle Eaton, Wilts: 4 texts) 31 March 1915; "Wassail" Harvey (Cricklade, Wilts: 21 texts) 27 August 1915; Henry Radband (Bampton, Oxon: 1 text) 29 November 1915; William Jefferies (Longcot, Berks: 7 texts) 22 January 1916; James Mander (Aldsworth, Glos: 1 text) 1 May 1916; and Richard Gardner (Hardwick, Oxon: 3 texts) 26 June 1916. Of these, the first two are the most pertinent, tending to confirm the view that Williams concentrated his efforts initially on north-east Wiltshire, part of his immediate neighbourhood and growing out of investigations for *Round About the Upper Thames* (both King and Harvey feature in that work). In each of these two cases, collecting must have occurred between the starting point (1914) and date either of text publication or singer demise. These are no more than narrowings down, in which the utility of the method, at best *grosso modo*, recedes to vanishing point.

If the calendar of Williams's wanderings remains unknowable, what intimations of itinerary survive, given that record of geographical sequence may obtain distinct from specified chronology? His delimiting of the collecting arena is, as we have seen, apparently very precise, though some blurring of edges is detectable on closer inspection. Did he then, within the fabled domain, conduct the work of scouring to a rigorous scheme? *Post hoc* he is, true to type, the very apostle of thoroughness:

it [the work of collecting] depends upon careful search and critical comparison; and it is only natural that that district which is the most methodically examined should yield the best results.³⁷

Operating from his native South Marston, he was perched, like some restless, obsessive spider, not at the edge but the very epicentre of this irregular web of his own spinning: 'Being situated in the centre of this area, I was able, by daily journeys, to visit every village';³⁸ 'I live in the centre of this area, and I reckoned to make at least five journeys a week.'³⁹

These useful avowals of frequency of expedition are not, alas, matched by any statement of geographical *modus operandi*. It seems likely that he began in the neighbouring villages of extreme north Wiltshire and pushed outwards from there. One glimpse, fleeting enough, of definite itinerary is confined to the final period of collecting, afforded by the sole surviving (part used) field notebook.⁴⁰ The book is inscribed 'Begun May 19th 1916', and though the entries are undated, they must necessarily occur in sequence of collecting. If each of the 34 entries were taken to correspond to one day's fieldwork, the document would cover about five weeks, extending perhaps to the end of June 1916. The topographic sequence, itself incomplete (12 notations have unspecified location), is this: ?—Bampton (Oxon) x2—Alvescot (Oxon)—Northmoor (Oxon)—Black Bourton (Oxon)—Fairford (Glos)—Bampton (Oxon)—?—Fairford (Glos)—?—Poulton (Glos)—?—Driffield (Glos)—?—Poulton (Glos) x2—?—?—Poulton (Glos)—Ampney Crucis (Glos)—?—Ampney Crucis (Glos)—Kempsford (Glos) x2—Meysey Hampton (Glos) x2—?—?—Ashton Keynes (Wilts)—?—Minety (Wilts)—?—Bampton (Oxon). If any 'pattern' is discernible here, it is that Williams was juggling three foyers in this period: a (not especially tight) cluster in west Oxfordshire, turning on Bampton; settlements along the Cirencester—Fairford axis; and bits of north Wiltshire, finally. (If unlocated items could be specified, the picture might of course appear less quirky.)

On this issue of itinerary, too, the *Standard* serialization may afford certain clues. In its detail, the same qualifications apply as for chronology: publication is no index of recent expedition. Locations featuring in the inaugural instalment,⁴¹ with distance in miles from South Marston, are: Stratton (Wilts) 2, Blunsdon (Wilts) 3, Watchfield (Berks) 3, Cricklade (Wilts) 6, Inglesham (Wilts) 6, Longcot (Berks) 6, Castle Eaton

(Wilts) 6, Ogbourne St Andrew (Wilts) 10, Southrop (Glos) 10, Eastleach (Glos) 11, Filkins (Oxon) 11. Thus communities from across the district are represented from the outset, though the mixture may confirm the view that initial emphasis was on neighbouring enclaves. This mode of publication does, however, influence the distribution issue in its broader outline. Introducing the series, Williams writes (war's interruption is taken up below):

I have not yet covered all the ground, though I hope to do so in the future, if circumstances permit. The eastern part of the field remains to be done. If the war had not broken out it would have been completed by now. As I have said, I hope to do it by and by.⁴²

Almost a year later, in his concluding remarks, Williams recalls that the serial had originally been planned for 'about six months' (until the end of March 1916):

The materials I continued to collect proved so abundant, however, and the songs that had been printed gave pleasure to so many readers—as is evidenced by the number of letters I have received from various parts, and also by expressions of pleasure made to me personally—that, with the collaboration of the Editor, I thought it advisable to carry on the publication a few months longer, during such time, in fact, that I should still be engaged in examining the villages in the area south of Cirencester, in which the *Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard* circulates. This I have now about completed. What remains to be discovered in the extreme south and east of the Upper Thames Valley might not have a similar interest for our readers, so that it is fitting we should now conclude our weekly instalments of the songs.⁴³

With the proviso that circulation of the *Standard* was (is) not confined to 'the villages in the area south of Cirencester', this statement bears importantly on the most prominent anomaly in the distribution of Williams's gleanings: neglect of the southernmost swath of the field. (See map, and p. 381 *infra*. Baldwin and Harker draw attention to this disparity,⁴⁴ though neither has any explanation to offer. Testing of this expedient trade-off—extension of the serial conditional upon serving a particular locale—against materials published shows high concentrations in May and early June 1916 of texts from Gloucestershire: instalments XXX–XXXII (13 and 20 May and 3 June) comprise 26 texts, of which all but one derive from in and around Bibury.⁴⁵)

This collecting focus is further reinforced in a private letter from Williams to Mrs

© The full breakdown of these 25 Gloucestershire texts is: Instalment XXX—Ablington 4, Arlington 3, Hatherop 1; Instalment XXXI—Arlington 2, Bibury 4, Aldsworth 2, Quenington 3; Instalment XXXII—Arlington 4, Bibury 1, Quenington 1. (Ablington and Arlington are hamlets of Bibury.) XXXII has a solitary text from Oxfordshire, making the total of 26.

Field at Winson at this time: 'I was at Bibury twice this week. I shall call at Winson one of these evenings.'⁴⁵ It seems, therefore, that these three selections, exceptionally, can be taken to represent newly collected materials.

We thus confront the unique prospect of a directing of endeavours towards one quarter steered, if not absolutely determined, by the exigencies of an extemporized mode of publication. This, in turn, in all probability brought about a postponement of exploration of the nether zone, terminal in the event. The extent of disparity between the *de jure* theatre of enquiry, as detailed in the previous section, and the *de facto* area becomes clear when rendered diagrammatically (see map). The qualification must, however, be made that Williams may have visited enclaves for which no record survives.

Notionally, the collecting act involves three components: location, informant and prized object. Exposition would ideally show how all three not merely coexist but interact (forms of correlation). Though this triad—geography-people-music (text)—is *stricto sensu* insecable, differing orders of primacy will inform endeavour: geographical spread; the prowess of individuals or groups; the musical object in itself (trophy). All are represented in Williams's discursive account, but the strongest indications are that unfolding fieldwork was driven by the song-as-trophy.

§2 FERRET-WORK: DYNAMICS OF PURSUIT

If there is little sense, then, that Williams was carrying into practice some topographically directed master plan, what was the dynamic driving his searches? Once set in train, any fieldwork project will tend to be self-fulfilling, acquiring a momentum of its own as one damned song/singer leads to another. What prevails is something more akin to nose-following, centred on informants, certainly, but impelled more urgently by the search for particular songs, those imperfectly recollected or merely rumoured on the *de facto* rustic grapevine. It is these fabled cases which lured him siren-like on, and to which he adverts (and what always signifies?) in the headnotes:

I first heard of the song at South Marston, in this way. I was talking to an old villager, aged ninety[-five], and he told me his father, among others, sang a piece entitled "One God made us all." I immediately began to inquire for it, and within a week discovered it ~~in two places — near~~ [at] Brize Norton, and at Bampton.⁴⁶

The first recollection I have of the following song is that of having seen a brief quotation of it in Akerman's "Wiltshire Tales," some years ago. I believe Akerman heard it at Hihgworth [*sic*]. By chance I stumbled upon the piece at Blunsdon, where it was still remembered by a dear and cultured old woman, Mrs [named] Hancock, who told me she learnt it of her father, when a girl. ~~I was quite six months in getting the song, as my informant was so very forgetful, and could only tell me two or three lines at a time. In the end I obtained it complete, with the exception of the first two lines of the "warning". I had decided that I should not get them, but by and by I called to see another dear old woman, also considerably over eighty, named Dickson, of Brinkworth, and the first thing she told me was the warning verse of "The Gamekeeper"—she had forgotten everything else!~~ The [A] Brinkworth version had in the fourth verse—"With her baby sprawling in her arms."⁴⁷

I, too, have chased the Buffalo, or, at least, the song; I have been at some pains to secure it. I first heard of it at Ogbourne; from there I traced it to Eynsham, near Oxford. Months of inquiry failed to elicit its whereabouts. By and by, however, I heard a little more of it at Aldsworth, and Bibury, and finally discovered it entire at Brinkworth, near Malmesbury.⁴⁸

In these passing insights into fieldwork-in-progress we witness, projected into a new province, the drivenness, the acharnement so emblematic of the Alfredian ethos (set out in Chapter III), the most compelling expression of which occurs in the note to 'When Morning stands on tip-toe' where, taken by the literary quality of the opening figure, the poet-collector writes: 'I was some time in obtaining the words after I had heard of the song, but those first two lines haunted me, and I could not rest till I had found the piece.'⁴⁹ Here, in this fetish of the rare specimen, the autodidact-scribbler reveals himself as collector, in all the monomaniacal charge with which that term resonates.

In addition to one-off cases, Williams learned, as his corpus took shape, to enquire after certain types of song, as for instance glees:

there were at one time a large number of good glees north of the Thames. But *though I repeatedly asked for them* I found none in Wiltshire except at Castle Eaton, Marston Meysey and Latton.⁵⁰

He found, moreover, that this procedure might correlate with an informant subgroup, as in an assiduous courting of the distaff side, which he held to be musically privileged:

I have never omitted an opportunity of searching for the women's songs, where I suspected any to exist, and I was never disappointed with anything I obtained as the result of such inquiries.⁵¹

A further, notable variant of these song-singer correlations is the observation that he used a core of venerable singers as touchstones against whom to check off newly noted texts, suggesting a dialectical rather than purely linear-radial approach:

I used frequently to re-visit my friends, the best singers, and tell them of all the songs I had heard on purpose to note how general the knowledge of such pieces might have been and—to mention two such men, David Sawyer, formerly of Ogbourne, Wilts and Charles Tanner, the aged morris dancer of Bampton, Oxon (both now deceased)—I can honestly say that they were acquainted with, though they did not know completely, almost every song that I collected.⁵²

This avowal potentially illuminates Williams's common practice of assembling composite texts (see Appendix I), a large number of which feature Elijah Iles and David Sawyer. An example involving the latter is 'Creeping Jane':

Though this piece was once fairly well known I could only obtain the copy in parts, and with great difficulty. I first heard it at Castle Eaton. Old Thomas King, who was nearly a hundred, told me several verses; in time I obtained the remainder of David Sawyer, the sheep-shearer.⁵³

Closer scrutiny reveals glimmerings of design amid the serendipity; evidently, method might emerge organically if it did not obtain *ab initio*.

§3 PEOPLE

Music, manifestly, is not separable from its human bearers: textual *rarae aves* apart, the conduct of fieldwork turns signally on the enquirer's *savoir-faire* in seeking out and connecting with people. Confronted with this imperative, Williams declined significantly to make use of two stock mechanisms. His rejection of the network of country parsons, mobilized by Sharp for example, is evident from a cryptic notation in the lecture notes: 'People thought I ought to ask the Parson and the School-master ... They didn't know'.⁵⁴ The statutory anomaly here is that he noted a song from Miss [Annie] Cross, the schoolmistress at South Marston. More surprisingly, he also declined apparently to trawl the workhouses of his district, ready-made depositories of the archaic worked by virtually all collectors in the period.⁵⁵

© This neglect is despite an awareness of the pathos contained within these forbidding walls which Williams exhibits in chapter six of *A Wiltshire Village* (devoted to the union workhouse at Stratton St Margaret, adjoining South Marston). Within, or at the periphery of, his Upper Thames there were institutions at Faringdon, Hungerford and Wantage in Berkshire, Cirencester and Northleach in Gloucestershire, Witney in Oxfordshire, and Marlborough, Purton and Stratton St Margaret in Wiltshire. Of these, Sharp himself had found singers at Cirencester, Witney and Marlborough—see table at p. 383.

Here, perhaps, we can detect the seasoned, not to say prickly, rural fieldworker employing proven procedures in which the patronage of parsons and schoolmasters had no place. In seeking in order to find, Williams discovered that, as with the pursuit of particular songs, he could cling productively to a grapevine of singers:

By careful inquiries I got to know all the singers in the next village before I came to it, so I knew who [*sic*] to ask for when I arrived.⁵⁵

It is left to Henry Byett to supply elaboration on the cast of these ‘inquiries’:

His method of collection was to accost any likely-looking old man or old lady, make his quest known, and, if they were themselves unable to contribute a song, they could generally refer him to someone who knew one or quite a repertoire.⁵⁶

Interestingly, Williams’s breezy remark, spun out by Byett, provides an *aperçu* incidental to the principal point, qualifying the observation that music-making had by this period receded from easy earshot: that the condition of singer (distinct, notionally, from those who merely sing) conferred a definite parochial prestige, residual conceivably by this stage but sufficiently pronounced to assist the prosecution of musical ferret-work. Byett’s vignette, furthermore, of the determined collector trusting to his powers of ‘accosting’ on the ground fits with the picture sketched above. The workings of this *ad hoc* dynamic of referral-by-reputation, dependent by definition on the constricted conditions of village communities, can best be shown by inference from exceptional cases. The unearthing of singers in the peripheral market towns of Tetbury (Glos) and Witney (Oxon), ‘Mrs Russell’ and ‘Mrs Rowles’ respectively, cannot plausibly have been the outcome of ‘careful inquiries’ in those places. Williams acknowledges Mrs Russell as being ‘late of Crudwell’,⁵⁷ a Wiltshire village where he found a number of singers and, presumably, secured the Tetbury lead. There is a little more information to go on in the case of Mrs Rowles, supplied by Williams in his headnote to ‘The Buxom Blade’:

This song was formerly popular in and around Marston Meysey, where it was sung by an old carter named Barrett, of whose daughter, Mrs Rowles, Bridge-street, Witney, I obtained the copy.⁵⁸

Stock enquiry in a village directs the collector to a migrant family member who would not otherwise have been located. (In these instances, Williams effectively found himself beating the path of small scale urban migration.)

There are further variants on this effect of providential encounter. Williams cannot, for example, have chanced upon Mrs Sessions at East Hendred (Berks, now Oxon), well beyond the confines of a district to which he otherwise strictly adheres. The most extraordinary connection, however, occurred in May 1916 at Winson, where Mrs Elizabeth Field (née Davis) proved to be David Sawyer's niece. Her mother, Sawyer's sister, was also a singer, by then antique and living at Theale.

Fancy David Sawyer having a sister! I often see him. I have spent many hours with him and Granny. Of course, we talk of many things, and David has told me a good deal about his life and affairs, but he has never told me of his sister. I must mention her to him when next I see him.⁵⁹

Diligent as ever, Williams duly pursued this lead in the relentless search for further songs, taking the substantial distance involved in his considerable stride:

I saw her last Thursday. I had to go to Reading, so I cycled back the Newbury way and called at Theale. I soon found her. She seemed fairly well, though she had been very middling. She is very much like David Sawyer. She told me 'Lord Thomas', you have a word or two which are better, however: I expect her memory failed her a little; but my call was so sudden.⁶⁰

Thus, although the quest necessarily entails a specialized form of fieldwork, hints are few that Williams deployed any more concerted methodological apparatus in these resolute rummagings than in his previous investigations: empirical persistence clearly prevailed over *a priori* design, leading to an acquired dynamic of the chase. His endeavours are certainly not exceptional in being substantially shaped by vicissitude, but the detail is, customarily, idiosyncratic. In that all pursuit is inherently purposive, however, some extemporized calculations of mind must have obtained. To these shadowy ruminations we cannot, now, hope to be party. What is not in doubt is that Williams enjoyed a knack in his informant relations, born of partisan affinity and long acquaintance with country people.

SELF-COLLECTING INFORMANTS, AND PROXY COLLECTORS

Although Williams makes a particular virtue of subjecting all items in his collection to the scrutiny of his own ears, a larger proportion of texts than he conceded—'out of the six hundred I have all but about two dozen were given me orally'⁶¹—are noted in a foreign hand. These submitted texts divide into two kinds:

1° those prompted by newspaper serialization (readers were actively invited to respond—‘Mr Williams will be glad to hear of any folk songs not already obtained by him provided they are known within the limits mentioned in his introductory chapter’⁶²—which must have resulted in some texts being submitted.)

2° those prompted by fieldwork, of two orders: i) singers writing out their own texts as the result of a visit; ii) those informants carrying out further notation on his behalf. There is some indication that Williams encouraged this proxy collecting, enlisting confederates where appropriate, though the instance is very restricted.

The usual lack of record makes it hard in practice to distinguish the two types.

1 A ‘Mr Long’ of Acton Turville (then Glos, now Avon) contributed ‘The Jobbing Mason’ (Gl 32). Frederick Newman of Cold Aston (Glos) contributed Arthur O’Bradley (Gl 68)—both are located well beyond the collecting zone as mapped. Mrs Brown of Colesbourne, ‘The Snail’ (Gl 69) is definitely a *Standard* submission.

2 i) To Henry Byett (no details available on ‘Mr Selby’ or the songs in question):

I heard from Mr Selby a week or so ago, and he sent me two songs; unfortunately—or should I say fortunately?—I had them both. I wrote to him and thanked him warmly for so very kindly writing them out; they were both very old songs.⁶³

A series of letters to Mrs Field at Winson:

I am sending you an envelope, in order that you may forward me the song about the wren ... If you think of any other piece ... I should be glad of any fragment of a good song.

She had sent him ‘The Volunteer Maid’ and ‘Old Mother Hodgkin’:

PS If you should think of another old piece, I should always be glad to have it at any time.⁶⁴

James Thorne at Langford, out when called, forwarded his text (Ox 281), *supra*.

ii) Letter to Mrs Phillips at Purton, Wilts.⁶⁵ She had sent him ‘two pretty songs’, and most of ‘Still the laurel wear’. ‘If you can think of any more will you please jot it down for me?’ he requested. She then noted ‘An Acre of Land’ (Wt 479) on his behalf from a Mrs Hedges in the village. Also letter from Herbert Gascoigne at Kemble (p. 139 *supra*) enclosing ‘Turpin and the Lawyer’ (Gl 94) and fragments of ‘I was single Oh then’ (prompted by *Standard* serial) and ‘The Green mossy banks of the Dee’.

You say you are not satisfied with the Kemble Folk Songs. Unfortunately you came at a period when the old man who used to sing them had passed away. If I had only known I could have collected quite a nice few.⁶⁶

§4 MANŒUVRINGS: COLLECTOR AS PSYCHOLOGIST (AND TROPHY HUNTER)

More than merely an uncompromising cyclist, Williams needed to deploy a certain intrepidity in his dealings with the rustics who were his informants, an engaging instance of which concerns “Wassail” Harvey at Cricklade, a champion songster:

This old piece I also obtained of the late “Wassail” Harvey, of Cricklade. He died recently in his ninetieth year. I was a long time in securing any of his songs; he appeared to have forgotten them and was very infirm. Happening to look in upon him in his tiny cottage one wet night in mid-winter, I found him possessed of a very severe cold, and gasping for breath. Thereupon I went to the inn, fetched a little rum, and insisted upon his taking a hot glass immediately. The result was magical. After expressing gratitude he commenced to sing in a wonderfully deep tone of voice, that surprised me, and quite startled his old wife; she said he had not sung like that for fifty years. After that I saw the old man frequently till the time of his death, and we had many musical afternoons and evenings together. He was possessed of much quaint lore and useful knowledge.⁶⁷

Odd instances aside, the particularity of countless transactive hours—collector genially machinating, informant bemused and flattered?—goes unchronicled. The Essay paragraph addressing the point is pitched in customarily general terms.

A countryman never sings to a stranger. First win his heart and confidence before you can expect a song from him. And this requires time and effort on your part. ... A villager seldom, if ever, offers you a song. You must ask him for it. You will be sure to get a negative reply at the outset. And blunt questions and imperative requests will never succeed. The manner of asking needs to be cultivated to such a point as to be of the nature of an *fine art*. I have sometimes been forced to spend several hours of manœuvring with people before I succeeded in tapping their store of folk-songs. ~~I have talked subtly on almost every conceivable subject, enticing and suggesting, and artfully working round to the crucial point.~~ And sometimes I have had to entreat, and almost to implore; *but I have never once absolutely failed to obtain a song from an individual after I had learned that he was possessed of some.* Once or twice I have had to buy a song outright, as though it had been a saucepan or kettle. Such as require you to do this usually have a highly exaggerated idea as to the value of their pieces. The great majority, however, when once you have crept into favour with them, give you the songs freely, with apologies for their rudeness. They are surprised that you should discover yourself to be interested in such a thing as a country ballad, and I have more than once been reminded that “only fools and fiddlers learn old songs”.⁶⁸

It is left, once more, to Henry Byett to supply a snippet suggesting one of the levers Williams may have employed in prising open his object:

When he [Williams] suggested to the singers that certain words might have been as written by Burns, they hotly resented any such suggestion, and contended that they were as they had sung them.⁶⁹

Undoubtedly, Williams possessed an adroitness in securing the confidence of his singers: an awkward cove who could turn on the charm when it suited him. His eagerness, however, to parade a prized capacity to beguile, to carry off patient hearth-side negotiations, rather runs away with him in the passage above as he avows occasional recourse to sordid purchase: emblematic, in that it sits uneasily with protestations of integrity, of what amounts to a form of principled inveigling. The question of the mediator's relation to her informants—the pact of trust, 'integrity'—was certainly one which exercised him, bound up with the urge to claim high ground based on social propinquity (more problematic than he cares to suggest: Chapter VI.1). This ostensibly gave him a certain edge, though he may not have had things all his own way. Instinctively, the competitor—in evidence in this passage, the hunter who always bags his prey, 'I have never once absolutely failed to obtain a song'—will be disinclined to register his failures, the sole exception being Gabriel Zillard, fabled champion of the singing contest: 'by reason of his infirmity, I was unable to obtain possession of any [songs].'⁷⁰ The fieldwork blanks thus translate into documentary blanks, an effect of the prisonhouse of unique testimony.⁷¹

Benevolent sightings of rustics in the Alfredian mirror provide no sense of what they made of him. (He serves up the merest snippets, what he is comfortable for the reader to know. We might well wonder whether Williams was an inhibiting presence in the rustic abode, as for example at the Christmas party *chez* Iles recounted in the final chapter of *Round About the Upper Thames*.) Perhaps only in the case of Shadrach Haydon at Bampton, visited by both Williams and Sharp, might it be possible to detect a degree of insuccess by implication. If Sharp's yield was 27 songs, why did Williams, with much readier access to Bampton, manage no more than nine? This meagre tally, coupled with a lack of the fond personal remarks accorded his other big singers, suggests that relations were less than fully fraternal. (The parallel case

⁷⁰ Did Williams ever encounter outright hostility to his enquiries? Byett reports this case presumably derived from the man himself, though not apropos song collecting: 'I may be allowed to digress here for one moment to mention that the author—referring to Hannington—said he had no desire ever to go there again, as he had there met with very discourteous treatment. The Vicar of that day refused to lend him the key of the church to view the interior. Also, on making a request of the then occupier of Hannington Hall for permission to see this fine Elizabethan specimen of architecture, the reply he received was: "No. Get right out of the village. I have read your writings, and don't want you here, writing about my house and the village."' (*Life*, p. 60)

of Charles Tanner, also visited by both collectors, is inversely complementary: Sharp has half a dozen songs where Williams has 22, as well as notable expressions of friendship, affirming the link between personal relations and musical yield.)

§5 CYCLIST, TRAMP, SPY (LIFE IN THE SADDLE)

To gloss Williams's relations with his informants in these calculating, extractionist terms is to traduce one defining feature of his intervention: the great affection he conveys for his singers as people. This, distinctly, is his strong suit, reflected in an expressive sincerity contrasting with the labouring which often mars his writings:

It is charming to sit with many of these old rustics and to hear them sing their songs. They discover the most delightful natures and qualities. This one is sweetly shy; the voice of that one trembles and quivers with nervousness of a different order. Another receives you into his confidence straightway, and, with smiles and gentle simplicity, lavishes the wealth of his muse and memory upon you. What a sweet disposition this one has, and how naive, artless, and innocent is the behaviour of that one! They are all very primitive. They are fresh and unspoiled, born of the earth, beautiful children of nature, young all their lives, changeless under hardships, afflictions, and other adversities.⁷¹

Here the apologist speaks in tones of greatest conviction. The championing of bucolic wisdom, made plain in the prose works (Chapter III.3 'Threnos'), he extends now into the musical realm. Of 'the villager in days past' he writes:

If he had not learning he had wit. Though he was not educated, he possessed much useful knowledge, and he was wise. Many a time, after an old countryman has entertained me for several hours by telling me songs, and intelligently discussing a host of things connected with his life and work, he has apologetically explained that he was no scholar—he had never been to school and so could not read or write. And I have told him to stop talking such nonsense, and to think of himself as one of the best, as indeed he was, whether he considered himself as such or not.⁷²

These synthetic effusions are fleshed out in a note to 'The Bold Fisherman':

I have heard of this piece in several quarters of the Thames Valley. I obtained my first copy of "Wassail" Harvey, Cricklade, and a slightly better version, given below, of Mrs Sarah Calcott, Northmoor, Oxon. Northmoor is a lonely little village on the banks of the Thames between Standlake and Oxford. The road is broken by the river, which must be crossed by ferry to Bablock Hythe and Appleton. The old woman, who lives alone, sang me several songs, including *Lord Bateman*, while her pet jackdaw sat upon the arm of the chair in the firelight. At the same time, though extremely poor, she insisted upon my taking tea with her, and filled my pockets with choicest apples to eat on the way home.⁷³

He communicates, moreover, an almost schoolboy enthusiasm in his prospecting, all of a piece with the hallmark thralldom displayed as autodidact and naturalist. If disillusionment later takes hold, a characteristic wonderment marks his contemplation of convergence of temperament and song type during the period of pursuit:

As soon as I get into contact with a new singer I begin to be anxious to know what kind of songs he is about to discover to me. There is real excitement in it. It is exactly like waiting for the development of a negative plate in the photographic dark room. Will it develop? And what will it be like? The uncertainty is tantalising. It is no use being impatient. As soon as the dark patches and outlines appear in the chemical bath you have an idea of what the photograph will be. And before a person has finished telling me his first song I have been able to estimate his nature and character and to take a look into the recesses of his heart and soul.⁷⁴

This scramble to catch a fading whisper in the throats of the venerable men (and women) of the Upper Thames importantly enacted a personal argosy as much as it secured a corpus of record for eager posterity:

It has been a labour of love to me, and I trust that others will derive some amount of pleasure from a perusal of the pieces. ... some of the pleasure I have taken in collecting and preserving them [the songs] has been shared by numerous others.⁷⁵

the little I did gave me much pleasure, and was a satisfaction in itself.⁷⁶

There is more than a hint that Williams's hallmark enthusiasm was as much for the pleasures of pursuit as for the songs themselves. He could scarcely have chanced upon a project better calculated to satisfy the amalgam of his predilections: a need to keep on the move, a yearning for the open air, inveterate curiosity. Aside from a brief mention to Fitzmaurice cited in the opening section, the first overt reference to song collecting, following release from employment, perfectly catches the tone:

I am glad to say I am much better than I was in the autumn—the cold weather always suits me better than heat or mild spells. ... I find I have as many preoccupations now, or rather more, and less actual leisure than when I was at Swindon. I have recently been travelling far on my cycle, however, and I try to cover the routes week by week, getting songs and other information and this keeps me very busy.⁷⁷

A year later, the same pace was being sustained, health *ennuis* notwithstanding:

I have been very busy scouring the ground, village by village. It is a long job, but I am getting on very well. ... I had a bad month in November, terrible dyspepsia all the time. That is better but I have a severe cold at present.⁷⁸

Most revealing of the extent to which the work monopolized his attention is this line to Henry Byett. In the summer of 1916 he was evidently in full flight:

I have been very very busy up till now, and have not got to Ferndale Road, but I will try to do so soon. The Folk Songs require all available time I can give.⁷⁹

Retrospectively, the memory of these strenuous, single-minded cyclings acquired an edge of repentance (to his wife), modulating to grievance (to the poet Dowsing):

I shan't be away from home so much song-getting, etc, as I was before I joined the Army, but when the spring comes we must try and have an [*sic*] holiday together.⁸⁰

I have a book of Folk Songs which I collected on [*sic*?] the Upper Thames area and I think I shall try and get them off my hands next year, if I can, and try something else afterwards. For the amount of work I put into this, in order to save some very interesting and valuable materials from perishing, I ought to have got support.⁸¹

Whatever the exact chronology and mechanics of his movements, or extractive procedures brought to bear, Williams knew the gratifications and impediments of the chase: there were manifold, redolent experiences on the road of which his literary talents are employed to supply vivid account. Readers are permitted a wry smile at the travesties to which popular suspicion will give rise—'I have several times been taken for a tramp, and also for a German spy'⁸²—but what most distinguishes this epoch is its dominantly noctivagant character, a season of pedalling in the dark:

The greater part of the work of collecting the songs must be done at night, and winter is the best time, as the men are then free from their labours after tea. This necessitates some amount of hardship, for one must be prepared to face all kinds of weather, and to go long distances.⁸³

Night time was best, as then the men were home from work; you could only see the very aged during the day.⁸⁴

For all his expedient (autodidactic) propensity to lucubration, Alfred Williams was not by disposition especially nocturnal. Yet through the waxing and waning of perhaps 20 moons, he savoured the company of the creatures of the night: dizzying hours in the saddle; a hyperbolic feat of cycling in all winds and weathers; an odd, lonely odyssey the strenuous particularity of which is scarcely imaginable. Even in these times of baroque, englobing technology, the Upper Thames Valley can be an eerie landscape on a dark winter's night: the crossing at Radcot, or negotiating the

slender road that joins Lechlade to Clanfield past the numinous turn for Kelmescot, often shrouded in patches of fog drifting across from the unsleeping river.

In frost and snow, fogs, rain, and on sultry summer nights I have journeyed along the dark roads, and climbed the steep hills bordering the valley, with the bats, the owls, the hares, and the foxes. I have faced the Thames' floods in almost inky blackness upon unknown roads and lanes, and shivered in the numbing cold of the damp mists exhaled by the river in the late autumn and winter months. Once, during a severe flood, following an extraordinarily rapid rise of water, I found myself immersed to the waist, in Stygian darkness, and miles from any town or village; I have often scrambled along the banks in the blackness above the roaring brooks to escape a wetting. In the spring I have loitered on my return, evening after evening, till past midnight, listening to the nightingale under the pure air and clear skies of the Cotswolds. Later in the summer, at the same hour, I have sat in the grass by the roadside amid the beautiful glow-worms, while the air was warm and fragrant with the delicious scents of the newly made hay. I have watched the late moon rise, now from behind the Cotswolds, and now above the rolling chalk downs of Berkshire, south of the White Horse; and I have looked upon its reflection at midnight in the calm river, now from Swinford, now from New Bridge or Radcot, and again from the Ha'penny Bridge at Lechlade, or at Castle Eaton.⁸⁵

Here, clearly, is communion expressed as quiet rhapsody: an inspiring consummation of relations of self and locality. The improvised odyssey had permitted a recruiting of physical forces, certainly, but it described more decisively a path of spiritual renewal, the glad recovery of optimism. Indisputably the season marked him, a voyage of (self)discovery in which 'his' *terra* was finally rendered fully *cognita*, dependent for its full realisation on the keener probing song collecting called forth. He would never again declare affiliation with the district in terms of such elation.

Then, suddenly, it all came to an end.



PART IV : THE KING'S SHILLING

Here, mower, take my shiners bright,
 You'll prove a hero in the fight
Folk Songs of the Upper Thames

The contextual dimension glaringly absent from discussion thus far is, of course, the war in all its mounting enormity. As, by some singular chance, Williams embarked on song collecting at the very moment when the nation was striving to beat its ploughshares into swords, a kind of incidental counterpointing comes into play, turning at length to causal convergence in bringing about an abandonment of fieldwork. Williams is certainly at pains to proclaim the turn of events as a substantial impediment to his pursuit of song, though in somewhat cryptic manner:

the countryside was stirred with the gigantic struggle that developed in France and elsewhere, and drew away so many of the youths of our local towns and villages. ... Really, the work could not have been undertaken at a more inopportune moment; and the wonder is, not that I did not obtain better results, but that I succeeded in getting what materials I did.⁸⁶

In that his informants were elderly denizens of the countryside, that section of the population least actively caught up in the mighty mobilization, protestations of supreme inopportuneness seem forced. The impression created here (1926) is that, *post hoc*, Williams is adducing the war in mitigation of perceived flaws in his work: specifically, of having noted no music (this is discussed in Chapter VI); generally, that he did well in the circumstances.

Where the war evidently did impinge was in strictly personal terms. The ruined condition of his health, which had forced his departure from employment in the first place, consigned Williams's patriotic contribution initially to sub-jingoistic verse (which he later regretted on strictly literary grounds) published in the local press. This incapacity to serve jarred with an acute sense of duty to occasion distinct unease, to which he gives epistolary voice enlistment once secured. Repeated mordant, not to say exultant, declarations convey his civic relief, the most unbuttoned instance of which is to his wife during the first few weeks of military life:

As I told you, they all honour us in khaki. I know, and you know, that not all people see as I do, but this I do most clearly see, and certainly understand, that it is absolutely necessary that I should do as I am doing, and be prepared to share danger, and not shirk my duty, and be branded as a coward. I am a volunteer, and don't intend to conceal the fact.⁸⁷

The state of his constitution he still deemed a hindrance to enlistment well into 1915, however, as he told Byett, serving with the Royal Army Medical Corps:

I honour you for your pluck. I might have said courage, but pluck will do as well. If I were sure of my stomach I should enlist into something or other. But I really do not feel able to maintain any efforts. One day I feel rather fit and for the next few days following I am very "shaky". I have no stability.⁸⁸

And all the while he kept on pedalling ... The impression Williams conveys here—that he was prevented from joining the colours by poor health, and engaged in song collecting to fill the time—is tempered by a later avowal to Byett:

I would not have missed it for anything. I wish I had been in before but it was not my fault. But I was held back to some extent by my literary work—the Folk Song collecting.⁸⁹

In this scheme of things, fieldwork more evidently conflicts with the warrior urge. Whatever the case, it emerges that these ostensibly disparate issues—the recovery of rustic song and the call to arms—had become oddly entwined.

A recruitment document issued at Swindon on 10 December 1915, surviving in the Williams Collection, appears to prove that he had sought, unsuccessfully, to enlist: 'This is to certify that ... has presented himself for enlistment and was found to be medically unfit.'⁹⁰ His act is qualified, however, by the fact that it relates almost certainly to attestation under the Derby scheme instigated in the autumn of 1915.⁹¹

This official rejection at least legitimated his civilian condition, if it did not salve his conscience. The exact circumstances in which he found himself called to the colours are not recorded, but it was not entirely unexpected: in June 1916 he hopes to call on Mrs Field's mother 'if I am not called up: everything is very uncertain.'⁹¹ A blue attestation form (B.2512A) dated 30 August 1916 announces: 'Notice to be given to a Man at the time of his offering to join the Army.'⁹² (Revealing of his self-conception, Williams is entered, under 'trade or calling', as 'Forgeman and

⁸⁸ 'A last attempt to preserve voluntarism was made when Lord Derby was made Director-General of Recruiting in October 1915, his principal task being to administer a scheme under which all men between 18 and 41 were asked to attest their willingness to serve when called.' Peter Simkins, 'The Four Armies 1914-1918', in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the British Army* (Oxford, 1994), p. 257. A further document, specifying the nature of Williams's disqualifying complaint, issued along with an exempting 'armlet', does not appear to survive. These matters resurfaced in letters to his wife from India: 'I'm losing a rupee a week [1/4] because I cannot prove that I attested early. Do you remember when I got my armlet? At the same time I had a blue warrant or certificate. Please have a good look for it and send it on then I can get my extra rupee. It's a sad loss. This is called proficiency pay, 2 years from the date of attestation.' 'The paper is the wrong one, dear. There was a blue paper, similar to the one you sent, with the nature of my complaint upon it, bearing also the Officer's signature (who was in charge of the recruiting station). This was in addition to the white card. I never destroyed that. But I'm writing to the Swindon Recruiting Station, and asking for the proof of my attestation then, as I don't see losing 30/- or 40/- on account of that.' (Letters to Mary Williams, 30 March and 26 April 1918—both at WSRO 2598/64.)

Literature'.) From this time dates his effective enlistment, though he was not to be formally called up until November 3rd of that year.

These bureaucratic vagaries bear directly on Williams's song activities in bringing down the curtain, unceremoniously. As late as August 1916, he was still in full flow: announcing to Mrs Field the winding up of the *Standard* serial at the end of the month, he goes on, 'I shall be still collecting yet, however, as I have much ground to cover.'⁹³ In the event, the end of press publication and the end of fieldwork were to coincide, though that was evidently not the intention. Given that his departure did not occur until November, September and October 1916 remain unaccounted for, in something of a biographical lacuna. (No correspondence, for example, is extant for this period.) If Williams knew by early September that call-up was imminent, it seems likely that these two months were occupied with preparations for his looming absence. There is certainly no indication of any further song collecting.

BALANCE SHEET: MONTHS OCCUPIED / MILES CYCLED / TEXTS RECOVERED

The closure this peripeteia effected, circumstantially, invites a taking of stock. How much time *in toto* had been taken up by song work? What was the total distance cycled? What was the final tally of texts? All three are mired in uncertainty.

Williams himself puts the collecting period at 19 months.⁹⁴ Accepting, however, that he had begun the work by October 1914 at the latest (Part I, *supra*), and continued at least until the end of August 1916, 23 months (100 weeks) seems more plausible. The time element is central to testing of the more problematic matter of ground covered, which Williams famously proclaims to have been 'more than 13,000 miles'.⁹⁵ This arresting, and suitably quirky, figure is much quoted: it has hardened into a component of Williams mythology, in so far as such a thing can be said to obtain, the very stuff of cliché.⁹⁶ Yet, oddly, no one has troubled to call into question how it came to be computed, given that he was unlikely to have been counting.

What kind of daily distances was Williams covering? The spectrum runs from 20 miles as the crow flies (Eynsham, for example, to the north east, making a round trip of 40 miles), reducing to zero for singers found in South Marston. From this a

⁹³ Most of the commentators cite the figure at some point: Byett, p. 66; Sanderson, Preface to reprint of *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, p. vi; Wood, *Oxford Mail*, 10 December 1970, p. 6; Harker, *Fakesong*, p.216; Davis (ed.), *Round About Middle Thames*, p. 18; Palmer, *The Folklore of Gloucestershire*, p. 246. Clark, p. 93, cites an interim figure of 7,000 miles, which Clissold (*Folk Music Journal Symposium*, p. 295) oddly takes to be final. (Flaubert's version—entry in an updated *Dictionary of Clichés*—would read: Williams, Alfred: the man who cycled 13,000 miles to collect folk songs.)

median daily jaunt of 20–25 miles might be posited.⁹⁵ A rudimentary calculus can be constructed from these postulates, proceeding from the fabled final figure of 13,000 miles, to give the following notional weekly and daily averages:

19 months: 82 weeks @ 158 miles per week
 (week of 5 days = 31 miles *per diem*; 6 days = 26 mpd; 7 days = 23 mpd)
 23 months: 100 weeks @ 130 miles per week
 (week of 5 days = 26 miles *per diem*; 6 days = 22 mpd; 7 days = 19 mpd)

Thus a total span of 23 months (supposing five outings per week, as he states *supra* p. 359) yields a figure nearest to the postulated mean.

The issue is given a revealing twist by Williams's original projection of distance:

Some idea of the amount of travel necessary to the work may be gathered from the fact that, from where I am situated, I cannot complete the examination of the Upper Thames Valley without covering at least 25,000 miles; I have already traversed more than half this distance.⁹⁶

At this point—late August 1916—it is abundantly clear that he regarded his fieldwork as anything but complete, reinforcing comments to similar effect already cited. In January 1916, he had estimated to William Dowsing at Sheffield a further two years of collecting,⁹⁷ and on 7 December 1915 wrote to the Rev Goddard: 'The Folk Songs will be published in due course, but I have more than a year's work to do yet—in collecting them.'⁹⁸ The fact that many of these remarks occur in the Conclusion to the newspaper series confirms the thesis that, right up to the end of August 1916, Williams was unaware that his number was about to be called.

SONG TALLY The Conclusion also furnishes a final intimation of unfinished business in the form of musical (textual) yield. Announcing his present tally of songs to stand at 'more than 600', Williams writes:

I hope and expect to obtain an additional hundred or so before I have finished the work of examining all the villages, though that is a matter of some speculation.⁹⁹

He twice, as late as the mid-1920s, repeats this figure of 600,¹⁰⁰ oddly in that the extant collection stands c. 750, with a number known to have been lost (Chapter I). Byett's story seems nearer the mark: 'I remember the author telling me, some time before he had ceased to collect, that he had already acquired over 800 [texts].'¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ The more distant enclaves of Acton Turville and Cold Aston represent, of course, corresponding informants not visits. Byett recalls, apropos payment for songs printed in the *Standard*, an unspecified 70-mile round trip (p. 64); and there was a visit, as have seen, to Mrs Field's mother at Theale—but these are exceptional instances.

The corollary to this sense of incompleteness is the intention, present strongly at the start of military service, to resume the work of song collecting once he had returned from the war:

I often think of you all and your beautiful villages. Of course I miss not being near our Upper Thames, but I hope to return and finish my job.¹⁰²

As the months passed, however, military moves and overseas postings fed his relentless curiosity with fresh milieux and attendant literary schemes. Despite warm enquiries after favoured informants in letters from the Army, Williams's ardour for a return to the musical field had, by the time he regained the Upper Thames at the end of 1919, properly abated. At issue, customarily, is the gloss he elects to place on this mutation for public consumption:

I had hoped immediately to resume the work I had relinquished on entering the Army, but circumstances rendered that out of the question.¹⁰³

The essentially dismissive cast of this account he elaborates upon twice in his writings of the mid-1920s:

In 1920, when I returned (from India) I was able to realise how fortunate I had been in my haste to gather materials. Late as I had been in the field, I had saved much; now it would have been impossible. All my oldest and best singers were dead; their ages had ranged from eighty to one hundred years. We know that atmosphere of the early post-war days—the disappointment and despair of those whose interest lay in non-material things. To a great extent that has passed. We have time now to appreciate what has been done in this direction; but further collection is hopeless, because so many new interests have appeared on the scene, and the human repositories of the folk songs have died out.

I hoped to carry on again when I got home. But oh dear! what a condition the country was in! It was impossible. And I found the greater part of my old men were dead. I saw that I was lucky to do what I did before I joined up: it could not have been done afterwards.¹⁰⁴

The first passage above signals, importantly, a revalorizing of materials gathered. Although as early as 1915 Williams had expressed 'surprise' that so much had been recovered,¹⁰⁵ he still looked forward to further gleaning. Ten years later, however, he views the whole episode as closed. This clearly marks a stage in his thinking. He now views his haul not as a task to be completed but as the congratulatory fulfilment of the virtue of persistence in the field:

I always found it extremely unwise, after receiving information regarding a song, or a singer, to take the instruction as final; but I pushed out on my own initiative, and peered into all sorts of corners, and the more I did this the more I was amazed at the mass of songs and relics remaining in even the most unpromising situations.¹⁰⁶

Retrospectively, his intervention is redefined as the eleventh hour: rustic song was on the point of extinction, but his yield was more than merely vestigial.

TOO LATE! (A RHETORICAL CONVENIENCE?) Isn't it always too late? These explanatory offerings do not somehow ring true. Firstly, it is implausible that post-bellum conditions were any more inimical to rural song collecting than wartime had been (p. 373 *supra*). Secondly, although it was true that by 1923 Williams's 'oldest and best singers' had departed, these account for no more than half a dozen from the 200 whose names are recorded. Research in the official records shows that, at the time Williams made this statement, a high proportion of his informants were still alive, indeed that a considerable number outlived him (see table in Chapter II).

In adjusting this account, two strands can be identified (the appeal to biography).

1° The peculiarities of Williams's personal position immediately after demobilization. He faced two pressing material exigencies, the addressing of which was to absorb his attention during this period: lack of occupation, and prospective homelessness (the South Marston estate, including their rented cottage, having been sold while he was in India). Of these, Williams evidently regarded the former as the more urgent, in the form of a concern to revive the literary reputation he had striven to establish before the war. His failure to place any of the books prompted by war service or the articles offered to the national press did not augur well for these final years. The accommodation problem was solved by the Williamses building a house with their own hands (literally), a task which occupied the period from autumn 1920 to January 1922. Thenceforth, he sought to scratch a living from market gardening, worked at preparing *Round About the Upper Thames* for publication, and—most portentously—began reading Eastern literature in translation, inspired by his service in India. This season of disruption would scarcely have conduced to a resumption of time-consuming fieldwork.

2° The other strand stretches back into the period of military service. From the very outset, Williams had seen the songs as fodder for a book—he was an author, he hankered after titles to his name—as the letter to Fitzmaurice of October 1914

shows (p. 352 *supra*), and the *Standard* Conclusion confirms: 'In time—not till after the war, probably—the songs, with the notes, will be published in book form.'¹⁰⁷ The correspondence reveals how his construal of 'completion' shifts from fieldwork to seeing his efforts enshrined in print. Anxiety as author duly supplants frustration as song collector (a purely adventitious condition):

Even as is, if it were not that I want to do something with my Folk Songs, the Thames Book etc etc, I'd get out of the Army here, get employment, and send for you to join me.

If I am not satisfied with things at home, I shall shift clean out, as I'm not going to suffer the semi-starvation we put up with before the war. But I must come home and try and get rid of some of the writing I have, and the Folk Songs.

What I'm going to do in the future I don't quite know. If it were not for my literary work on hand—I must see it through; I've a big volume of Folk Songs collected here, and a couple of prose volumes—I would not stay in England 3 months!¹⁰⁸

Thus does the hard-won optimism of 1914–16 turn inexorably into a burden to be unloaded. (Just as the fieldwork had acted against enlistment, so the song book makes him hostage to the Upper Thames?) That Williams was vexed by the widening gap between gleaning and permanent publication is evident.¹⁰⁹ The issue of a volume by Duckworth in the spring of 1923 brought a sense of having, finally, paid off this lingering debt.¹¹⁰ Aside from some occasional pieces in the local press, motivated at least in part by financial need, Alfred Williams had done with the rustic song of his neighbourhood. A bee of a quite different order had begun its insistent buzzing in a bonnet conspicuous for the quality of its bees: as the song book was in preparation, Williams determined on extending his access to Eastern thought by teaching himself Sanscrit.¹¹¹ Thus at the point of publication in May 1923, *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* already belonged to the past of one for whom mental stagnation was death.¹¹² These contextualizings serve to modify Williams's account of non-resumption. His own singular circumstances, material and intellectual, can be seen to have impinged more decisively than the historical moment: rationalization in print converts personal purposes into external event. Certainly, Williams's inclination to consider the Upper Thames as by this time, musically, a landscape populated by ghosts owes more to nostalgia for a period he regarded as closed than to demographic actuality.

CODA: ENQUIRIES DURING MILITARY SERVICE AND A POST-WAR HOLIDAY

Although there is no indication that Alfred Williams ever resumed the work of song collecting in the Upper Thames following his return from military service in 1919, he does, in the writings of the mid-1920s, give brief indications of having made enquiries on his travels in the British Isles in the period 1916–1920, the main effect of which was to confirm the view he had earlier formed (see Chapter VI.3) of the extra-parochial character of the core of putative folk song. In 1925, he recollects:

I remember that after collecting in the Upper Thames Valley, on the ground between Oxford and Malmesbury, on joining the Artillery and camping at Sible Headingham, in Essex, in 1916, I made enquiries in the village, and I found that it was full of exactly the same materials I had left behind in Wiltshire and Gloucestershire. Later, the Battery was posted to Fermoy, Co. Cork, where I made local friends, and, pursuing the subject, discovered that the same conditions existed in Ireland as here with regard to folk songs—the same pieces. In 1920 I spent a brief holiday at Maentrog, North Wales, and there I found a local inhabitant who could give me the history of the folk songs round about Festiniog—of the blind harper who had his headquarters at the famous old inn, provided with oak stools and tables, and the large company of delighted participants and hearers. The folk song was as popular there as it was anywhere else, and although much of it was Welsh many of the same pieces and the same tunes, from what I gathered, were in use in the Southern Counties.¹¹³

In a subsequent article of 1928, he elaborates:

Being billeted for a time in the Colne Valley, in 1916, I heard many of the same pieces I had found at Bampton and Buckland. [*No text extant in the collection is attributed to Buckland. Of an 'imperfect and corrupt' version of 'The Croppy Boy' noted at Filkins, Oxon in 1914 he notes:*] At Fermoy I corrected the copy with the help of an old Irishman who had been to the front and was wounded at the battle of the Somme.¹¹⁴

Finally, in confirmation that nothing *chez* Williams is ever simple, the qualifier 'recently' inserted into the headnote to 'The Golden Vanitee' when preparing the song book must mean in relation to 1923:

An old English Ballad of uncertain date. Formerly popular on the borders of the Wiltshire Downs. [I recently discovered another version on the Cotswolds.] Obtained of David Sawyer, ~~the shearer,~~ of Ogbourne.¹¹⁵



PART V: AN IMPERFECT SCOURING?

The principle of unique chronicling—districts trawled by one collector—means that assessment of this order, in that it supposes access to the whole picture, is not strictly performable: the comparative frame required by evaluation is absent. Small indications, overt or oblique, enable the exercise to be attempted. A proviso specific to Williams is that any singers deemed ‘missed’ may be actually be present, either in manuscripts known to have been lost, or in the c. 230 manuscripts surviving without attribution (‘Miscellaneous’ as catalogued). How comprehensively did Williams, the apostle of rigour, scour his district? He announces himself satisfied with his efforts:

I have not saved everything in the district, though I do not think that there is very much of value left behind in those villages which I have examined.¹¹⁶

In testing this claim, three working divisions may be posited. **GEOGRAPHY:** locations he either did not visit, or where he failed to find a singer; **PEOPLE:** singers he may have missed, subdividing as what is supplied by him—supplementary notations scattered in his writings—and findings by others, contemporary and subsequent, which may indirectly bear on the issue; **SONGS:** of the singers he did collect, the songs not, for whatever reason, noted from them—the most difficult of all to establish.

DISTRIBUTION How comprehensively did he scour the settlements of his designated district? Geographically, at least, his results are, avowedly, both patchy and incomplete at the point of interruption. Attempts to adjudicate what was ‘missed’ are hampered by some of his boundaries being ill-defined, but the country south of Swindon¹⁷ is generally under-represented, more so than appears if it is accepted that

¹⁷ Harker skews the point in deeming it a ‘prejudiced anomaly’ that ‘Swindon was totally ignored’ by Williams for the purposes of song collecting (*Fakesong*, p. 216). Instinctively, and conventionally if not altogether incontestably, Williams equated ‘folk’ song and music with the countryside. Little, indeed, encountered during long years in the GWR works at Swindon would have persuaded him otherwise. *Life in a Railway Factory* preserves no more than snippets which might pass for industrial folklore, and two fleeting glimpses of music-making, one accompanying the ritual ‘Trip’ exodus—‘with the shrieking of steam whistles and hooters and the playing of concertinas and melodions’—the other connected with New Year’s Eve celebrations—‘When supper was over a melodeon or several mouth-organs were produced’ (pp. 26 and 272 respectively—the variant spellings are Williams’s). Ivor Clissold, Williams scholar and railwayman, probed A E Green on this topic of vernacular music and the railways: ‘For your query, no, I know nothing about railway songs, nor could I dispell [or even spell ?] any of your suspicions. We once had an MPhil student working [at Leeds] on the traditions of railwaymen in Doncaster, and despite very assiduous work, he came up with no songs at all. Sorry.’ (Green to Clissold, 31 January 1974; Clissold Papers.) A L Lloyd, for all his championing of ‘industrial’ folk song, reached a similar conclusion. (A L Lloyd, *Folk Song in England*, 1967, pp. 330-1.) Yet industrial Swindon might have proved fertile terrain. Much of the initial population was drawn from surrounding villages. In addition, many GWR workmen ‘commuted’ from the surrounding villages, as Williams himself, and therefore remained countrymen. Thus, in principle, it would have been possible to carry out folk song collecting (in the classic bourgeois sense) amongst the bucolic element in the workforce. A possible instance of this effect concerns Williams’s singer George Couling ‘of Kempford’ (Glos), listed in 1881 census for that place (aged 22, native, carpenter) but not subsequently. A George Couling appears in 1891 for Swindon (a GWR carpenter), whose details stack apart from place of birth (‘Fairford’). There is no apparent trace in the Fairford baptisms, so Couling may have given ‘Fairford’ as being the nearest substantial enclave to obscure Kempford. This also chimes with the testimony of his nephew, Frank Couling, who remembered cycling to Swindon to visit before the Great War (private correspondence). While not conclusive, the evidence tilts towards this ‘folk’ singer living and working in railway Swindon.

David Sawyer was not at the time of collecting resident at Ogbourne, easily the southern-most settlement mentioned (see p. 116 *supra*). While Williams confesses to neglect of the south-east, the south-western portion is equally poorly covered. A few random mentions of southern points occur in song headnotes ('Will the Weaver' (Bk 27), for example, mentions Wroughton). It was not that he lacked acquaintance.¹¹⁷ Perhaps he sensed that, despite inclusion in the delineated district, the downland of north Wiltshire and Berkshire was a zone apart from his 'Upper Thames' proper.

PEOPLE Discussion divides as: supplementary references of varying kinds to singers in Williams's own corpus; and what can, more speculatively, be inferred from endeavours of others, in the period and since. 1° Singers mentioned by him but not represented in the collection. Williams's essay devotes a paragraph to fabled singing families in the locale. Names in bold do not occur in the collection as it survives:

Other well-known singing families [*additional, that is, to the Kings at Castle Eaton*] were the **DEANS** and **RICKETTS**, of Down Ampney; the Howses and **MESSENGERS**, of Latton; the Barrets, of Marston Meysey; the Harveys, of Cricklade; the Ockwells, of Somerford Keynes; the Sparrows, of Crudwell; the **CASWELLS**, of Marlborough; the **LEGGs** and Zillards, of Hannington; the Pillingers, of Lechlade; the Wheelers, of Buscot; the **JORDANS** and Jefferies, of Longcot; the Tanners, of Bampton; and others too numerous to mention.¹¹⁸

Additionally, he mentions the Clargo (Hinton Parva, Wilts), Keylock (Latton, Wilts), and White (Appleton, Berks) families.¹¹⁹ Scattered notations are: Thomas Betterton (appended to manuscript of 'John Appleby' (Gl 92) from Edward Griffin at Hatherop); and from the sheaf of lecture notes: 'Lappington, Kempford (Songs not on main routes you must search for them / difficulties)', and 'Billy and Betsy Bridges / Old Ike Tibbles 94'.¹²⁰

The other main source is references in the one surviving field notebook. This document contains 18 names—apparently leads to pursue—which do not occur in the fair copy manuscripts. Three explanations for their non-inclusion suggest themselves: that Williams did not in the event follow up the lead; that he visited and drew a blank, for whatever reason; or that he noted texts from these people that survive in the unattributed bundle or which were subsequently lost. These notations, though inconclusive, support the suspicion that more singers were originally collected than the 200 names which survive.

2° SINGERS COLLECTED BY OTHERS WITHIN THE FRAME Other collectors have down the decades patchily conducted enquiries within the 'Upper Thames' as delimited. Since all of this potential fieldwork overlap occurs either a few years earlier or considerably later, any connection to Williams's performance—essentially what he might have missed or ignored—remains speculative, another task for the historical detective. Chronologically, the exercise turns on establishing, from both ends, whether a singer would have been alive during the brief floruit of Williams's fieldwork; geographically, the issue is whether she was still resident.

Vaughan Williams noted five items from a 'Mr Woolford' at Ramsbury (Wilts) on 27 August 1904.¹²¹ Cecil Sharp recorded some dozen singers in the district between 1907 and 1923, as set out below (the table does not include Haydon and Tanner at Bampton, separately discussed):

SINGERS COLLECTED BY CECIL SHARP WITHIN WILLIAMS'S ZONE				
SINGER	AGE	LOCATION	DATE	REFERENCE
Robert Higgs	37	Little Coxwell	31 July 1907	FT 1366-7
William Hitchman	67	Faringdon	1 August 1907	FT 1368-71
William 'Hearty' Russell	74	Eynsham	26 April 1909	FT 2185
Richard Toms*	85	Cirencester Union	2 Nov 1911	FT 2717-8
Mrs Mary Sparling	—	Kelmscot	Undated †	FT 2699
James Radway	—	Witney Union	4 April 1912	FT 2764
POST WILLIAMS'S FIELDWORK				
William Sparrow	79	Kemble	7 March / 7 April 1913	FT 2854-6
William Pittaway	66	Burford	19 May 1923	FT 4937-9, 4945-7, 4949-52
Charles Pearce	80	Marlborough Union	20 July 1923	FT 4953
Thomas Smith	62	Marlborough Union	20 July 1923	FT 4954
* Possibly Richard Toms, a native of Kempsford who had lived mainly at Fairford				
† September 1911 from context				

Starting with the singers collected before Williams's floruit. Robert Higgs (44 in 1914), who gave Sharp 'John Barleycorn' and 'I'm seventeen come Sunday', was baptized at Faringdon on 30 July 1871 and married Caroline Hawkins at Little Coxwell on 20 November 1897. His burial has not been found, but a daughter was buried at Coxwell on 5 October 1916, indicating that he was in residence in the period. William Hitchman was baptized at Hatford on 17 March 1840. After some mobility (see census), he and his family settled at Hatford. His burial has not (yet) been found, so there is no means of establishing survival (he would have been 74 in 1914). For William 'Hearty' Russell (he would have been 79 in 1914) there are two candidates, coeval: baptized 1 November 1834 (son of William and Ann), and 4 January 1835 (son of Charles and Sarah). Burials not (yet) found.¹²²

In Gloucestershire: Richard Tom(b)s was baptized at Kempsford on 25 September 1825, and resident in Fairford before 1881. Burial has not (yet) been found (he would have been aged 88 in 1914). William Sparrow was baptized at Kemble on 6 July 1834, and buried there on 2 February 1915 aged '75', so he perished in the very early phase of Williams's fieldwork. (See p. 139 *supra*, n. 116 for sources on this singer). Of the three singers noted post-Williams, William Pittaway at Burford, from whom 10 songs were recovered, is the most prominent. The records throw up several of that name, but the most likely candidate was born at Taynton (c. 1857) and had moved into Burford by 1881, where he was buried on 22 August 1936. He was 57 in 1914.¹²³ Of the two singers at Marlborough Union, Charles Pearce was 71 in 1914 and Thomas Smith 53, though they would not necessarily have been Marlburians. Mary Sparling and James Radway are ruled out through inspecific detail.

In conclusion, Robert Higgs (Little Coxwell) and William Pittaway (Burford) can reasonably be accounted omissions by Williams. William Sparrow (Kemble) strictly falls within the period but died before collecting was fully under way. Of the remainder, information available is insufficient to adjudicate the point.

The great exception to this indeterminacy is the singers Charles 'Cocky' Tanner and Shadrach 'Shepherd' Haydon, known to have been collected both by Williams and, mainly in 1909, by Cecil Sharp at Bampton (see biographies in Chapter II). From Tanner, Williams has 22 texts to Sharp's six songs (only one of which is additional, and that a tune only); conversely, the figures for Haydon are: 22 exclusive to

Sharp, 5 in common, 4 exclusive to Williams—giving a total repertory of 31. Interest has periodically been expressed in this intersection—Dave Bland, for example, in the early 1970s¹²⁴—but no one has at the time of writing examined it rigorously, even though this sizeable intersection offers a *rarissime* (possibly unique) opportunity for direct comparison of efforts. A parallel presentation of texts is included with tunes in Appendix II.

2 FIELDWORK IN THE DISTRICT POST-WILLIAMS (1930)

Occupying a limbo period between First and Second Revivals (as understood) is the shadowy figure of H H Albino (1889–1957), a Cotswolder who carried out fieldwork fitfully from 1913 but mainly in the 1930s.¹²⁵ His intersection with Williams is confined to Eastleach (Glos), where he visited the Pitts family, originally of Sherborne. Two songs were noted from Thomas Pitts, born c. 1856, one of them dated December 1934. A further five songs were gathered from Thomas's son Charles (born c. 1879 at Sherborne) resident at Brize Norton (Oxon, also within Williams's zone), three of them dated to October and December 1935. (In a morris and music connection, Russell Wortley visited Charles, then 78 and within a few months of his death, at Brize Norton on 20 May 1956.)¹²⁶ In 1914, Pitts *père* was in his late fifties, Pitts *fils* 35, both therefore qualifying as 'misses' by Williams, the more peculiar in that he noted a song from Thomas's wife Esther (G1 82).^o

Removed though the Second (post-war) Revival seems, singers could yet fall within the Alfredian time frame (see Chapter IV on this subject). The first instance involves Peter Kennedy who, on behalf of the BBC's Folk Music and Dialect Recording Scheme (1952–57) co-ordinated by Marie Slocombe, made a recording in 1957 of the brothers Raymond and Frederick Cantwell at Standlake (Oxon) performing 'The Soldier and the Lady'.[†] Given the date of baptism of the brothers—Raymond 17 April 1881, Frederick 4 February 1883—they would have been young men of thirty-ish when Williams turned up in the village c. 1915. So unless they were

^o This family connection raises the question generally of how many other offspring of Williams's informants had taken on the musical mantle, many of them already in middle age in the period. To take a further example from Brize Norton, a son of Elijah Iles—Elijah *fils*—evidently settled in the village: he married Emily Drinkwater there on 17 July 1880 (he was literate); he figures there in 1881 (24 labourer born Highworth); and was buried there on 20 March 1929, aged 72 (Oxford Record Office, PAR/43/1/R5/2). In 1914 Elijah *fils* would have been in his late fifties: so if he was a singer, and given that he was *in situ* (he would have been too old to have been away on war service), he would count as a 'miss'.

[†] The recording was included in Volume II ('Songs of Seduction': 1961, track B5) of *Folk Songs of Britain*, the series of gramophone records issued by Caedmon. In his note, Kennedy remarks: 'This version is unique among those collected in having a refrain and a whistled coda. Seventy-three-year-old Frederick Cantwell said emphatically as he finished the recording, "It ain't much now, but I used to be able to whistle just exactly like a nightingale when I had my teeth."' It is possible that further recordings were made within the pale as part of the scheme.

away from the village working or on war service, this may count as another 'miss'.

Interestingly, a further recording of this item was made the same year by Brian Ballinger and associates. For all their efforts, the only further definite contact Ballinger and party made was a 'W Jordan' aged 84 at Fernham (then Berks), during the expedition of 26 October 1957.⁹ This connects directly to Williams's list of singing families, *supra*. Given that the Jordan in question would have been in his early forties in 1914–16, this can be added to the tally of potential misses.

Next to follow in the cycletracks was John Baldwin in the late 1960s. Alongside a small number of direct descendants, he found three or four singers of sufficient vintage to have been active in Williams's day: Harry Johnson of Standlake (ex-Bampton), possibly 'A C' of Siddington, George 'Tom' Newman of Clanfield, and Bill Whiting of Longcot. These are known to have been elderly, though Baldwin does not record precise ages. The last two of these were followed up in the early 1970s by Mike Yates, who made recordings issued on the gramophone record *When Sheepshearing's Done*.¹²⁷ In the latter case, Yates supplied some further details in an article following Whiting's death in the 1980s. Born on 13 April 1891, he

had not only known the Jordan and Jefferies families who had given songs to Alfred Williams prior [*sic*] to the Great War, but clearly remembered William Jefferies being visited by Williams.¹²⁸

When Williams visited Longcot in 1915, Bill Whiting would have been 24.

The exercise attempted here, purely hypothetical, assembles fragments designed to indicate that Williams's fieldwork cannot be regarded as in any way exhaustive.



If this chapter reconstructing Alfred Williams's song fieldwork establishes no more than the banality that his floruit as collector occupies the period autumn 1914 to autumn 1916, it will have served a useful purpose. To mistakings of this elementary chronology already cited—Wilgus (p. 301), Copper (p. 327), Yates above—must be added the most glaring, inscribed on the cover sheet of the classified index to the song manuscripts: 'noted over a period of several years prior to the 1914–18 War'.

⁹ The entry in the fieldnotes reads: 'Recording: W Jordan, Church Lane, Fernham, Faringdon, 84. 'Jim the Carter Lad', 'We're all Jolly Fellows that follow the plough' & several music halls (some also sung by his sons). Songs learnt from sheets bought at fairs.' (Copy supplied by Brian Ballinger.)

NOTES TO CHAPTER V

- 1 Dean-Smith, p. 23.
- 2 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, pp. 9-10.
- 3 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Preface.
- 4 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames District', *Word-Lore*, 1, no. 1 (January-February 1926), p. 12.
- 5 Lecture notes (WSRO 2598/36).
- 6 Five of the song texts originally used in *Round About the Upper Thames* are now incorporated in the song collection—'Botany Bay' (Wt 350), 'Bonny Bunch of Roses O' (Wt 391), 'Rolling in the Dew' (Wt 407), 'Preaching for Bacon' (Wt 410), and 'Sweet Peggy O' (Wt 414)—though only one of these figures in *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* (Wt 410).
- 7 Letter to (unspecified) sister, '19 February'. (From context 1913, the 'new prose' being *Villages of the White Horse* published that year; WSRO 2598/45).
- 8 *Villages of the White Horse*, pp. 141-2, 95, 111 and 140 respectively.
- 9 *A Wiltshire Village*, p. 122. 'Jemmy' may be Boulton (*A Wiltshire Village*, p. 100 *et seq.*). The general purpose conclusion to 'There is a Tavern in the Town' recurs elsewhere in the collection, such as 'The Sailor Boy' (Gl 115). Williams has a full set of 'The Farmer's Boy' (Mi 565).
- 10 Wt 497; Wt 514 (cf *Villages of the White Horse*, p. 141); Gl 56; Gl 162 (cf *Villages of the White Horse*, pp. 185-6).
- 11 'Folk Song and Locality', *Wiltshire Times*, 28 August 1926, p. 9.
- 12 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames District', *Word-Lore*, 1, no. 1 (January-February 1926), p. 12.
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 *Villages of the White Horse*, p. 193.
- 15 'The Local Distribution of the Folk Song and Folk Music', *Wiltshire Gazette*, 6 August 1925, p. 3.
- 16 Clark, p. 77, specifies (without justifying) date of leaving as 3rd September.
- 17 Byett, p. 63.
- 18 Clark, p. 79.
- 19 Letter to Guy Rawlence, 16 February 1914 (WSRO 2598/56).
- 20 Letter to Henry Byett, 5 March 1914 (WSRO 2598/38/2).

- 21 Letter to Henry Byett, 10 March 1914 (WSRO 2598/38/2).
- 22 Letter to Henry Byett, 12 March 1914 (WSRO 2598/38/2).
- 23 Letter to William Dowsing, 2 April 1914 (WSRO 2598/56).
- 24 Postcards to Henry Byett, 2, 10 and 19 May 1914 (WSRO 2598/38/2).
- 25 Clark, p. 77.
- 26 Letter to Alfred Zimmern, 8 September 1914 (WSRO 2598/67).
- 27 Lecture notes (WSRO 2598/36).
- 28 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames District', *Word-Lore*, 1, no. 1 (January-February 1926), p. 13.
- 29 Letter to A E Withy, 'October' 1914 (WSRO 2598/2).
- 30 'Folk Song and Locality', *Wiltshire Times*, 28 August 1926, p. 9. Only one attributed copy of this text is extant in the manuscript collection, the note to which reads: 'I first heard this at Aston, afterwards at Inglesham, and finally obtained the complete words of Mrs M Bond, Quenington.' (Gl 130)
- 31 'Upper Thames Folk Songs', *Oxford Times*, 20 January 1928, p. 10. This particular instance does not feature in the collection. The extant version (as 'The Copy Boy') is a composite from Charles Tanner and Shadrach Haydon of Bampton, Oxon (Ox 207).
- 32 Letter to Lord Fitzmaurice, 14 October 1914 (WSRO 2598/78).
- 33 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames', Introduction, *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 2 October 1915 p. 2 (*Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, p. 9, collapsed into a single paragraph). The same edition carried, p. 4, an editorial announcing songs.
- 34 *Round About the Upper Thames*, p. 21.
- 35 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames District', *Word-Lore*, 1, no. 1 (January-February 1926), p. 13.
- 36 Thorne's note accompanying his writing out of the text of 'The Lass of Richmond Hill' (Ox 281), 28 May 1916.
- 37 'The Local Distribution of the Folk Song and Folk Music', *Wiltshire Gazette*, 6 August 1925, p. 3.
- 38 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames District', *Word-Lore*, 1, no. 1 (January-February 1926), p. 13.
- 39 Lecture notes (WSRO 2598/36).
- 40 Field notebook (WSRO 2598/36).

- 41 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames' III, *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 16 October 1915, p. 2.
- 42 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames', *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 2 October 1915, p. 2 (passage subsequently deleted).
- 43 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames', *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 2 September 1916, p. 3 (emphasis added; whole passage later deleted).
- 44 Baldwin has: 'Whilst Williams claims coverage down from Malmesbury to Marlborough, east to Aldbourne and north to Lambourne [*sic*] and Wantage, he has very little from this area save the songs of David Sawyer of Ogbourne' (*Folk Music Journal*, I, no. 5 (1969), p. 347). Harker has: 'Apart from David Sawyer at Ogbourne, Williams seems to have gone no further south than Wanborough' (*Fakesong*, p. 216).
- 45 Letter in reply to Mrs Field at Winson, 5 May 1916 (WSRO 2598/56).
- 46 'One God made us all' (Ox 216), noted from Charles Tanner, Bampton, Oxon. The 'villager' in question is likely to have been William Bridges: 'Tell Mr Bridges that I think of them and of the story about the young man who got shut up in the grave, and the song "One God made us all".' Williams to his wife, 23 February 1918 (WSRO 2598/64).
- 47 'The Gamekeeper' (Wt 317).
- 48 'We'll Chase the Buffalo' (Wt 334) noted from Allan Cutts, Brinkworth, Wilts. Additionally, the manuscript of 'The Old Musketeer' (Mi 662) has the note 'Inquire of this Bampton'.
- 49 Noted from Charles Messenger, Cerney Wick, Glos (Gl 67). The couplet in question runs: 'When morning stands on tiptoe 'twixt mountain and sky | How sweet 'tis to follow the hounds in full cry'.
- 50 'The Folk Carol in Wiltshire', *Wiltshire Gazette*, 29 December 1927, p. 7 (emphasis added).
- 51 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 20. Female singers account for about a quarter of the total.
- 52 'The Local Distribution of the Folk Song and Folk Music', *Wiltshire Gazette*, 6 August 1925, p. 3.
- 53 'Creeping Jane' (Wt 439).
- 54 Lecture notes (WSRO 2598/36). '[Sharp] sent a reply postcard to the incumbent of every parish in these counties (Yorkshire, Northumberland, Durham)'. A H Fox Strangways, *Cecil Sharp* (Oxford, 1955), p. 102.
- 55 Lecture notes (WSRO 2598/36).

- 56 Byett, p. 63.
- 57 The period propriety of not stating a forename for female singers—'Mrs Russell'—makes their identity all but impossible to establish.
- 58 'The Buxom Blade' (Ox 305).
- 59 Letter to Mrs Field at Winson, 5 May 1916 (WSRO 2598/56).
- 60 Letter to Mrs Field at Winson, 27 June 1916 (WSRO 2598/56).
- 61 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 25.
- 62 *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard* editorial, 2 October 1915, p. 4.
- 63 Letter to Henry Byett, 22 May 1916 (WSRO 2598/38/2).
- 64 Letters to Mrs Field at Winson, 12 June and 8 August 1916 (WSRO 2598/56).
- 65 Letter to Mrs Phillips, 11 December 1915 (WSRO 2598/56).
- 66 Letter from Herbert Gascoigne, 29 February 1916 (WSRO 2598/60).
- 67 'Down Ratcliffe Highway' (Wt 353).
- 68 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 10 (emphasis added).
- 69 Byett, p. 65. Burns was an Alfredian *bête noire*.
- 70 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 15.
- 71 *Ibid*, p. 19.
- 72 *Ibid*, p. 14.
- 73 'The Bold Fisherman' (Ox 282).
- 74 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 18.
- 75 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames' II, *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 9 October 1915, p. 2 (passage subsequently deleted).
- 76 'The Local Distribution of the Folk Song and Folk Music', *Wiltshire Gazette*, 6 August 1925, p. 3.
- 77 Letter to J B Jones, 24 December 1914 (WSRO 2598/75). Note in passing that he still does not employ the term 'folk' song.
- 78 Letter to Mrs Phillips at Purton, 11 December 1915 (WSRO 2598/45).
- 79 Letter to Henry Byett, 10 July 1916 (WSRO 2598/38/2).
- 80 Letter to his wife from India, 1 September 1919 (WSRO 2598/61).
- 81 Letter to William Dowsing, 26 November 1922 (WSRO 2598/56).
- 82 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 27. Shades of Wordsworth and Coleridge during an earlier conflict.
- 83 *Ibid*, p. 28.

- 84 Lecture notes (WSRO 2598/36).
- 85 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 28.
- 86 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames District', *Word-Lore*, 1, no. 1 (January-February 1926), pp. 13-14.
- 87 Letter to his wife, 28 November 1916 (WSRO 2598/59).
- 88 Letter to Henry Byett, 24 August 1915 (WSRO 2598/38/2).
- 89 Letter to Henry Byett, 20 November 1916 (WSRO 2598/38/2).
- 90 'Certificate on plain white paper'—Williams's army documents are at WSRO 2598/46.
- 91 Letter to Mrs Field at Winson, 27 June 1916 (WSRO 2598/56).
- 92 As note 90.
- 93 Letter to Mrs Field at Winson, 8 August 1916 (WSRO 2598/56).
- 94 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames' XLIV, *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 2 September 1916, p. 3. The *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* addition is at p. 28. In the *Word-Lore* article (p. 13) Williams gives the figure as 18 months.
- 95 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, p. 28.
- 96 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames' XLIV, *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 2 September 1916, p. 3 (passage subsequently deleted and replaced by the previous quotation, n. 95).
- 97 Letter to William Dowsing at Sheffield, 2 January 1916 (WSRO 2598/56).
- 98 Reproduced in *Newsletter of the Friends of Alfred Williams* 6 (May 2004), pp. 16-18. (The document is in the possession of a 'Mr Stanbrook', who found it inserted in a copy of *Life in a Railway Factory*.)
- 99 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames' XLIV, *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 2 September 1916, p. 3.
- 100 'On this limited area I collected some five to six hundred folk songs.' ('The Local Distribution of the Folk Song and Folk Music', *Wiltshire Gazette*, 6 August 1925, p. 3). 'The songs I collected of one sort and another in the time numbered about six hundred' ('Folk Songs of the Upper Thames District', *Word-Lore*, 1, no. 1 (January-February 1926), p. 13).
- 101 Byett, p. 63.
- 102 Letter to Mrs Miles at Quenington while in military training, November 1916 (WSRO 2598/56).
- 103 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Preface.
- 104 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames District', *Word-Lore*, 1, no. 1 (January-February 1926), p. 13; lecture notes (WSRO 2598/36).

- 105 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames' II, *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 9 October 1915, p. 2 (passage subsequently deleted).
- 106 'The Local Distribution of the Folk Song and Folk Music', *Wiltshire Gazette*, 6 August 1925, p. 3.
- 107 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames' XLIV, *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 2 September 1916, p. 3 (passage subsequently deleted).
- 108 Letters to his wife, 13 March 1919 and 25 January 1919 (WSRO 2598/61); letter to William Dowsing 4 December 1919 (WSRO 2598/56).
- 109 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Preface.
- 110 He mentions particularly David Sawyer in this connection. See pp. 116-7 *supra* for details on Sawyer.
- 111 Clark, p. 159.
- 112 See p. 247 *supra* for Williams's horror of mental stagnation. The most fleeting of convergences between the divergent realms of song and Sanscrit occurs in a 1923 addition Williams made to his note to 'A-begging Butter-milk I will go' (Wt 432), originally composed in October 1915: 'The subject appears among the *Fables* of Æsop, and also in the Hindu Hitopadesa.' (*Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, p. 40.) This hints at possibilities for a degree of comparative folklore opened up by investigation of Eastern life and literature, which Williams explores to a limited extent, though not in the context of song.
- 113 'The Local Distribution of the Folk Song and Folk Music', *Wiltshire Gazette*, 6 August 1925, p. 3.
- 114 'Upper Thames Folk Songs', *Oxford Times*, 28 January 1928, p. 10. The piece continues with a reprising of the story previously quoted.
- 115 'The Golden Vanitee' (Wt 444).
- 116 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 26.
- 117 His writings suggest extensive contact in these downland villages, from Bishopstone to Uffington. See *Villages of the White Horse*, *passim*; also: 'the villages along the downside from Wantage to Marlborough, as well as those in the Vale, bordering the highways, were full of vigorous life and activity.' 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames District', *Word-Lore*, 1, no. 1 (January-February 1926), p. 15.
- 118 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 22.
- 119 Clargos: see note to 'Old Dorrington' (Gl 101); Keylocks: see note to 'Auld Robin Gray' (Wt 420); Whites: see 'Thames Head Wassail', *Oxford Times*, 23 December 1927, p. 5.

- 120 This is possibly George Lappington who appears in the 1881 census for Kempsford (§I, schedule 50) aged 33, an agricultural labourer. ‘Billy Bridges’ is possibly a reference to William Bridges of South Marston—see p. 295 *supra*, and n. 46 to this chapter.
- 121 These are: ‘All Serene’ (‘I come from the west’), ‘The Lost Lady’, ‘The Young Indian Lass’, ‘The Green Mossy Banks of the Lea’, and ‘Erin’s Lovely Home’.
- 122 The Russells were a prominent morris family at Eynsham. Keith Chandler writes: ‘‘Hearty’ Russell was the father of dancers William ‘Buff’ and Edward ‘Feathers’ Russell. No one seems to have recorded if the old man was a dancer, but it seems likely that he was.’ (Letter, 31 December 1986.)
- 123 1881 census Burford (§II, schedule 12), Burford burials.
- 124 See letter from Bland to Ivor Clissold, 4 February 1974 (Clissold Papers): ‘I’ve started work on a book based on the photographs taken by Sharp of his singers and dancers, and at the moment I’m trying to amass biographical information on all the people he photographed. Two of these people are Charles Tanner and “Shepherd” Hayden from Bampton. I’ve got quite a lot from Sharp’s own MSS about the two men, but I’d like also to mention them in connection with Alfred Williams’s visits a year or two after Sharp.’
- 125 Elaine Bradtke, ‘The H Hurlbutt Albino Folk Music Collection (1913-1938)’, *Folk Music Journal*, 7, 2 (1996), pp. 205-215.
- 126 Wortley Papers at NATCECT, University of Sheffield, A III 8 a-d, 9 a.
- 127 *When Sheepsbearing’s Done* (Topic LP 12T254, 1975): George ‘Tom’ Newman, ‘All for the Grog’ and ‘Sing Ovy and Sing Ivy’; Bill Whiting, ‘The Broken Down Gentleman’ and ‘I’m going to the Woods’.
- 128 Mike Yates, ‘Visiting Bill Whiting’, *Downs Miscellany*, 4, 1 (May 1986), p. 11.

CHAPTER VI

ALFREDIAN MEDIATIONS

Refraction in a singular prism



DEVICE OF THE LOCAL PAPER IN WHICH WILLIAMS
FIRST SERIALIZED SONG TEXTS HE HAD GATHERED

FOLK SONG? | SINGERS? | UPPER THAMES? (PROPÆDEUTIC)

The pleasures of pursuing song in lane and cottage, entailing no painful transition for one so seasoned in bucolic fieldwork, duly turn to a tangle of questions when exposition is attempted. With these difficulties Williams finds himself ill prepared to grapple: he does not so much effect ready fulfilment of his enterprise as lift the lid on a Pandora's Box. Where he might, more circumspectly, have confined his efforts to gathering and selecting for publication with minimal comment, he feels (revealingly) the need to *pronounce*, self-protective disavowals of expertise notwithstanding. He thus faces the problem of terms in which formally to make sense of what he had seen and heard in the rustic dwellings of the Upper Thames. The congeries of apprenticeships—ploughboy, hammerman, self-taught scholar, poet—which conferred his distinctive equipping was of little immediate utility in broaching the unforeseen case of song: the verbal and music(ologic)al equivalent of seeking to operate a steam hammer without instruction (song, of course, being a province as technical as any). The strictly musical dimension he solves by ignoring it; but even the textual component supposes specific knowledge. The task is further complicated by the cast of his concerns, especially his unusual privileging of place. To what extent can he draw on *savoir faire* from previous formation? In what degree must he improvise a response? It is, manifestly, insufficient to (pro)claim that to 'understand' the people and their world is necessarily to understand their music. In artisanal terms, tools are required. Beyond the subject-object encounter effected in the circumstance of fieldwork lie problems of mediation: a multiple persona of egregious intellectual equipping (Chapter III) collides with the heterogeneous musical elements of a demotic constituency on the doorstep (Chapter II), informed—*nolens, volens*—by an ensemble of conceptual-theoretical difficulties (Chapter IV). The manner of knowledge resulting from a baroque confluence of this order will necessarily be constrained by the idiosyncratic modus in place; prismatic refractions. In this conjunction of conditions, heroic nocturnal pedallings in the field acquire a figurative aura of *pedalling in the dark*.



PART I: PURPOSES & CREDENTIALS

§I PURPOSES: APOLOGIA | INCORPORATION

Ostensibly, a discussion of aims would stand at the head of the previous chapter (fieldwork). It must be remembered, however, that Williams's *framing* of his purposes dates (at the earliest) from the late summer of 1915, a year into fieldwork. It is possible, therefore, that some of these intentions are *post hoc*, or at least take more considered form than the impulses which drove him initially to enter the minefield. The pursuit of song was assuredly not part of any master plan of chronicling from c. 1911 but the adventitious product of nose-following, as Chapter V makes clear.

Let it at once be understood that Alfred Williams's purposive set in gathering folk songs entails motive beyond what he lays perfunctorily before the reader. The prose works introduced in Chapter III show that, by disposition as much as by conviction, he was drawn to all that was venerable, all that pertained to a bygone world. To this extent, he shares the stock motivation of all who pass this way. He is entangled in the perverse logic that perceived ending creates desire, a fascination with the archaic for which the most fitting term would be *Romantic*, if the positivist climate of the times had not rendered it so inconveniently abusive.⁶ As might be supposed, Williams has his own twists on this statutorily apocalyptic view. In the course of his writings on the subject, extending fitfully from 1915 to 1928, he modulates self-interestedly from *previously-neglected-but-just-in-time* (his high ground over those locally who had missed the opportunity, a jibe especially at Richard Jefferies), to *it-is-too-late-now* (read: he had finished with it and did not want anyone else to follow?), a stock ingredient of the later, retrospective newspaper articles. In the event, patchy subsequent fieldwork in the district revealed that his report of the death of folk song in the Upper Thames was somewhat—though perhaps not greatly—exaggerated.

He concludes his Essay with a rehearsal of the statutory rescue operation line:

It is certain that if the work had not been done now it would not have been accomplished at all. ~~In another ten years' time it would have been too late.~~ The old villagers are dying off very rapidly. ~~About ten of my old singers have bidden farewell to this world during the last few months.~~ What I have done, then, has been just in the nick of time.¹

⁶ Leslie Shepard has his finger on this dichotomy-which-we-cannot-bring-ourselves-to-concede: 'Modern interest in balladry of all kinds is unquestionably a romantic one—as life becomes more materialistic we salvage the fragments from a metaphysical past and try to find good respectable scientific reasons for doing so.' (*The Broadside Ballad*, 1962, p. 38.)

An eleventh hour scramble to stay one step ahead of the Grim Reaper, reiterated in the 1923 Preface, cannot, however, be the full story. Notation for notation's sake is not merely otiose but not *stricto sensu* possible: some larger intention must be at work, even if not proclaimed, shaping the peculiarity of a mediator's intervention.

APOLOGIA PRO TERRA 'SUA'

Exposition in Chapter III §3 shows that Williams's chronicling endeavours were aggressively centred on the 'Upper Thames'. This defining perspective carries over, apparently straightforwardly, into the song mediation ('apparently' in that the carrying over proves in the event less than seamless). Crucially, his parochial-partisan instincts combine with (otherwise unexceptionable) observations on neglect of song locally to lend a singular charge to his project. Beyond a circumstantial *failure to record*, he resolves to discern a further insinuation: that absence of record bespeaks absence of music. His role becomes that of champion, his mission not merely now to extol the life of the locale but to *defend* it (and thus its denizens) against this slur, actual or imagined. The first voicing of this preoccupation occurs in 1915 during the exchanges with Frank Kidson in the *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*:

Previous to this time, certain counties had claimed to possess the majority of the Folk Songs, and we of the middle South were represented as being dull, unmusical, and generally unintelligent. We hope that the publication of our songs will shatter that illusion effectively. As I pointed out in my introduction, we are principally concerned with our own locality, and not with the Folk Song in particular, or as it occurs in other parts of the country.²

A more extensive elaboration of this preoccupation comes in the conclusion to the song serialization, published in September 1916:

The collecting of folk songs had been carried out in most of the counties of England before I began the work here. To tell the truth, it really wanted doing badly. Because no one had attempted to examine the locality methodically for folk-songs it was assumed that none existed. The opinion was current that this was about the dullest part of England. We are an agricultural people here. What had we to do with music and merriment? Far from the large towns and cities, far from ship-bearing rivers and the sea, cut off, as it were, from the heart of the great world, its commerce and civilisation, inhabiting a region calmly beautiful, but destitute of very stirring or striking scenery, engaged all their lives upon the soil, how could the hearts and feelings of the people become quickened? It was not to be expected that they should be so, much less that the village folks should discover any surprising and unusual propensity to and aptness for cultured and artistic sports and entertainments. It

was not expected, and the natural inference was drawn. It was supposed that the people were stupid and ignorant, thick-headed, unmusical, and unimaginative—mere clowns and clod-hoppers. I hope that we have effectively shattered that illusion. Whatever other counties possess in the matter of folk songs they can scarcely claim to have more materials than have we of the Upper Thames. And the quality of the songs is good. I believe that versions of most, if not all, the best known folk songs were to be obtained in the villages around us, together with many that appear unfamiliar to residents in other quarters. The intensity of the life as it was in the villages is remarkable, and it would be inexplicable if we were to believe all that has been written concerning the “misery, poverty, and starvation” rife among the agricultural populations a century or three-quarters of a century ago.³

This eloquently sets out the case for (presumed) slight and its indignant rebuttal, in support of which the many hundreds of locally recovered texts he published in the *Standard* are decisive. Interestingly, this resolutely probative-apologetic idiom becomes if anything more pronounced with his return to the issue in the mid-1920s. Williams several times plugs the line that a ‘Victorian’ dismissal of ethnic materials led to the misconception that none had obtained. The first of these pieces, which appeared in the *Wiltshire Gazette* in 1925, is devoted entirely to this line of defence, prodded by publication by the Folk Press of a folk music handbook:⁴

The re-issue of the handbook on *Folk Song and Dance*, mentioned in the columns of the *Gazette* a week or two ago, calls attention once more to the curious obsession which is responsible for the attribution to Somerset of such a large proportion of our folk songs at the expense of other counties in the West of England and elsewhere. As the editor of the *Gazette* pointed out, in a list of 340 titles Wiltshire was allowed but three. I note that Oxfordshire is also apportioned three. Out of this unequal allotment the idea has been allowed to gain ground that Somerset was richest of all in folk song and folk music, which is pure myth, if it is not a piece of absurdity. There are those who would pass over the claim, were it not for the fact that they know it to be utterly untrue, and did it not improperly reflect upon the taste and intelligence of the numerous inhabitants of other districts and regions.⁴

Forthright as these statements are, passive constructions—‘it was supposed that’, ‘the idea has been allowed to gain ground’—skate over the obvious question of ascription: who, precisely, had been drawing these calumniatory conclusions? The nearest to a specific attribution is this:

⁴ The handbook had been reviewed a fortnight before in the *Wiltshire Gazette* (23 July 1925, p. 5), in which exception was taken to the preponderance of songs recovered from Somerset, and invoking Williams in defence of adjoining counties: ‘Mr Alfred Williams in his “Folk Songs of the Upper Thames,” which takes in a considerable area of Gloucestershire and Wilts, affords evidence that these counties are richer than the list before us connotes’.

I remember being told rather curtly once by a Midlander that Wiltshire had no folk lore. I was not in a position at that time to contradict the statement; but I certainly did not believe it. The remark set me pondering.⁵

The fact that Williams does not seek to pin culpability on specified individuals or bodies is presumably politic. More importantly, the issue of attribution is conceivably not to the point. Of distinctly gladiatorial disposition, he gives the impression almost of welcoming any opportunity to go into resistance: as susceptible to flattery as the next man, Williams the temperamental porcupine instinctively curls up into a ball of prickles at the first hint of criticism. The clearest exemplification of this proclivity is the spat with Kidson in the *Standard* in 1915. This conduces to a defining defensiveness; or even, a hint of inferiority, as if being patronized by those from a different social world. In so far as the perceived belittling of musical reputation conveniently furnishes the gladiator with the *repoussoir* he seeks, precise identification is unnecessary. He is stung, apparently, into (re)action—though the bee remains unidentified—and the offending insect then lodges itself in his bonnet.

Where the passages cited are directed at castigation of the putative disparagers, Williams at other times casts the point in terms of the targets of disparagement:

The only concern I have at this time is to see justice done to the people, to the inhabitants of this county and others equally entitled to our respect and admiration under this head. In brief, my experience was, and is, that one district, though the materials it contains may be somewhat different, and though it may exhibit a totally different spirit—witness what I have said in my essay concerning the dwellers on the north and south banks of the Isis—is not really much more rich than another, making allowance for the matter of local conditions and population.⁶

The gloss in terms of (in)justice resonates resoundingly with the scale of values Williams carries with him. In these ways, the personality of the mediator set forth in Chapter III intrudes into the problem: gladiator, loner, partisan, crusader.

Williams's extension of ethnographic agenda to subsume song is thus overlaid with stimulus of a more visceral order, an intensifying of prior identification which will prove unwittingly a source of complication. His paraded determination to demonstrate that his native district had been as rich in music-making as any in the country engenders a sense of crusade lacking in the prose accounts: a kind of *apologia pro terra sua*. The greater problem he faces lies in convincingly carrying into practice the project of connecting people to music.

PROTO-ETHNOMUSICOLOGY (WITHOUT THE MUSICOLOGY)

Williams's other principal aim takes him into the methodological-ethical bind of how to *record* without merely *accumulating*, not to say cynically *extracting*, a preoccupation articulated in his very gambit to the Essay:

Let it at once be understood that my intention never was merely to gather folk songs for the purpose of adding to the more or less undigested mass of materials in the collections already existing. That is not my business. What I wanted to do was, as nearly as I could, to complete the work I have undertaken in my prose volumes and to leave a permanent record of the language and activities of the district in which I find myself.⁷

From the *recul* of the 1920s, the song collecting interlude acquired a certain focus. To J B Jones, in thanks for a local review of *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, he wrote:

Even to know that the book of songs has given *you* (if no other) a little real pleasure is enough to compensate me for many pains and disappointments, which I have no doubt I shall experience. Yet I shall bear with them by the remembrance that a few sympathetic ones like yourself appreciate, without the highly critical spirit common to some, what after all is intended to be nothing more than a friendly collection of home songs, neither scientifically treated, nor intended to appeal to the cold specialist in such things.⁸

In the *Word-Lore* article he recapitulates this—knowingly egregious—position:

I would here point out that my original purpose was not that which may have prompted other collectors of folk songs. It is fair to say this, because in the arrangement of my materials, as they stand in *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, I was at no particular pains to connote and classify ... My idea was to save whatever folk songs I could, not to add to existing collections, but merely in order to supplement the record of local life and activities undertaken in my prose volumes. In this sense I was not a specialist, but merely a labourer and an enthusiast.⁹

This holistic scheme of adding song to the larger picture of country life as it was, or had once been, in the district based predominantly on gleanings on the ground rather than on the printed word, is several times reiterated:

Above all, I wanted to describe how the people spent their days and nights, in what employments, recreations, and amusements. In a word, I wished to show how they lived.

It will be seen that what I hope for is that my collection of folk-songs may be accepted as a corporate part of my general work undertaken towards depicting the life of the Upper Thames Valley. That has been my aim throughout, and not, as I have said, to swell the collections of others.¹⁰

What I wanted to do was to show the songs, rough or smooth, in their exact relation to the life of the residents of the Upper Thames Valley, and, in some sort, to complete the purpose begun in my prose volumes before-mentioned. I hope, therefore, if there be any disappointed at what I have *not* done, to bear this in mind, and not blame me for having failed to do *more than I professed, or above what was my set intention*. I considered the work to be fully worthy of my attentions and labours, and I have no doubt but that the materials I have gathered together will amuse and delight a few others, and provide a permanent record of not the least interesting side of the life of the former inhabitants of our villages.¹¹

Beyond the banalities of simple record, however, Williams harbours a goal at once more ambitious and more problematic. At several points he gestures towards a more thoroughgoing entwining of song and life:

to grasp it [song] in its entirety, and to understand its relations and functions comprehensively; to fit it in with the life from which it sprang, and of which it continues to be the faithful reflection and representation.

the evidence of the music, songs, pastimes, feasts, and games is final and conclusive. Whoever, in the future, pens a history of English rural life, and omits to take full cognizance of these, and the part they played, will have neglected half his subject: it is impossible to understand the actual life and conditions of the countryside without taking into consideration these highly important characteristics.

I should like to be thought of not merely as the reaper, but the cultivator of a field. ... it strikes me as being far easier to collect the literature of any field, or region, and make off with it, than, having discovered it, to fix it in its local habitat.¹²

Thus eager, in highlighting the evil of extractionism, not to go down as the ransacker of the Upper Thames (see §4 'Uses'), Williams elaborates an intentional scheme largely distinct from that of his contemporary collectors. Yet in this variant of *making the bits fit together* lies the crux of the problem: vernacular music(making) is not merely to be sketched in, but fully situated—'fixed', as he has it—within its larger culture such that 'understanding' is promoted. This ostensibly fulfils Sharp's prescription (see §2 *infra*) and anticipates on the ethnomusicological problematic (Chapter IV.1). Williams's starting point, exceptionally, in broaching this integrationist project is country life, not music. If the goal of 'fixing [song] in its local habitat' is understood as enhancing an *existing* (non-scholarly) ethnographic account of bucolic life in the Upper Thames, it sets Williams apart from the—characteristically extractionist—practice of the period. Exemplary as framed, the proposal's enactment proves the reef on which he comes ultimately to grief, a defeat which can be read as especially

instructive. Where most mediators start from music and (fail to) contextualize, Williams egregiously sets himself the task of *musicalizing context*. This is problematized by the fact that, notoriously, he blithely omits what many would regard as the defining dimension of the subject: tunes. He is notably reticent on the point, as if to disguise his incapacity to notate music. In all his extensive writings on folk song there are only four references to the matter, retrospective and fleeting:

I had no time to obtain tunes, my chief concern being to save the words.

I had not the leisure, unfortunately, to note music, amid the disturbance just after the outbreak of the war.

I was not looking for music.

If the war had not broken out I should have achieved better results, because I should have had collaborators and obtained music as well as words.¹³

In passing, this furnishes an illustration of readership context shaping the tenor of comment: in the three published instances, Williams self-protectively hedges, pleading adverse conditions in mitigation; in the lecture notes, delivered presumably to a local non-specialist audience, he more forthrightly states that music formed no part of his design in collecting, which is likely to be rather nearer the truth. Whatever Alfred Williams wanted from the working people of the Upper Thames, it was not music *stricto sensu*. More properly, then, his project is to *textualize context*. What was the manner of his equipping to carry out this eccentric programme?

§2 CREDENTIALS: PROPINQUITY | SEQUESTRATION

Investigations in Chapter III established that no part of Williams's experiential-formation was, strictly, specific to ethnic music-making (in so far as any such formation was available at the time). The amalgam of conditions and apprenticeships described—a factitious but expedient division into temperamental proclivity, literary book-learning, belletristic ethnography, moral grammar (in addition to having grown up and toiled among ordinary country people)—aggregated as a set of instruments at best tenuously apposite to the unpremeditated task he now broached: rumination beyond fieldwork. He shows himself to be unusually exercised by this problem of credentials, in the process displaying much about his relation to the problem.

HIGH GROUND OR INFERIORITY?

The original nine-paragraph opening sequence of the Essay contains, alongside the statement of aims, a rather laboured catalogue of requirements in a song collector. His procedure is to identify requisite qualities, suggest that they are routinely lacking in others, and finally lay claim to them for himself. Enumeration in the opening paragraph contains *patience, enthusiasm, tact and taste*, the last of which is elaborated with (as often lacking) *literary skill, judgement and critical ability*. To these he adds *courage and strength*, and *opportunity* (intended in an embracing sense). He further advocates working within a specific 'field or locality' as promoting coherence. Finally, the collector should possess 'some means of disposing of them [songs] to best advantage', requiring the 'authority and prestige' conferred by (literary) achievement.

I am hoping that I am more favourably situated than is such a one [*one lacking certain qualities*]. In the first place, I can lay claim to a ground. In the second place, I have not attempted to do too much, and, finally, it is possible that the publicity my work has already obtained may serve to attract the necessary attention and stand as a guarantee of its merits and value.¹⁴

Running through the Essay is a concern to appear scrupulously honest in his dealings with singers: he winces at his own 'hypocrisy' in declining bawdy texts, and concludes, 'I hope I have acted honestly. If my readers grant me that, I care but little what may be their opinions of my general methods, or of the pieces themselves'.¹⁵ To dilate at such length on this matter of credentials is to reveal a certain *mentalité*: exercised as much by the *ethics* as by the mechanics of fieldwork and 'disposal', he both lays claim to privileged standing and betrays, in being at such pains to *justify* his intervention, a hint of inferiority (none of this writhing would have crossed the mind of a Vaughan Williams, for example). High ground and uncertainty, a distinctively Alfredian commixture, stand as sure symptoms of the gladiator-autodidact.

Beyond these paraded qualities, what is Williams's relation to the people from whom he collected; what is his relation to his fellow collectors, whether through personal contact or printed word; what, in a word, is the cast of his *knowledge*?

I PROPINQUITY (ONE OF THEIR NUMBER?)

In the course of his investigations, Williams vaunts his ability to win the trust of ordinary people, both in general terms (p. 237 *supra*) and for purposes of song

collecting (Chapter V). 'You have to know your people,'¹⁶ he proclaims in his listing of credentials. Presented with Kidson's unwelcome intervention he lays claim, in the context of genesis (see p. 457 *infra*), to 'a complete knowledge of the villagers',¹⁷ a response epitomizing his self-positioning towards fellow collectors generally. The clear implication is that Williams presumes to enjoy privileged access deriving from socio-cultural propinquity to the agents of song, a kind of ethnographic special pleading. Byett acts as the mouthpiece for the simplistic version of this position.

One person—I believe it was the same [the occupier of Hannington Hall, Wilts]—told Alf, when he was collecting folk songs, that he would get no folk songs there; they were not for such as he, but for a gentleman like Mr. Cecil Sharpe [*sic*]. It is pertinent to remark here that Cecil Sharpe obtained only a very small proportion of the songs known, as the ordinary villager, when approached by a gentleman, instantly closed like an oyster. Alf succeeded by being one of them, dressing as them, chatting with them and getting thoroughly into their affections before requesting songs. He was sometimes forced to spend several hours in this preparation with some individuals, so shy were they. No one but a man such as himself and with his methods could ever have collected so many, and posterity owes him a debt impossible to pay for his labour in this direction alone.¹⁸

Byett goes on to ascribe this verdict to Williams himself:

This class of collector [such as Kidson and Sharp] he considered lacked success in collecting owing to their being much above the station of the villagers. They were for this reason unable to obtain the confidence of the old singers; the latter would not open out to them as to one of their own station, such as himself.¹⁹

The picture is, reassuringly, more complex than that. The character sketch at the start of Chapter III established that Williams was, viscerally and by cultivation, an outsider whilst being authentically an insider by birth and occupation: he stands as a classic case of the *insider-outsider*. Those who start, ostensibly, on the inside do not escape the chronicler's bind, namely that the act of documenting *ipso facto* creates a degree of remove. In Williams's case, there is no anguished recognition of ambiguity: he unblinkingly lays claim to propinquity, with the element of remove given away in unguarded moments (some of his comments are distressingly condescending). That he was not straightforwardly of the rustic tribe is more evident in *musical* terms, a realm in which he was not a participant. Empathic contact with local custodians of song will not automatically confer 'understanding' of specifically musical (textual)

aspects: a portent of the difficulty Williams will later experience extending into song.

The story of his first encounter with Elijah Iles ('Gramp') is emblematic here:

As a matter of fact—I tell it as a confidence ~~which I hope will be respected~~—Gramp thought at first I was a curate come to make the usual call and was inclined to be formal, but when I had fully discovered myself as a very common [sort of] mortal ~~with a large interest in the affairs of the earth and fields and of village folk in particular~~, he became friendly and familiar ~~and we began to make rapid headway.~~²⁰

For all that Williams could enter Iles's *musical* world, he may as well have been the curate. Ultimately, the collector-informant *décalage* can be papered over but not removed.† Far from reducing the gulf, as he liked to pretend, the inverse case may here obtain: a relation to the object in certain respects *more* not less tangled.

2 SEQUESTRATION: ISOLATION? SPLENDOUR? (THE OUTSIDER)

In addition to this empirical source of knowledge, Williams had the option of tapping into the body of establishment expertise, in person or through the printed word. In the event he chose repudiation: the counterpart to his presumption of (enabling) *closeness* to his humble informants is (virtuous) *distance* from the folk music establishment of the period, an altogether more exalted tribe. To visceral outsiderdom is now added concern at potential vitiation of parochial purpose by songs from beyond the district. He accordingly from the outset avows in categorical manner:

To safeguard myself in this particular work I have purposely isolated myself from all others engaged in the indiscriminate collection of folk songs. I have neither communicated with them nor seen any of their books. I did not require their assistance. My plan was first to collect and then to collate—if that were necessary. That is the safe method.²¹

20 The story improved in the telling. Byett (p. 63) has: 'Foremost among his singers was Elijah Iles, of Inglesham, who died in 1917 at the age of 96. At first Elijah mistook the author for a curate, come to make his periodical visit, and quoted becomingly from the Scriptures, but laughed heartily afterwards on finding his mistake.' Clark (p. 162) elaborates further: 'When "Gramp" first met Williams in the Spring of 1915 [*sic*] he mistook him for a new curate who had come to pay him a courtesy visit. Ripe with the wisdom and innocence of a nonagenarian, Elijah in order to put his visitor at ease, knowingly quoted a short passage from the Scriptures; on discovering his mistake he laughed heartily and offered as a recompense, a lengthy and somewhat bawdy folk song. From this time onward "Gramp" and Alfred were firm friends.' There is no documentary foundation for these mysterious midrashim. A further glimpse of popular perceptions of Williams comes from Tom Sansum, a South Marstonian who had served in the Great War and been a neighbour of Williams's in the 1920s, who recalled that Williams had been a full officer in the Army, sustaining this conviction in the face of 'correction' from his interviewer—'Battery Sergeant'. (Williams had held no rank higher than that of Gunner.) Thus a demotic countryman who had experienced the officer class at first hand instinctively, and erroneously, saw Williams as a person of that quality. When quizzed, at the end of the proceedings, on modes of address, Sansum is very definite that he, along with everyone else in the village, exclusively employed the form 'Mr Williams'. To the concomitant enquiry *what did he [Williams] call you?* the response is unhesitatingly monosyllabic: 'Tom'. (Unedited interview with Tom Sansum at South Marston conducted by John Wells (*et al.*), 31 October 1979 (BBC 47475). Extracts were used in *Hammerman—A Portrait of Alfred Williams, Wiltshire Poet, Translator, Local Historian and Factory-worker*, BBC Radio 3, 31 March 1981.)

† John Baldwin furnishes a latter day 'Upper Thames' instance in his moralizing over what constitutes 'acceptable' behaviour in the collector towards the informant: 'if one cannot show oneself as just an ordinary person able to talk about local affairs and to participate in the "culture"' (*Folk Music Journal* 1, 5 (1969), p. 317, n. 7)—but he was not an 'ordinary person' any more than Williams was. In the denial of difference a hint of self-delusion duly creeps in: false consciousness?

'Books' is taken up *infra*. In this light, Dean-Smith's gloss is misconceived: 'He was aware that other collectors were at work elsewhere, but he deliberately chose to pursue a solitary way, without benefit of association or comparison.'²² The whole point is that Williams considered, at least publicly, that such association was the inverse of a 'benefit'. How far is this proclaimed position verifiable? Manifestly, the establishment figure who casts the longest shadow over the proceedings is Cecil Sharp.^o Despite some difficulty in spelling his name, there are five passing references to Sharp in Williams's writings, though only one of them appears in print:

the late Mr Cecil Sharp, to my personal knowledge, obtained much material, both words and music, of the aged men of Bampton

You see, Cecil Sharpe [*sic*] is dead now; and they remember Alfred Williams.

If Mr Cecil Sharp had examined the Thames ground we should have had a much finer National Collection.

(I know Mr Sharpe [*sic*] was often in Glostershire)

Thanks to the efforts of Cecil Sharpe [*sic*], etc. Best of music is saved.²³

The 'personal knowledge' invoked in the first quotation presumably refers to the two Bampton singers, Charles Tanner and Shadrach Haydon, collected by both men. Sharp was there first, the bulk of his notations dating from the summer of 1909, with a fleeting further visit to Haydon in June 1914, a few months before Williams arrived. If the only knowledge Williams had of Sharp was indeed the oral report of shared informants, it scarcely supports the elaborations of the commentators. Clark has:

{Williams} had heard of the work of Cecil Sharp, and admired it, but he was not influenced in any way by what he and others had done.²⁴

Clissold's 1969 reiteration is unfounded in any extant record:

It was at this time, when Williams was working on another country travelogue, *Round About the Upper Thames*, that he heard of the harvest reaped by Cecil Sharp and decided to investigate the folk song field for himself.²⁵

^o To make the point that Sharp did not arrive in the van of the folk song movement, Dave Harker employs an adapted classical allusion, 'The Strong Men and Women before Agamemnon' (heading for Chapter 7 of *Fakesong*, 1985). To observe that the reference is earlier employed by Vaughan Williams in his 'Appreciation' of Sharp (1954) incorporated into the fourth edition of *English Folk Song: Some Conclusions* (1965)—'Of course there were strong men before Agamemnon'—is not to seek (*faut-il le préciser?*) to impugn the learned author's erudition by implying that he missed the classical source. Williams the votary of the literature of the ancients would certainly have recognized it. (*vixere fortes ante Agamemnona | multi; sed omnia illacrimabiles | urgentur ignotique longa | nocte carent quia vate sacro*. Horace *Odes*, IV, 9. 'Many brave men lived before Agamemnon: but all of them, unlamented and unknown, are overwhelmed with endless obscurity, because they were destitute of a sacred bard.' Smart.) Operating a little after the heyday of Agamemnon, Williams is incontestably a strong man after his own manner; perhaps more prickly Achilles, gladiatorial but vulnerable, than wily Odysseus.

Leonard Clark goes on, in customarily glib fashion, to assert apropos the *Standard* serial: 'Williams corresponded with people, many of them experts, all over England, about the songs',²⁶ citing John Denwood, the Cumbrian poet, and Frank Kidson at Leeds. Single surviving letters in each case—*replies* only from Denwood and Kidson—suggest that these are isolated instances, hardly constituting the extensive exchanges implied. Williams evidently sent song texts to Denwood, who related them to Cumbrian instances.²⁷ As for Kidson, Williams had this particular eminence thrust upon him in 1915. The biographers have a story relating to the period of publication of *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, much parroted but for which no documentary record survives:

Following the publication of 'Folk Songs' etc, he received a letter from a Mr Kitson [*sic*], of Leeds, a collector of folk songs and an officer of the Folk Song Society, offering on behalf of the society to assist him in publishing his songs. He did not avail himself of the offer, as he feared they would merely select two or three for inclusion with their collection. The object of the formation of the Folk Song Society was to popularise the old folk songs and bring them back into vogue. Alf considered they would never occupy their former position, as the desire for them had passed with the change of times. So long as the singing of them constituted the sole or chief pleasure of the people, the desire for them survived, but opportunity for other pleasures had supplanted it.²⁸

This later becomes, at the hands of Dean-Smith, Clissold and Sanderson:

[Williams] pursued his collecting as a solitary, though he knew of other collectors and exchanged correspondence with them, notably with Frank Kidson.

[Williams] had a slight brush with the Folk Song Society, supposedly stemming from an offer by the Society to assist with publication of the remainder of his collection, though no documentary evidence has been found to bear this out.

though this [publication of FSUT in 1923] brought him some modest fame—it caught the attention of the Folk Song Society and involved him in rather crotchety correspondence with certain of its members.²⁹

Where Sanderson no more than fabricates from secondary sources, Dean-Smith took up the matter when Clissold sought to confirm the story with the EFDSS in March 1967. Ruth Noyes, at the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, turned for advice to Dean-Smith (then in retirement), obtusely referring to 'a Mr Clifford from Wiltshire'. A triangular correspondence ensued, in which Dean-Smith struggled to recall events of which there was no extant documentary account. She summarized:

that the FSS was prompted to offer Williams (in desperate poverty) some assistance, and selected Kidson as himself 'a man of the people' to act as the ambassador least likely to be rebuffed.³⁰

Convinced that some form of exchange had taken place, she suggested that further investigation in the Williams Collection might prove fruitful. Clissold took the point and quickly unearthed a solitary letter from Kidson. This he put into typescript and copied to the EFDSS. The utility of the document is compromised in two ways: in being undated (taking the episode to form a private coda to the exchanges conducted publicly in the *Standard* means that it pertains to the end of 1915, not to 1923 as supposed in the story first published in Byett); and in being a reply, for which Williams's original does not, apparently, survive (see Appendix III). From the tenor of the letter, however, it is abundantly evident that Williams had, in revealing contrast to the adversarial line adopted in the local press, approached Kidson for assistance with his work on the songs; which Kidson, understandably, declined. Consequently, this is not Williams proudly rejecting a philanthropic offer from the folk song establishment consistent with his claim to sequestration but—much more interestingly—the inverse: an establishment luminary coldshouldering Williams.

PRINT PURDAH? Exceptions to the policy of sequestration from direct fraternization were apparently few. What of exposure to the printed word? Virtuous voluntary purdah Williams espouses more aggressively yet in the case of the body of publication (paradoxically for one who so uncompromisingly cultivated bookwormery). The principal setting forth of this ordinance merits quotation *in toto*:

It is evident that if I wished my folk songs merely to help elucidate the life of a particular locality, it was imperative that I should set myself certain limitations, and, above all, that I should be strictly conscientious in my claims to any single piece. And here let me say that there are temptations. One would sometimes like, on hearing a good folk-song outside his district, to be able to incorporate it with his own. It would enrich his store, and no one might be the wiser. But the fraud would be none the less shameful. And no one should practise deceit in literature. For literature is a fine art, and true art cannot admit of deception. And though one should write never so well, and do sterling work, if he has committed fraud and interpenetrated the substance of his labour with lies, it will rest upon rotten foundations. Especially is this true in regard to such work as that upon which I am here engaged. To be valuable it must be trustworthy. There must be no question of its authenticity. Both the author and the book must be above suspicion. All temptations to perloin and deceive must be resisted. ~~It will be better not to be confronted with them. That, at least, is my view.~~ And from the

beginning I laid down this rule—never by any means to admit a piece into my collection unless I had definite and personal proofs that it was actually sung in the neighbourhood and within the area I have mapped out. ~~That plan I have carefully and scrupulously followed, and shall follow.~~ My pieces may have been sung in Somersetshire, Cornwall, Surrey, Warwickshire, Lancashire, Yorkshire, or Aberdeenshire, if you will. But as long as I have proof that they were also popular in the Thames Valley I am satisfied. That fact alone answers my purpose. And though infinitely better songs and ballads may belong to the counties I have mentioned, unless I have certain proofs of their having been sung here, I shall not admit them to a place in my collection.³¹

As statement of principle, doctrinaire sequestering converges with high moral tone (*infra*). This unequivocal repudiation of sources embalmed in print, designed to sustain the pledge of ‘authenticity’ and corollary to the primacy of the testimony of his own ears, he revisits at the end of the Essay:

The words, verses, and rhyme of many of the songs are undoubtedly incorrect. What otherwise could one expect? Out of the ~~four~~ [six] hundred I have all but about two dozen were given me orally. I might, certainly, have gone to libraries and examined those of other collections in order to verify my own, but I did not do so. For one thing, I had not the time to spare. And I do not know that, if I had had the leisure, I was possessed of a sufficiently strong inclination. The versions of the songs differ widely in localities, and in searching out other copies and comparing my own with them—many of which have often been tampered with—I may have become confused, and, in trying to improve my pieces, have had them worse than before.³²

Williams casts his variant on the anxiety of influence in terms of ‘purity’ of version, an apprehensiveness at the perils of textual contamination translating as resolve to haunt the cottage rather than the library. This is kithlessness by election, a bibliographic form—in terms which would have been fondly familiar—of Odysseus having himself strapped to the mast to combat the nefarious lure of the Sirens. That he may not with absolute rigour have carried through this aim is suggested partly by the contacts already identified, partly by traces of published matter in his writings and effects. The principal, inter-related sources for this are the surviving volumes of Williams’s library (at Swindon), and passing references in headnotes.

I: VOLUMES ON SONG AND RELATED REALMS EXTANT IN HIS PERSONAL LIBRARY

Robert Bell (ed.), *Ancient poems, ballads and songs of the peasantry of England* (London: Griffin, Bohn & Co, 1862)

Mrs Clement Nugent Jackson, *Gordon League Ballads: dramatic stories in verse*, Series 2 (London: Skeffington, 1906)

James Johnson, *The Scots Musical Museum in six volumes consisting of 600 Scots songs with popular basses for the pianoforte* (Edinburgh: Johnson, nd) — volumes 5 and 6 only

James Plumptre (ed.), *A Collection of songs, moral, sentimental, instructive, and amusing* (London: Rivington, 1806) — volume 1 only

Ruth Rogers, *Breton Songs; done into English by Ruth Rogers* (1916)

Cecil J Sharp, *Folk Dancing in Schools* (pamphlet, no date)

2: REFERENCES TO PRINTED COLLECTIONS, SPECIFIED AND UNSPECIFIED

In the course of his headnotes, Williams makes brief mention of five specific printed collections and their authors (six if Akerman's *Wiltshire Tales* is included, not strictly a musical source), of the kind 'there is a version of this song in'. The instances are: Henry Morley, *A Bundle of Ballads* (1891), Frank Kidson, *Traditional Tunes* (1891), Robert Bell, *Songs of the English Peasantry [sic]* (1862), James Johnson, *Scots Musical Museum*, Bishop Percy, *Reliques*. As the library list shows, only Bell and Johnson are extant, though Williams is likely to have owned copies of all these rather than merely consulted them. Only Johnson and Kidson contain music. Morley and Percy were probably known to Williams through his literary studies, rather than in a strictly music context. Kidson he almost certainly acquired as a result of the 1915 spat in the *Standard*, though whether by purchase or gift is not known.⁵ How he came to possess the volumes of Bell and Johnson, both obviously second hand, remains a mystery. In addition to these specific titles, there are a slightly larger number of references to 'collections', details of which are not supplied (two of the examples occur in Bell):

'Twanky Dillo' (Wt 373): 'figures in several collections'

'The Brave Old Oak' (Bk 21): 'well preserved in collections of music'

'Joan's Ale' (Wt 507): 'figures in many collections' [Bell]

'It's my delight' (Gl 56): 'It is to be met with in most collections of folk songs' [Bell]

'The Lass of Richmond Hill' (Ox 281): 'figures in several collections of old songs'

'The Miller of the Dee' (Ox 283): 'may be found in numerous collections'

'How sweet is the horn' (Wt 399): 'found in several collections of folk songs under the title "When Bucks a-hunting go".'

'My love is dead' (Wt 489): 'This ... I copied from an old song book lent to me by Mrs Phillips'

'When we are homeward bound' (Gl 88): 'I have seen a more lengthy version of this song in print.'

⁵ Kidson's volume was not published as an aggressively commercial venture: 'We can only guess, for instance, how many copies of *Traditional Tunes* might have been presented to friends.' (John Francmanis, 'The Roving Artist: Frank Kidson, pioneer song collector', *Folk Music Journal*, 8, 1 (2001), p. 56.) Williams, of course, would not in any sense have rated as a 'friend'. Reference is made to the song 'On Board of a man of War', contained in the volume, for comparison in the headnote to 'Aboard the Resolution' (Wt 433) published in the *Standard* instalment of 8 January 1916.

'The Bonny blue handkerchief' (Wt 436): 'I have seen a longer copy, but this is all that was used here'

'Lord Bateman' (Wt 362): 'It is said to have been published and sung by the Turks at Constantinople.'

'George Ridler's Oven' (G1 169): 'I print this old Gloucestershire song. Though I have never heard it sung completely, yet at many points I have met with parts of it. I think it is a mixture of several songs really, though the whole as it now stands has long been printed together.'

Alongside the question of acquaintance with printed sources is that of familiarity with contemporary popular song. A number of titles are dropped in his writings. 'The Miner's Dream of Home' (Will Godwin and 'L D' [Leo Dryden], 1891) is mentioned in *A Wiltshire Village* (see p. 347 *supra*); 'Yip i addy i day' (*sic*: 'Yip-I-Addy-I-Ay' by Cobb and Flynn, 1908)³³ and 'Everybody's Doing it' ('Everybody's Doin' it Now' by Irving Berlin, 1911) were adduced in argument with Kidson (see p. 430 *infra*); and two catchphrases in letters to friends are apparently allusions to musical numbers of the recent past: 'Are we downhearted?'³³ ('Are we downhearted? No!' by George Robins, 1906) and "'What do you think of the Irish now?" Ain't it a long way to Tipperary!"³⁴ ('What do you think of the Irish now?' by Pat Rafferty, 1900, and 'It's a long way to Tipperary!' by Jack Judge, 1912).

A further capital feature of the passage cited above (note 30) is the high moral tenor of its couching. Placing song fieldwork exclusively at the service of one district (the thrust of 'indiscriminate' is *not tied to a locality*) rather than of the topic generally would be no more than a quirky consequence of Alfredian *campanilismo* were it not so flagrantly adduced as virtue. He will not be led into extra-parochial temptation: 'no one should practise deceit in literature ... To be valuable it must be trustworthy. There must be no question of its authenticity. Both the author and the book must be above suspicion. All temptations to purloin and deceive must be resisted.' In typically laboured idiom, this completes the catalogue of credentials occupying the Essay's inaugural paragraphs. The preoccupation with *apologia* expresses itself as crusade, bound up in turn with exigences of personal integrity, the result of which is a species of pious purdah from the body of folk song scholarship (in so far as such a thing can be said to have obtained). Yet, having set his face against these sources of knowledge, he still faces the problem of making sense of the materials assembled.

A number of significant qualifications become evident to the claims Williams

³³ Interestingly, this song cropped up in the repertory of Bill Whiting (born 1891) at Longcot (then Berks), recorded by John Baldwin in the late 1960s. See Baldwin's tapes at the Leeds Archive of Vernacular Culture, University of Leeds.

makes for his position. He was not in an absolute sense 'isolated' from wider interest, as many observations which can only have been derived from printed sources confirm. The unsought skirmish with Kidson ensured that he could not *not* be aware of the existence of the folk song establishment, so that 'isolation' could thereafter only be a posture, one more extension of reflex antipathy to organized forms of action. The wellspring *agon*, a being-at-odds-with-the-world informing his life and work, intersects with the proprietorial urge: he did not take kindly to trespassers on 'his' patch. Reiterations in the 1920s of the isolation stance carry a subtly different charge, implying circumstantial ignorance in place of doctrinaire sequestration:

Of other collectors, or collections of folk songs, I knew nothing at that time [1913]. This was owing to my occupation at the Swindon Works, which left me but a few hours of leisure at the week-end.³⁵

I didn't know anything about the Folk Song Society, or its members.³⁶

From here it is but a step to the quasi-recantation described at §3.1 (canon), in which sequestration stands no longer as guarantor of integrity but as handicap to be cited in extenuation of 'errors' (along with the 'honesty' it was designed to sustain). So Williams's parading of 'isolation' can be read as self-protective strategy as much as a route to parochial purity of materials, constituent in a defensive façade erected against the public gaze. Sequestration assumes a rhetorical cast, a disguise almost.

In the province of song, significantly, this visceral prickliness gives rise to involuntary intimations of inferiority betrayed in overt disavowals of expertise: 'In conclusion, I might say that I am not a specialist in folk-literature'.³⁷ Privately, letters to acquaintances, mainly Harold Hollick, during revision of materials for the book form of *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* in 1923 bespeak a guardedness, a sense of looking over his shoulder indicative of a pronounced self-consciousness towards the folk song establishment. He was bracing himself for an attack (*agon*) which did not materialize. (Arguably, it came in the more withering form of *silence*: see Chapter IV.3.)

LES MOYENS DU BORD

There is a sense in all this of being out of his depth, a discomfort suggesting that, behind the façade of independence, Williams *felt* his lack of specialist knowledge. This is the more revealing in comparison with other subjects on which he published: he readily discourses on flora and fauna, agricultural process, industrial production,

topics potentially as 'technical' as music (song). (He either considered that, in these writings, no special(ist) knowledge was supposed, or that he *was* a specialist in those realms.) Yet he remained intent upon pronouncing on song. He may have come, finally, to view his isolation as less splendid than he had imagined; that in seeking to secure the integrity of his project he had, rather perversely, denied himself certain means of understanding (as seemed so evident to the *Times* reviewer in 1923). What the opening discussion of credentials, in its angling towards gleaning and 'disposal', conspicuously elides is attention to this imperative of knowledge proper: how may materials be not merely gathered and displayed, but *understood*, a question lent particular orientation by Williams's integrationist agenda. A token nod at 'literary skill, judgement and critical ability' (p. 402 *supra*) is the nearest he comes: there is, need it be said, no recognition of a need for *musical* expertise. Instead, he projects into song the empirical ethos already in place (p. 238 *supra*) of the testimony of his own ears:

I am going partly by evidence I have gathered from the aged people still living in these villages, but chiefly from my own deductions, and from opinions formed on the spot after careful deliberations and an examination of all the materials available.³⁸

The knowledge idiom to which Williams here lays claim is by definition restricted in its reach. Resourcefulness in the field is insufficient to promote knowledge of a more conceptualized order (bicycle and pencil are of themselves insufficient tools); 'understanding' conferred by socio-cultural propinquity does not *ipso facto* extend to the specifics of music, so that its incorporation into the larger picture is problematic rather than (as he implies in announcing that aim) straightforward. The dimension which could *not*, for the most part, be established from mere observation and for which he lacked (repudiated) specific apparatus must be supplied from the means to hand. In championing singers-as-people and locale (apologetics), and in attending to his own standing (moral high ground), Williams carries over rooted preoccupations. The constitution of aims and credentials thus embodies his idiosyncrasy: parochial affiliation inclining to virtue, chronicle mutating to advocacy, voluntary restriction inhibiting understanding, literary norms and values drawn from the European canon. With these *tools not designed for the purpose* Williams must set about his self-inflicted task.



PART II : CONTEXT

PSYCHOLOGY | SOCIETY | MILIEUX || DEMISE

How cogently, then, does Williams carry into practice this compelling proposal of tying in song with the larger life of the 'Upper Thames'? As glimpses in the prose works testify, he grasped instinctively the way music-making was woven into the fabric of country life, rather than figuring it *in abstracto*. Essay passages in which he addresses this entwining of singer and world are among the richest in his canon, though, ultimately, his disquisition fails to accommodate primary components of the problem. *Grosso modo*, the dimensions on which Williams's attentions bear divide—in descending order of cogency—as the individual ('psychological'), the collective ('sociological'), and the circumstantial (loci of performance and transmission).

§I PSINGER PSYCHOLOGY

One compelling aspect of this song/world embrace concerns the cast of mind of the bearers. Williams rejoices in the prowess, reportedly, of unlettered, institutionally untutored country singers in absorbing and retaining lengthy songs, the musical form of herculean capacities deployed generally (see INTERLUDIUM):

I have heard old labourers say that if they could hear a song clearly once only they were able to remember it completely. And we must bear in mind the fact that they were not short pieces. One old labourer told me a song containing eight verses of eight lines each, and took his oath that he had only heard it sung once—at Highworth Fair. And knowing the man's keenness of wit and general honesty, I saw no reason at all for doubting him.³⁸

I have frequently come into contact with those who have assured me that such and such a one knew from two hundred to three hundred pieces.³⁹

These 'remarkable acquisitive faculties' and gargantuan powers of retention receive circumstantial confirmation in the recollection Williams found of singing matches (*supra* p. 256), and in the prodigious repertoires residually possessed by the masters who were his chief informants, as evidenced in the collection. Whereas knowledge of this scale of prowess, however important, had to be established at a remove, further attributes of the traditional singer's psyche derive from direct observation. In an individuated variant on the confluence between song type and singer sub-group,

elective subject matter is deemed index of a singer's personality—"You can allus tell a man by the songs he sings"—often enshrined in attendant sobriquets:

The songs of old Elijah Iles, of Inglesham were gently humorous and witty, such as "The Carrion Crow and the Tailor," "Sweet Peggy," and "The Old Woman drinking her Tea." The majority of the pieces sung by David Sawyer, the sheepshearer of Ogbourne, were rather sentimental. William Warren, the South Marston thatcher, sang the romantic-historical kind, such as "Lord Bateman." Shadrach Haydon, the old shepherd of Hatford, preferred the strong and formal order. Thomas Smart, of Stratton St. Margaret [*sic*], would sing none but what were moral and helpful. Those of "Wassail" Harvey, of Cricklade, were roughly hilarious, such as "How I could ride if I had but a Saddle [Horse]," "Dick Turpin," "Jarvis the Coachman," and so on; and those of Mrs Hancock, of Blunsdon, were of the *awful* sort, i.e. dealing with tragedies, lovers, and blood, such as "Johnny, the Ship's Carpenter," "The Gamekeeper," and others.⁴⁰

Another form of the bond between a singer and the materials she makes her own through performance is the *lex non scripta* of ownership:

The title to the "ownership" of a folk song was commonly recognised. Individuals were jealous of their pieces, and they were often not allowed to pass out of the family. Farther afield, of course, the song might be known. Again, it might not be met with in a fifty-mile radius.⁴¹

The most penetrating of the psychological song-singer affiliations identified by Williams results, engagingly, from the artifice of notation. An unsought spin-off of the laborious process of oral transcription was the discovery that his informants were wedded to their songs via the act of *singing*: in the rustic psyche, a text was inseparable from its tune (a rare, tacit, nod to music proper), and was possessed *whole*, so that it could not readily be summoned up *per partem* for the collector's convenience. Furthermore, performance significantly conferred stamina:

The majority of them [singers] cannot teach you their songs merely by speaking the verses. No; they must sing. At least, they must sing first. Then perhaps they may manage it. Even then it will be a difficult matter. Very often a line is wanting in the middle or at the end of the piece. No amount of pondering will suffice: the singer has never been trained to concentrate. Nothing will serve but to go back to the beginning and repeat the whole song through. Then the *habitus* of singing will prevail, and the lost line will appear naturally and take its place with the others. It is singular, also that it is physically easier for the men to sing their songs than to recite or relate them. "Wassail" Harvey, aged ninety, was quite exhausted after reciting two or three songs, whereas he could continue to sing, in a deep and powerful tone of voice, for an hour or more without experiencing appreciable fatigue.⁴²

At this point, Williams begins to manifest a capacity to get inside the *mentalité* of those who were the exemplars of an order of music-making the modalities of which, even then, had grown foreign. His sensitivity to his singers' habits and quirks of mind thus yields, though typically without elaboration, a modicum of cute insights into dispositions which might loosely be gathered as a 'psychology' of vernacular singing, thereby making a small but significant contribution to a dimension of the topic which had, as Lloyd suggests (see p. 19 *supra*), been largely neglected. These perceptions represent the most fruitful of the intended music-(singer)-world connections, deriving from close observation of an individual's performance propensities.

Williams permits himself no hesitations, though little of this asseveration will, as it stands, sustain rigorous scrutiny. From these passages, his working postulates are evident: the possibility of framing statements that are true of all traditional (he does not employ the term) song and thus of its singers; the premise of categorical knowability. This is a fieldworker's confident synthesis, untroubled by extensive exemplification or sceptical testing. Who then, in terms of the larger population, were the members of this moribund rustic club (deferring for the moment the thornier question of what more exactly the *musical* contents might be)?

§2 SONG AND RURAL SOCIETY

Beyond the level of individuals, where propensities identified have the merit of being specific to song/singing, lies the less exact—because necessarily more generalized—zone of musical correlations to social group and sub-group. Boldly venturing into this tangled territory, Williams's disposition to confident assertion betrays him progressively into difficulties, not to say apparent absurdities.

An evident instance of a posited correlation between social (sub)group and song type is furnished by his remarks on the distaff side:

The women's songs were chiefly the sweetest of all. This is as befits the feminine nature. They were rarely sung by the males. The women might sing some of the men's pieces, but the men seldom sang those of the women. They appreciated their sweetness but they felt that the songs did not belong to them. There can be no doubt but that many choice and rare old songs, comparatively unknown, existed in the memories of the cottage dames.⁴³

Here, typically, an *aperçu* remains ungrounded in analysis. Additional to gender division is the kinship axis. The family is found to be a nexus of tradition, embodying

in some cases a song type, exemplified by a notable family at Castle Eaton (Wilts):

As some individuals were more musical than others, so also were some families. Very often the entire members of a family, for generations, had been famed for singing, and their songs had usually belonged to a distinctive class or order. One of the most convincing illustrations of this is the case of the Kings, of Castle Eaton. They were a numerous family, and nearly all were good singers and possessed of fine voices. The entire choir at the church was composed of the Kings, male and female, and bands of them practised carol-singing at the farmhouses for miles around every Christmas-time. Their songs were uniformly of the sweet and original kind, such as "The Rifles" and "To Milk in the Valley Below"; they never sang comic, boisterous, or, in fact, any but quiet songs.⁴⁴

In these passages, Williams postulates conjunctions between segments of the populace and the musical corpus which, though not empirically fully tenable, sketch in dimensions to the song-life embrace. Greater difficulties arise when he broaches a delimiting of the socio-musical segment as such. The paragraph principally devoted to this aspect merits citation *in toto* (sectioning added).

[1] Not the most intelligent sang. For the most highly intelligent is not commonly the most musical. Often the reverse obtains. Otherwise all the singing would have been done by tradespeople and schoolmasters. [2] Generally speaking, it was the middle class of the working people who were most musical. At the same time, very many of the best singers I knew were quite illiterate, and some were incapable of much interest in matters of a more practical value. Still, they were never stupid. The absolutely stupid person never sang. Yet he appreciated the music and provided an audience. [3] And very often, when a villager who had been a singer left the farm and took up work of a more highly skilled nature, and mixed with other company, he felt ashamed of his songs and definitely relinquished the singing of them. The same thing happened in the case of the one who, fond of singing, and gifted with a good voice, was tempted to learn music and join a choir, or play an instrument in the band. Thereafter he, too, neglected the pure folk-song, and showed a preference for classical, or, at any rate, for standard pieces. He was under the impression that his taste had improved, whereas, in reality, the opposite had often taken place. Thus, the singing of the folk songs constantly and continually devolved upon the rank and file, the lower order, if you will, by which I merely mean the carters, waggoners, shepherds, cowmen, and other farm hands, and the stablemen at the inns.⁴⁵

COMMENTARY [1] *Not the most intelligent sang*: the bald judgement seems asinine, the supporting generalization ('not commonly') bizarre, and the further connector ('otherwise') an instance of false logic.^o [2] The unfortunate incipit is hardly redeemed by its obverse, reference to 'the absolutely stupid person'. Three of these four sentences

^o It is a *gaucherie* which duly earned Williams a place in the *sottisier* featured in *Ethnic*, a short-lived, home-spun organ of the late 1950s rather entangled in the tendentiousness of its inverted imperialism, but which gave rise to commentary of some interest.

lead with a qualifier ('At the same time', 'Still', 'Yet'), creating an infelicitous effect of veering across a line of thought. The gauche embodiment of this gloss, however, may obscure a certain method: Williams seeks here to isolate sociologically the dominant rustic-musical stratum, proceeding largely by elimination of the outer edges. In so far as his line is that neither those of formal education, nor those deficient in mental capacity, formed part of the singing tradition in question, it is unexceptionable. The case is traduced in the setting forth by a restrictive, normative use of 'intelligence', a rather disdainful use of 'stupidity', and an elliptical understanding all through of song/singing which takes one nook of music-making—interestingly, he does not here employ the qualifier 'folk'—as given, monolithic. (What Williams makes of the *contents* of this postulated musical-verbal category is discussed below.)

[3] The remainder of the paragraph displays Williams's powers in a more flattering light. Now he brings properly to bear his antennæ for social distinction to identify an attitudinal shift accompanying (perceived) upward mobility, one which finds musical counterpart in a repudiation of songs associated with the yokelry. The perception is extended in two degrees, the one purely preferential, the other to an extent testable. He is moved to proffer a sceptical verdict—'the opposite had often taken place'—by which he proclaims the partisan position integral to his project: his sympathies lie, unashamedly, with the humble rustic against the socially aspirant, and with the order of *taste* entailed. In conclusion, he posits all this as *process*, as musical level-finding specific to a socio-economic segment located by occupational standing: 'carters, waggoners, shepherds, cowmen, and other farm hands, and the stablemen at the inns.' This is perfectly astute, the idea of a self-sustaining threshold—'the middle class of the working people'—above and below which folk song ceased to appeal. Yet information derived from independent sources (Chapter II) reveals the occupational range of Williams's informants to have been more varied than he allows here, the most glaring omission being the several blacksmiths collected, whose endeavours surely qualify under 'work of a more highly skilled nature'. There is, conversely, no occurrence of 'stablemen' anywhere in the constituency of informants.⁹ Here, too, a conclusion confidently mongered fails fully to match empirical conditions.

A passage such as this can be taken to embody the Alfredian amalgam. A perfectly

⁹ Oddly, he also goes out of his way to cite this group in the preceding paragraph: 'Let it always be remembered that we are speaking of the agricultural population; very few others, if we except stablemen at the inns, figured to any extent in the minstrelsy.' (p. 20)

pertinent perspective on the problem stands unsupported in detail; and, in this case, is expressed carelessly, betraying a trace even of disdain; but the founding observation is incisive. An emblematic quirkiness results, formed of assertion lacking in thoroughness, and fecund insight; stylistically, he fashions after his manner well-turned sentences, while sometimes giving the impression of not having weighed fully what he intends. Here is projection into the song domain of characteristics identified in Chapter III: *ethnography-belletrism*; *apologetics tinged with superiority*; insight founded on intuition in place of rigorous analysis, tending to bear out his self-estimation that he was not much of a thinker (p. 247 *supra*). These are glimpses of the idiosyncratic prism through which Williams refracts song, obliquely articulating his singular mixture of failings and virtues.

Where the passage above (p. 416) is cast in highly generalized terms, making it all but impossible to infer the terms of its deriving (did he have actual *cases* of the socially mobile turning their backs?), the lower level of generality at which the preceding paragraph is pitched may permit connections to be traced. Here, Williams offers elaboration on the social block dubbed 'the lower order', seeking to establish correlations between occupational particularity and musical performance:

Individuals had their favourite pieces. This one was popular with the ploughboys, who taught each other songs at the ploughtail, and in the stables. Another was the favourite of the women at work in the fields reaping, hoeing, or haymaking. This was commonly sung by the cowman to keep the cow quiet during milking; that was chanted by the shearers as they clipped the fleeces from the sheep in the spring-time. The husbands and wives, sitting at home weaving and straw-plaiting, whiled away the hours with song; the children learned the melodies and repeated them out of doors, or after they had gone to bed, and often sang themselves asleep. A few of the choicest songs were taught the children at school; this especially seems to have been the case at Lechlade. The servant girls and maids in the kitchen at the farms and country houses also regularly had musical evenings, and taught each other new melodies.⁴⁶

COMMENTARY *Individuals had their favourite pieces*: a statement promising modulation to particularity introduces instead a set of synthetic encapsulations, an ethnographic parsing which proves, on closer inspection, little more than a perfunctory conspectus of species of the agrestic work force, whose employments are held to afford concomitant opportunities for music-making. To suggest that singing whiled away the working day, and that individuals had preferences, is to say very little. Are these simply abstract categories, or is Williams generalizing from instances among

his acquaintance? Most of the eight (mainly) occupational domains he inventories—ploughboy, women, cowman, shearer, domestic weaving and straw-plaiting, children, school, female servant—would have been familiar from his juvenile participation in agriculture: is he here recalling boyhood memories of singing? Reference to the song collection—identified singers and headnotes—offers stronger clues, in three cases at least. The category *women at work in the fields* finds confirmation in three notes:

‘The Gay Ploughboy’: A popular old ploughing song that was sung both by the carters and by the women and girls who toiled in the open fields during summer and harvest. (David Sawyer, Wt 443)

‘The Green Bushes’: it was equally pleasing to the women, who sang it in the fields. (Elijah Iles, Wt 397)

‘So early in the morning’: a great favourite with the girls and women at work in the fields. (Mrs [Esther] Pitt [*sic*], Gl 82)

(Oddly enough, two of these three songs associated with women derive from male singers.) Secondly, ‘shearers’ almost certainly refers to his favourite, David Sawyer:

‘Shearer’s Song’: I obtained the piece of David Sawyer, the sheep-shearer, who sang it at the shearing feasts every year about the Downside. (Wt 468); ‘The Miller of the Dee’: I first heard of it as having been sung at the shearing feasts held upon the Wiltshire Downs. (Ox 283)

Finally, *A few of the choicest songs were taught the children at school; this especially seems to have been the case at Lechlade*: the quirky picking out of Lechlade (Glos) suggests recollection by an informant, Mrs Mackie being the likely candidate:

‘Old Dorrington’: Obtained of Mrs Mackie, Lechlade, who learned it while a school-girl on the banks of the Thames, about 1860. (Gl 101)

Additionally, the passage suggests how performance is intimately entwined with *transmission* (‘learning’ and ‘teaching’), linking to the third division here.

§3 MILIEUX OF PERFORMANCE

The most circumstantial of the world-music connections is that of milieu of performance, subsuming acquisition (transmission), local conditions of which are set out in Chapter II. Beyond the occupational contexts sketched above lie the loci of leisure, largely inns and country occasions such as fairs and farm festivals.

As the ekistic counterpart to noted musical families, Williams nominates certain villages in the district as once fabled centres of singing, listing 21 locations, to which

may be added from headnotes Bishopstone, Kingston Bagpuze (*sic*), Uffington and Brize Norton. An essential determinant in this respect is the role played by the village inn: the observation of uneven distribution of music-making among settlements forming the locale leads Williams to comment on conditions conducive to song, especially the freedom from constraint which a public house will furnish:

It is worthy of note that the most dull of all villages are those in which there is not and has not been an inn, and, consequently, no, or only very limited, means of association open to the inhabitants. The village reading-room is insufficient. The atmosphere of that has, and is meant to have, a certain curbing and correcting influence. The liberty of the members is restricted, and that is detrimental to music; the folk song could live and thrive only in a state of perfect freedom and independence.⁴⁷

This amplifies a point already made, with qualification:

I have spoken of songs being sung at the inns. It is well known that the inns had more to do than anything besides with the perpetuation of the folk songs. A few men never sang anywhere else. Their souls only expanded in society.⁴⁸

More particularly, inns furnished a *rendez-vous* for the privileged order of musical occasion represented by singing matches, already introduced (**INTERLUDIUM**). Here, too, Williams pitches his paean in terms of physical stamina not musical idiom.

The other capital occasion on the country calendar was the fair, stamping ground of the fabled hawkers (ballad-singers). (See section on transmission in Chapter II.) The effect of this locus is to emphasize the role of print in acquisition:

But the songs were not sung at the inns alone. They might chiefly have been learned there, but they were afterwards sung in many places, and under all sorts of conditions. The songs were mainly obtained at the fairs.⁴⁹

Following from his favourite vignette of a pair of hawkers pedalling broadsides at country gatherings (cited at p. 185), Williams observes:

The pieces were afterwards sung on public and private occasions. A certain class was popular at harvest-homes. They were usually such as dealt with, or referred to, the occupations of mowing and reaping, and often included the ballad of "John Barleycorn." Others were sung at the farm festival of "seed-cake," shearing feasts, May and Morris games, church feasts, at Christmas time, during mumming, at weddings, and so on.⁵⁰

The intimate wedding of song to the manifold occasions of the rustic round suggests at this point, if only fleetingly, a connection to musical content, especially

those songs extolling the immemorial rituals of harvest, of which at least a dozen are identified in headnotes. In addition, all these aspects tacitly stand in exemplification of his primary concern with apologia: the manifold musical prowesses and felicities hitherto proper to the working people of the Upper Thames.

§4 APOCALYPSE: THE FOUR HORSEMEN

Poignantly, this centrality within the Alfredian scheme of things of sites of bucolic social congress finds negative confirmation in his explanatory section on the determinants of decline and ultimate demise. The two paragraphs duly given over to this issue combine a reversing of the picture previously proposed with extraneous factors which have the feel, revealingly, of poorly pondered tackings-on.

Williams adduces a handful of 'causes', set rather lop-sidedly before the reader, which can be subsumed under four primary heads (not in his order): an end to rustic occasions and haunts, the imperialism of 'education', technology's ingenious tentacles and the demise of folk song composition. Of these four horsemen deemed to roam the Upper Thames, three are already familiar from the prose works and are thus not specific to song; the fourth, slipped in almost casually—'Before the middle of the nineteenth century the writing of even moderately good folk songs had ceased'⁵¹—most glaringly invites elucidation, best conducted in the context of the next section ('Genesis'). Expressed at a higher level of generality, forces identified divide into decay internal to the object and destruction wreaked by external agents.

INTERNAL FORCES If decay is the obverse of burgeoning, Williams need in principle only invert the description of conditions he has ready to hand:

The dearth, or, at any rate, the restricting of the fairs, and, consequently, of the opportunities of disseminating the ballad-sheets is one cause of its decline. The closing of many of the old village inns, the discontinuance of the harvest-home and other farm feasts, the suspension and decay of May games, morris dancing, church festivals, wassailing, and mumming are other obvious reasons. Another factor was the advent of the church organ and the breaking-up of the old village bands of musicians. That dealt a smashing blow at music in the villages.⁵²

EXTERNAL FORCES In the companion paragraph, he loops back to this issue of loci of performance, in particular picking up at length the central role of inns, where conflict with the forces of order led to repression of singing:

At the same time, the singing of the old songs went on as long as the fairs and harvest-homes were held, and even after they were discontinued, till they began to be rigidly discountenanced, or altogether forbidden at the inns. This was the most unkind and fatal repulse of all. It was chiefly brought about, I am told, not by any desire of the landlord, but by the harsh and strict supervision of the police. They practically forbade singing. The houses at which it was held, i.e. those at which the poor labourers commonly gathered, were marked as disorderly places; the police looked upon song-singing as a species of rowdyism. Their frequent complaints and threats to the landlords filled them with misgivings; the result was that they were forced, as a means of self-protection, to request their customers not to sing on the premises, or, at any rate, *not to allow themselves to be heard*. The crestfallen and disappointed labourers accordingly held their peace. The songs, since they could no longer be sung in public, were relegated to oblivion; hundreds have completely died out, and will be heard no more.⁵³

These men knew hundreds of songs, and the pieces showed great variety, ranging from the historical ballad down to a doggerel version of "Maria Martin," or lines composed on a local execution. These usually came last, and were often introduced to provide a taste of comedy. There was much fun at these gatherings, and, no doubt, they might not have been appreciated by all sorts and conditions of people, though I never heard of any serious misbehaviour or disorder. That they were viewed with disfavour in some quarters, however, is not to be disputed; local sympathy was waning, complaints were made of the noise, and the proprietors of the inns were requested not to allow the contests. I have been told that the closing of the famous Bear Inn at Cumnor was due to the too boisterous behaviour of the patrons and the noise made by the singers.⁵⁴

Just as the flourishing of inns fostered the singing tradition, so their constraining hastened its demise. Here, too, Williams's pronouncements read a little sweeping: some venues, at least, must have survived. His sympathies, plainly, lie with the oppressed against the agents of social disciplining, though purely as wistful retrospection.

This companion paragraph adduces further forms of rural change 'of late'—none of the states of affairs and developments set out in Williams's Essay is anchored in time—in support of musical apocalypse, modulating now to the irruption of the monstrous modern. Dividing broadly as ideological and technological, contemporary dominant developments are adjudged inimical to music-making. The institutionalizing of a prescriptive elementary 'education' commands pride of place in Williams's scheme of culpability:

Education has played its part. The instruction given to the children at village schools proved antagonistic to the old minstrelsy. Dialect and homely language were discountenanced. Teachers were imported from the towns, and they had little sympathy with village life and customs. The words and spirit of the songs were misunderstood, and the tunes were counted too simple.⁵⁵

In the material sphere, technology furnishes him with a litany which, following the egregious excursus on the church organ, continues with the Pandora's box of the railway, the ramifying depredations of which extend to the break-up of rural communities (urbanization and its attendant population shifts); and closes, *par comble de malheur*, with the aberrant mechanical distractions peculiar to the age:

The gramophone and the cinema have about completed the work of destruction, and finally sealed the doom of the folk song and ballad as they were commonly known.⁵⁶

These six 'causes'—removal of venues (fairs, inns), advent of church organ, education, end to composition, railways, cinema and gramophone—may be grouped under four main heads, in turn subsumable under the root polarity: internal / external. Schematic shuffling in this way throws into relief the emphasis of Williams's exposition: internally, room for (public) performance had either decayed or been suppressed; externally, supply had dried up and demand had been destroyed by a mixture of educational corruption and alternative attractions.

In the case of decay of country occasions, the question is deferred rather than resolved (what *caused* the decay of these occasions?). On the intrusions of education, Williams arguably concedes undue clout to the purveyors of state-sponsored 'learning', underplaying the resilience of popular culture. Any impact of the railways on music-making is oblique and thus difficult to measure. Finally, it remains implausible that commercial entertainments overnight created a rural throng of asinine cinema-goers and sharpeners of gramophone needles. (The atrophy of vernacular music-making surely predates these developments.) As an explanatory scheme this is clearly *désinvolte*. In so far as these factors designate a shift in climate, they are pertinent, vindicating in inverse terms Williams's contextualizing approach (that is, song wanes when enabling conditions cease to obtain). His difficulty here is that the terms of his explanation are either insufficiently precise, or they are unsustainably specific. The positing of direct causal connections between urban-technological developments and forms of country life is unusual in Williams (hitherto he has presented the two as opposed but parallel realms), and evidently uncircumspect. In playing up the vulnerability of rural culture to extraneous influence, furthermore, he conspicuously neglects attitudinal aspects: there is no sense that younger generations might

have rejected song of their own accord, the possibility that the lure of commercial entertainment is symptom rather than cause.

In Williams's scheme of things, the horsemen stalking the Upper Thames were not plague and famine (small traces of the latter he reports from living memory) but the social and economic mutation set forth in Chapter III: disciplining by the forces of order (including 'education'), slow agrestic decay, the corrosions of technology. Following from this, his purchase on folk song decline—three of the four principal categories of which are Alfredian *bêtes noires* previously hunted down in the prose works—proves in a small way eschatological, a kind of baleful coming to pass: enforced closure of rowdy inns sparking his visceral antipathy to forms of beadleism, destructive effects of modern leisure pursuits offending his lettered sensibilities, the propagating role of the railway colliding with prelapsarian yearnings. Accordingly, a view already angled towards dissolution of a world unexpectedly finds emblematic embodiment in one of its incidental aspects, furnishing a manifest exemplification of the thesis that Williams carried over an existing body of verdict into his reading of song, a kind of hermeneutic prefabrication: he rummages in his baggage for (in this case) convenient culprits rather than conducting scrupulous investigation. These are the vertical echoings of credo in distinction to the linear *enchaînement* of enquiry and conclusion ('logic'). As on other topics, a distinct impression of improvisation is detectable. Causes of decline adduced are not grounded in rigorous enquiry, but convey rather a sense of rounding up suspects familiar from the earlier writings.

Significantly, his lament for the passing (as he believed) of song does not portend resuscitation. Williams had no stake in maintaining this music in performance. It was not exactly that he *wanted* it to die out, more that he clutched at the expropriatorial scope inherent in demise: once safely over, it was 'his' to pitch against brash contemporaneity. Terminal waning lends his object not merely poignancy but a kind of convenient closure. This ebb tide was directly familiar from personal entanglement with country life: in a sense, the bulk of his oeuvre is a tale of gentle senescence. Where origins are a postulate and heyday a second-hand memory, demise presses in more insistently upon his consciousness, resonating with the backward-looking cast of an already crystallized *Weltanschauung*. The chimes are loudest in this case of musical coda, the informing modality of which is—apocalyptically, indulgently—threnos.

It is in these terms of the subject-object relation, rather than intrinsic substantive connections, that congruence obtains. Agon, a defining tenet of his world-view, extends to the *urbs / rus* contest, a struggle for dominion which *rus* was by this time signally losing, creating thereby an irrevocable realm, an avatar of the Housmanian land of lost content. *A rueful stilling of voices: Orpheus bids farewell to Eurydice*. Thus, the incidental province of song embodies, adventitiously, an epitome of Alfredian agenda: his amalgam is of clear-eyed disaffection, a position at once retrophile and valiantly unsentimental.

FULFILMENT, UP TO A POINT

In these varied respects, Williams can be seen to go some way towards satisfying the terms of his own project of apologetics (every quality identified tacitly advances the case), and of integrating music and life. Framings, however, remain impressionistic, passing *aperçus* which scarcely amount to a thoroughgoing account of the problem. Much of the proposed congruence of the two components is adventitious in character: milieux of performance and acquisition, loose sociological correlations, with perhaps only reflections on singer psychology, such as the musical predilections of individuals, or the modalities of a custodian's possession of her materials, gesturing towards a more compelling bond. Passages such as these proclaim at once Williams's great strength—conveying the rootedness of song in its earthy setting which he knew from experience and observation—and his evident weaknesses: failure rigorously to argue through his declarations. For instance, the sociological *découpage* he arrives at—'Generally speaking, it was the middle class of the working people who were most musical' (p. 416 *supra*)—is cogent as it stands, though insufficiently *nuancé* much to extend understanding. What the exposition of song-society affiliation so far described leaves out of account, bearing as it does on the *fact in itself* of performing (of having performed), is the more substantive issues of internal musical-textual properties, and the modalities of performance in specifically music(ologic)al terms.



PART III : TEXT

DIFFERENTIA SPECIFICA | VALUE | GENESIS

Williams's negotiation thus far of his out-of-the-way object is generally happy: the *de facto* apprenticeships explored in Chapter III had provided him with a model of rustic authenticity and with the means of documenting (gathering and embodying in language), both of which could readily be extended to accommodate the circumstantial aspects of music-making as he progressively unearthed it. Two of the primary elements of his rubric—the human agents of song (previous section), and their habitat (Upper Thames, as Chapter V)—were *terra cognita*. Foreign to any order of negotiation he had hitherto assayed (without fully grasping its foreignness) was the body of melodico-verbal artefact, reducing under his intervention to a corpus of popular verse, the third root element. Here, the point at which the imperatives set out *in abstracto* in Chapter IV are bodied forth in parochial particularity, Williams the novice in musical ethnography confronts the greatest challenge to his powers of improvisation. How to account for the genesis of folk song? How to characterize its specificity? Where to locate its putative value? (With the peculiar restriction that these topics must be adjudicated from text alone, decisive dimensions thereby subtracted.) His difficulties here are self-inflicted: he determines to pronounce on the properties of textual finds rather than confine himself to gleaning and presenting in transcription. The locus of commentary shifts from Essay to headnotes, supplemented by exchanges with Frank Kidson, all falling in the period autumn 1915 to late summer 1916, with some press additions in the 1920s. Beyond two degrees of *implied* evaluation—what is noted, what is selected for publication—judgement becomes overt: not merely *Who records?* but *Who judges?* His position, the reach of his understanding of a problem for which no precedent occurs in his life or work, becomes more exposed. As the *terra* turns *incognita*, Williams must rummage in his saddlebag for tools which can be pressed into service to mediate this strange domain. Elitist accumulations of early manhood conjoin with culturally-given categories: provenance / vintage / 'quality'. The adequacy of Williams's equipping is further tested by the task he sets himself of integrating song into life within his elective locale (PART I). To pose the problem more pointedly: what *musical* meaning can 'Upper Thames' have?

§I DIFFERENTIA SPECIFICA: WHERE THE CAN(N)ONS DO LOUDLY ROAR

it is as if a zoologist would ignore
warthogs because they are not pretty

Lloyd, *Folk Song in England*

The informing concept around which, for better or worse, the problem hinges is that of *canonicity*: is there an order of song the discreteness of which is determined not merely by internal characteristics but by a distinctive value? The ruminations of Chapter IV established that, throughout at least the nineteenth century (the period of currency documented by pioneer fieldworkers either side of 1900), country singers typically possessed a salmagundi of material; and that emergent orthodoxy decreed parts of that heterogeneous repertory—ascrivable commercial compositions—to be ineligible (in that sense, extra-canonical) for the status of ‘folk’ construed as creation by the unlettered peasantry. Primordial questions result. How may this putative boundary be policed? What orders of *knowledge* are supposed in the policing? To what extent do the arbitrations of interlopers coincide with those of the aboriginal enactors? *Qui juge?* Sharp, the most prominent of early luminaries, fell short in these elementary requirements, though *Some Conclusions* derives much of its utility from its magisterial failures and errors (Chapter IV.2).

ETHNOMUSICOLOGICAL INNOCENT OR ZOOLOGICAL TRAIL-BLAZER?

In the course of his strenuous, rain-or-shine safari, Alfred Williams not merely encountered but *recorded* what was, by the historically dominant paradigm of identity and worth, a small herd of musical warthogs roaming the tranquil watermeadows of the Upper Thames alongside creatures of more fabulous complexion. At Quenington (Glos) he found a unicorn and a warthog in apparently amicable coexistence: the aged Mrs Harris had a version of the classic ballad ‘Lord Thomas and Fair Eleanor’ (Child 73), while James West, a good two generations younger, counted ‘Never Cut your toenails on a Sunday’ among his repertory of songs. The uniquely (in the period) high proportion of extra-canonical instances thus noted (see table in Chapter II) means that the cardinal question—did Sharp & Co perform, in their cocksure adjudications, a signal service to posterity by screening out pseudomorphs, or did they destroy a legitimate and important part of the picture?—is inverted by his egregious

intercession: did he create a more faithful record or did he merely display his ignorance by accepting specious specimens? Or to put the point more forcibly: did he merely lack the knowledge to distinguish different orders of popular song, or was he mounting a doctrinaire contesting of an unwarrantedly narrow canon? Purslow raises this question of *intentions* in extra-canonical gleaning, in order to dismiss it:

Williams, although probably the most unscientific of all collectors, appears nevertheless to have gone about the task the right way—whether deliberately, or by chance, or by sheer force of circumstances is probably impossible to say.⁵⁷

Yet, although it may not be possible finally to adjudicate the point, the intentions issue is sufficiently salient to call for closer inspection. More to the point, intention supposes knowledge (especially as he parades print purdah as virtue, **PART I**): in order to use extra-canonical instances to challenge the canon, he must spot them as such.

WHAT'S IN A TERM? Possession and wielding of the problematic qualifier 'folk'—a term (notion) which would not have been a given of the linguistic consciousness that began to form in him through the 1880s, any more than it was known to the singers—does not of itself confer knowledge. He could not, however, employ the shibboleth without gesturing at the dual postulate (discreteness-value, and attendant difficulties) contained within it. The process, conscious or not, of acquisition and percolation into his lexical set is untraceable, but we witness, if we cannot distinctly follow, mutation from fleeting notation of rustic song (text) fragments into a discrete, engrossing project. At no point in the prose works does he qualify the snippets of song (text) woven in as 'folk', but, song gathering once intensively embarked upon, the term duly makes its entry.⁵⁸ Following an inaugural (recorded) use in a letter of autumn 1914, it is not in further evidence—the period is, admittedly, sparsely documented—until its confident incorporation into the definitive rubric 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames' for the *Standard* serial starting in October 1915 (though the paper had run a prominent plug for the serial, so titled, on 14 August). In the introductory Essay, the term's reference is taken as given rather than dwelt upon after the manner of Sharp in *Some Conclusions*. Barely, however, was the song serial properly under way than Williams found himself being prodded from an unexpected quarter.

⁵⁸ This may stand as a small, belated exemplification of Sharp's point that 'the word folk song was added to the language when we had a use for it' (*English Folk Song: Some Conclusions* (1907), p. 2). In assuming the mantle of collector, Williams evidently felt the need to dignify the object of his attentions with a resonant rubric.

THE HIGH PRIEST & THE HERETIC

Frank Kidson's unsolicited observations are of two kinds, the corroborative and the contestatory. The first, predominant, is cast in his antiquary's stamp-collecting idiom ('there is a version of this song in ...'), in which he parades his vaunted mastery of printed collections. The second order, in the form of mandarin strictures, shows the red rag to the bull, with entertainingly instructive results. Kidson concludes his second submission with the apparently innocuous remark:

I am afraid that "Jeanette," "Maggie's Secret," and "I don't mean to tell you her name," can scarcely claim to be folk songs. A folk song, as generally understood to be, is a lyric with its music that has come from a non-professional class of musicians and verse writers. It is, in fact, a song evolved from the people; generally the rustic, or more or less unlettered people. [*Gives details of composition of those items.*] "I don't mean to tell you her name" was a little earlier. The music was composed by Robert Guylot, born 1794, died 1876. The words are attributed to Thomas Hudson, a well-known writer of comic songs in the twenties and thirties, but I have a suspicion they are by Thomas Haynes Bayley [*sic*], author of "I'd be a butterfly," and many other delightful songs that were in fashion in our grandfathers' days. The title generally assigned is "My Village Fair." The version given by Mr Williams is not quite verbally correct.⁵⁸

To presume to correct in this schoolmasterly fashion was to beard the lion in his den. Thus goaded, Williams makes the first of three brief but revealing responses. Following a formality that reads very like studied *froidueur*, he delivers himself of an affirmation of parochial-apologetic intent (oddly absent from the introduction to the serial) in extenuation of the collecting and publication policy adopted:

As I pointed out in my introduction, we are principally concerned with our own locality, and not with the Folk Song in particular or as it occurs in other parts of the country. I shall accordingly not attempt to deal exclusively with the purely Folk Song, but shall include any piece I think worthy of note, provided it ranked with the Folk Song, and stood in relation to the life of the people. I find that certain songs of Burns, and other choice pieces, were sung by the villagers, and it would be committing an injustice not to notice them. I shall also, later on, give specimens of local rhymes and mumming pieces, which were acted upon the Thames' Banks.⁵⁹

Two further interventions passed off without incident, before Kidson blithely repeated the *faux pas*, this time taking exception to Williams's printing of a truncated dialect text of 'Sweet Molly O'Mogg' (see pp. 35 and 191 *supra*) under the rubric of 'folk song':

"Sweet Molly Mogg" can scarcely claim to be a folk song: it is by John Gay, and said to be written on an innkeeper's daughter at Oakingham, in Berkshire. There are fifteen verses in the correct copy, and Dr Maurice Greene set the song to music. It will be found with the air in John Watts' "Musical Miscellany," Vol. II, 1729, and many later collections. There is no reason in the world why the witty poem should be put into dialect form: there is nothing to justify such a thing.⁶⁰

Uncowed, the gladiator hit back with his variant on 'if they sang it, it is valid':

The fact that the song, "Sweet Molly O'Mog," has been sung by the peasantry for the last hundred and fifty years might reasonably be sufficient to entitle it to rank as a folk song, whatever its origin may have been. It is quite possible that the dialect version is the older form, and that it gave occasion to Gay's poem. We know that poets are notorious for their building upon others' foundations. Gay was more likely to change the dialect into pure English than was the later bard to turn his verses into local vernacular.⁶¹

Disinclined to let the matter rest, Kidson the following week further rehearsed the establishment line on the issue. In characteristic form, Williams's rejoinder (the third) takes the argument back across itself:

The question is what one would call art. The differentiation between this and the folk song may be too strongly insisted upon: the most stupid rustic I have ever spoken to upon the matter could tell the difference between "Henry Martin" and "The Miner's Dream of Home," or even such a sweet old song as "I don't mean to tell you her name," to say nothing of "Yip i addy i day," and "Everybody's doing it."⁶²

Ordinance of the kind publicly aired by Kidson had the signal merit of goading Williams (the gladiator) into a refining, at least in modest degree, of his position on the problem, though the responses as spatchcocked perhaps partake more of flailing than refinement. He is led in the three passages to run the gamut of possibilities: (1) retaining folk as closed set (the essentialism, 'the purely Folk Song') but admitting instances from outside the set on grounds of association; (2) the whole assimilationist hog that 'folk' is a quality conferred by adoption irrespective of conditions of creation: *tradition is as tradition does*; (3) twisting back finally to the view—stated without justification—that country singers *do* distinguish absolutely between the old stuff and modern trash (with the implication that that distinction does not preclude adoption: they 'differentiated' and still performed?).

While Williams's tetchy ripostes enact one more case of improvisation, confirming in the process the difficulty he experienced in holding a line of argument, they

at the same time show a willingness to countenance an array of options, boldly egre-
gious in relation to orthodoxy prevailing. The significant virtue, however, of these
heretical positionings lies not in the quality of their tenability as argument but in
Williams's propensity to plead the primacy of the performer, in telling contrast to
Kidson's abstractionist reflexes ('folk song'). Disinclination to be bound by consen-
sus and instinctive orientation towards singers as *people* designate characteristically
Alfredian dimensions, exceptional in this period.

The immediate consequences of this episode on Williams's position are twofold:
it forced him to confront the 'what is a folk song?' question which he had skated
round, deliberately or not, in the Essay (taken up in 'Genesis' *infra*); and any pretence
he may have harboured of operating in virtuous ignorance of the larger movement
was destroyed by a spelling out of the establishment line on the problem. Kidson's
listing of printed collections,⁶² furthermore, added to Williams's patchy acquaint-
ance set out above. So the question is at least posed of whether these unwelcome
strictures had any detectable impact on his discriminations. It is certainly the case
that Williams had *before* Kidson's intervention expressed faith in the rustic bearers
as unerring arbiters of the folk song paradigm:

They [singers] are guided by the principle of taste. And I have never
once known a rustic, or anyone else accustomed to singing the old folk
songs, who would deign to learn any of the modern popular pieces. They
speak of them with contempt, and feel insulted if you should ask them
to sing one. "What! That stuff! That thing! Call that a zong! There's
nothin' in't, maester. There's no sense ner meanin' to't, ner no harmony,"
they will answer you. That their opinions are justified in the main is
realised and admitted by all who are qualified to speak with any degree
of authority upon the matter.⁶²

The obverse of this percolation is rejection prompted by upward social mobility:

The same thing happened in the case of the one who, fond of singing,
and gifted with a good voice, was tempted to learn music and join a
choir, or play an instrument in the band. Thereafter he, too, neglected
the pure folk-song, and showed a preference for classical, or, at any rate,
for *standard pieces*.⁶³

⁶² Collections mentioned by Kidson (some several times) are: Baring-Gould, *Songs of the West*, Barrett, *English Folk Songs*, Bell, *Songs of the Peasantry*, Callcott, *The Harmonist* c. 1806, Chappell, *Popular Music of the Olden Time*, D'Urley, *Wit and Mirth*, Fuller-Maitland & Broadwood, *English County Songs*, Halliwell, *Nursery Rhymes*, Jamieson, *Popular Songs and Ballads*, F Kidson, *British Nursery Rhymes*, *Traditional Tunes and Songs of the Georgian Period*, Allen Ramsay, *Tea Table Miscellany*, Sharp's *Songs from Somerset* [sic], as well as John O'Keeffe's opera *The Poor Soldier*, the *Folk Song Journal* [sic]. Of these, Williams mentions only *Traditional Tunes* (obviously derived from this source) and Bell. Although the first overt mention of Bell (headnote of 5 February 1916) is post Kidson, Williams's note to the 'Seeds of Love' (23 October 1915, almost certainly derived from this source—see *infra*) indicates that possession of the volume pre-dated Kidson's advice. Williams appears to have allowed these references to the body of song scholarship to wash over him.

(What Williams intends here by the judgement 'standard pieces' is unclear: there are two further examples (*infra*), though the implication is of music exhibiting polite associations.) Although in one further passage, on the subject of bawdy songs, Williams is moved to perform the apologetic gloss on his singers' behalf, the burden is the same: the virtue of folk song located against contemporary vulgarities:

They were morally immoral, if I may say so, and not cunningly suggestive and damnably hypocritical, as are some of the modern music hall pieces.⁶⁴

Lamenting the decline of the genre, he posits a late nineteenth century shading of 'folk' song into 'what is commonly known as the popular song of to-day'.⁶⁵

Yet this urge to denigrate popular commercial song jars with the important testimony he gathered in the field, namely that many of his singers *did* 'deign' to learn these compositions in varying degrees of 'modernity'. It is precisely for this feature that his *Nachlass* is now, in certain quarters, prized. Was it a case, then, that Williams was failing to recognise this type of song?

SELECTION Judgements of value are, of course, *implicit* in the elusive practice of *selection*. *Grosso modo*, two stages obtain: the primary level of fieldwork (few collectors if any ever record the totality of what they encounter); and filtering for publication (few, equally, ever publish their gleanings *in toto*). In this case, the latter further subdivides into publication in the *Standard* (400+ texts) and as book (260+ texts). 1° Access to selection at the recording stage is by definition asymmetrical: we cannot know what was *not* noted, save where a collector specifies that she has declined an item. (The headnote on the next page mentioning 'Lord Ullin's Daughter' and 'Jock of Hazeldean' are rare cases of this *chez* Williams.) 2° In terms of selection for publication, more than half of the collection appeared in the *Standard*, around a third in *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* in 1923, the latter forming his summa. Ultimately, the principles which informed Williams's choices remain inscrutably personal. What can be said is that the book contains all but two of the Child ballads noted (see table in Chapter II), and, *a contrario*, a smaller proportion of ascribable compositions than the collection *in toto*. These figures suggest that Williams *sensed*, rather than knew, a distinction.

⁶⁴ If one prejudice united the First Revival collectors, it was abhorrence of the products of the music hall. In his Preface to *Traditional Tunes* (Oxford, 1891), Frank Kidson deems folk song to be under threat from 'the modern effusions of the music hall and concert room' (p. v); Sharp, for his part, derides the 'superficial attractiveness' of 'the poverty-stricken tunes of the music-hall' (*Some Conclusions*, 1907, p. 135, cited p. 282 *supra*). On this point, Williams appears to be in unison: writing of the demise of pub singing at Chiseldon, Wilts, he decries 'the idiotic airs of the music-hall'. (*Villages of the White Horse*, p. 95, cited p. 226.) This supposes, however, the capacity to identify one as such when heard: his collection in practice contains many such 'idiotic airs' from the lips of country singers ('I traced her little Footprints in the Snow').

PROOF IN THE ANNOTATING? Overt evaluation provides more fertile ground. A determination to prefix individual texts with sub-gnomic notes exposes more acutely the extent of Williams's (lack of) knowledge. The passing familiarity with printed works identified in part I was clearly too slight to deliver him from naiveties in the conduct of his quirky commentary on individual texts. A handful of notes bearing on the issue of *differentia*, dotted throughout the serial, is emblematic.

It will be seen that our version [*of another text on the same subject*] is more nearly in line with the folk ballad. ('Captain Brooks and his Gallant Crew', Gl 138)

A truly rustic song, not very artistic, but natural enough. ('Dolly and Hodge', Bk 17)

There are in existence two versions of this: the modern one, however, is too palpably a "fake" of the one here printed, ~~which is the original, and which is of good age.~~ ('Little Brown Jug', Wt 406)

These judgements—alignment with 'the folk ballad', what is 'truly rustic', what is 'fake'—are enough to indicate that Williams worked to a capital criterion of authenticity, but are insufficiently elaborated to show how that model was grounded.

Conversely, songs were rejected on the mysterious criterion of 'standard piece':

I have also found 'Lord Ullin's Daughter,' and 'Jock of Hazeldean' in the villages, though they, of course, are *standard pieces*, and not Folk Songs.⁶⁶

(Printed sheets in the British Library assign the first of these to J F Duggan with words by 'Campbell', the second given as a setting of verses by Sir Walter Scott.)

Detailed scrutiny of the headnotes reveals considerable ignorance about the body of popular song. (Admitting the legitimacy of composed pieces is, of course, fully consistent with a radically assimilationist construal of 'folk': but this is not, or at least not consistently, the position Williams adopts. The impression remains here that he has contrived to put the saddle on the wrong horse.) In the hesitant, slightly defensive tone of some of this commentary the legacy of the strictures administered by Kidson is perhaps detectable. Of the tables which follow: the first suggests in two cases—'The Seeds of Love' and 'Auld Robin Gray'—a printed source for the information he presents; the second shows his comments on identifiable compositions *which he did not know to be such*. It is in cases such as these that Williams's musical naivety is most patently betrayed.

WILLIAMS'S COMMENTARY

• THE SEEDS OF LOVE (WT 372)

Obtained of Mrs Goodfield, Crudwell. ~~Unheard of otherwise in the valley. A Mrs Habergam, who lived in Lancashire, and died in 1703, is said to have been the author of this song. It is suggested that she founded it upon an earlier piece. The earlier piece was probably the one preceding this. [The preceding song being the 'Sprig of Thyme'.]~~

In *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* (1923, p. 86) this reduces, unaccountably, to: 'Version obtained of Mrs Goodfield, Crudwell.'

• AULD ROBIN GRAY (WT 420)

"Auld Robin Gray" was written in 1771 by Lady Anne Barnard, whose husband was Librarian to George III. It was printed on the ballad sheet and sung by the more intelligent of the rustics. The following version is not identical with that in some collections, the chief difference being in the last line of each stanza, which is shorter. I copied it from an old broadside which I found at Latton, where the piece was sung by the Keylock family.

PRINTED SOURCE

ROBERT BELL, *ANCIENT POEMS, BALLADS AND SONGS OF THE PEASANTRY OF ENGLAND*

(1862): 'The author of the song was Mrs Fleetwood Habergam [*sic*], of Habergam, in the county of Lancaster. 'Ruined by the extravagance, and disgraced by the vices of her husband, she soothed her sorrows,' says Dr Whitaker, 'by some stanzas yet remembered among the old people of her neighbourhood.' *History of Whalley*. Mrs Habergam died in 1703, and was buried at Padiham.'

(Sharp, *lui*, will have none of this: 'The words of 'The Seeds of Love', for instance, are usually associated with a Mrs Habergam, of Whalley in Lancashire, simply because the story of her life, which was no doubt well known in her neighbourhood, corresponded more or less with the incidents narrated in the song. Naturally enough, a popular belief soon grew up in Lancashire that Mrs Habergam had herself composed the words of the song; and this is the explanation that is often accepted. There is, however, little doubt that 'The Seeds of Love' is a modern variant of an older ballad, 'The Sprig of Thyme', modified, in the way above explained, to suit the case of Mrs Habergam.' *English Folk Song: Some Conclusions* (1907), p. 98.)

HENRY MORLEY, *A BUNDLE OF BALLADS*

(1891): '[But] the last ballad in this bundle, Lady Anne Barnard's "Auld Robin Gray" was written in 1771, and owes its place to a desire that this volume, which begins with the best of the old ballads, should end with the best of the new. Lady Anne, eldest daughter of the fifth Earl of Balcarres, married Sir Andrew Barnard, librarian to George III., and survived her husband eighteen years. While the authorship of the piece remained a secret there were some who attributed it to Rizzio, the favourite of Mary Queen of Scots. Lady Anne Barnard acknowledged the authorship to Walter Scott in 1823, and told how she came to write it to an old air of which she was passionately fond, "Bridegroom grat when the sun gaed down." When she had heaped many troubles on her heroine, and called to a little sister to suggest another, the suggestion came promptly, "Steal the cow, sister Anne." And the cow was stolen.'

WILLIAMS'S COMMENTARY

DETAILS OF COMPOSITION

HEADNOTES, SHOWING AMENDMENTS

SEE ALSO TABLE IN CHAPTER II

• THE SOWER'S SONG (GL 102)

A superior piece, evidently penned by one possessing more than the average ballad-writer's skill. not heard out of North Wilts. Words obtained of Mrs Mackie, Lechlade.

• THE DOWNHILL OF LIFE (GL 122)

In the course of my inquiries I come across many songs of a moral or helpful nature, and sometimes pieces perfect in form and otherwise commendable, but which scarcely rank as folk songs. This, however, I admit as a folk song, though it may not meet with the approbation of everyone. It is very old, having been sung in Poulton for at least a hundred years by a family of blacksmiths. Words supplied by George Herbert, the aged blacksmith, Poulton.

• NOTHING ELSE TO DO (GL 157)

A charming old song, with real poetry, gentle wit, and pure sentiment; one of the better class of folk pieces. Obtained of Alfred Spiers, Southrop.

• LOVE WAS ONCE A LITTLE BOY (WT 493)

This also is of great age. It is one of "grandmother's" songs, which is sufficient evidence of its hoariness. It is not a common piece, though I believe it may rank as a folk song. Copy of Miss A Cross, South Marston, Wilts.

• YOU GENTLEMEN OF ENGLAND (OX 192)

Not purely a folk-song, but as it was sung by the villagers of Aston, Coate [sic—should be Cote] and Shifford, at the inns, and at club festivals, I have included it in my list.

• AN OLD BRASS LOCKET (WT 500)

I cannot vouch for the age of this piece, though I am told it is an old folk song. It came from the neighbourhood of Didcot, Berks; at least, that is where my informant learned the song, some fifteen years ago. Words obtained of Albert Spackman, South Marston, Wilts.

• THE SOWER'S SONG

Composed by Thomas Carlyle

• TO-MORROW

Composed by Collins (the actor), late C18

Oddly Williams had this text and information on his shelf in the collection edited by Plumptre (qv). It also features in some editions of Palgrave as John Bailey points in a letter to Williams (10 May 1923).

• AS I'D NOTHING ELSE TO DO

Words by H Fry, music by J L Hatton, 1859

• LOVE WAS ONCE A LITTLE BOY

Composed by J A Wade, 1826

• YOU GENTLEMEN OF ENGLAND

Composed by John Wall Callcott, from his opera *The Travellers in Switzerland*, 1794

• AN OLD BRASS LOCKET

Composed by Harry Dacre, 1894

The revision of 1923, when materials printed in the *Standard* were reshaped to form a book, afforded a chance to make adjustments to the original presentation. Where, most obviously, Williams might have incorporated the ‘corrections’ proposed by Kidson, a solitary instance obtains (songs cited in exemplification):

Examples of the kind and quality of songs sung by women are discovered in such pieces as “Maggie’s Secret,” “The Scarlet Flower,” [“Lord Thomas and Fair Eleanor,” “Grandma’s Advice,”] “The Seeds of Love,” “Lord Lovel stood at his Castle Gate,” “If you will walk with me,” “Cold Blows the Winter’s Wind,” and so on.⁶⁷

‘Maggie’s Secret’ was picked up by Kidson, §1 *supra*.) More pertinent is the inverse: a reference supplied by Kidson that was *ignored*. The contested case of ‘My Village Fair’ was included in *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* with note unamended, where Kidson had pointedly provided details of its composition. (This is not to suggest that Williams was impelled to accept Kidson’s verdict: simply that he might have covered himself by incorporating the information that had been supplied, if only to reject the view that the song was thereby disqualified.) This failure to amend seems to imply, for all his protestations to the contrary, that Williams carried out his 1923 revision in some haste. Did he simply *forget* Kidson’s comments of nearly eight years previously, rather than obdurately dismissing them? At the very least, the indications are that he was at no great pains to extend his knowledge of popular song.

What must have been his reaction to the *Times* notice (Chapter IV.3), which, with period superciliousness, picks up where Kidson had left off in 1915, but this time before a national audience: he is made to seem an incorrigibly inattentive schoolboy castigated by wearily condescending masters. Did he finally get the message? Or did it all bounce off the carefully cultivated carapace?

Intentions, finally, remain shadowy. If Williams was operating, as he was eager to aver, strictly in isolation from other collectors and their norms, he could not have used his gleanings consciously to contest the contemporary canon (of which he would thereby have been unaware). If nothing else, Kidson’s volunteered strictures thrust the consensus view under his nose. No sense is conveyed in the inaugural corpus of commentary (Essay) that he was seeking to mount a challenge to the received view. Hints of dissent in the subsequent headnotes (as *supra*) smack of self-protection, quite probably a legacy of the Kidson skirmish in which he had bodged

a position on the question, rather than of provocation. (Significantly, neither Kidson nor the reviewer in *The Times* considers that possibility that any of this might have been calculated, implicitly accepting the sanctity of the canon as axiomatic—simply not open to challenge—and deeming Williams consequently a fool for including material of this order.) In the second period (post 1923), however, two statements are of especial moment, considered here in chronological order (which simply serves to accentuate their incongruence). Writing in the *Wiltshire Gazette* in August 1925, Williams qualifies a re-affirmation of his apologia line with a telling confession:

In my work *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, which was published in 1923 by Messrs. Duckworth and Co., and was extensively reviewed, I gave a sketch of the ground and a minute account of the result of my examination and I venture to think that no one, after reading my conclusions there given, and scanning the selection, *in spite of several errors of inclusion, which isolation and pure honesty led me into*, would be in any doubt concerning what I pointed out, i.e., that the Upper Thames district was exceedingly rich in folk song, both music and every form of merry-making.⁶⁸

These unspecified 'errors of inclusion' presumably refer to instances which offend against the received canon, for which he had by then been further taken to task in *The Times*. If this was the elitist message finally sinking in, it represents, in glaring contrast to the prickly defence put up against Kidson in 1915, an uncharacteristic capitulation, the nearest the gladiator was likely to come to a *mea culpa*. A matter of a few months later, in an article written for the inaugural issue of *Word-Lore* magazine, Williams performs what appears to be an unprompted volte-face:

I would here point out that my original purpose was not that which may have prompted other collectors of folk songs. It is fair to say this, because in the arrangement of my materials, as they stand in *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, I was at no particular pains to connote and classify; nor did I attempt to adhere to the accepted canon, *which has always seemed to me too rigid as ordinarily applied to folk songs and ballads*.⁶⁹

Given the absence of any attention to the canon question in his initial writings, this pronouncement of 1926 smacks of making a virtue of ignorance after the event: had it *always* seemed too rigid? It certainly, in context—a periodical that was both national and specialist—bespeaks the outsider cocking a counter-canonical snook at the folk song establishment from the bucolic sanctuary of the Upper Thames. This was a bold statement to make in 1926—perhaps not until the 1950s did such a

stance become respectable, or even countenanceable—virtually going out on a limb in contrast to the cautious, not to say defensive, tenor of remarks over preparation of *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* for publication. Williams's only other use of the term *canon* occurs in another article of 1926, discussed under 'Genesis' *infra*.

Ultimately, Williams underestimates difficulties attaching to the capital discriminatory axis—*echt* and *ersatz*—around which the problem turns. The commentators have been misleading on the question of his understanding. Where Clark affirms, 'He was well aware of the pseudo nature of many of the songs which were called folk songs',⁷⁰ Purslow pillories his 'apparent inability to distinguish between songs with some degree of "folk" flavour on the one hand, and well-known popular pieces, 18th century minor art songs and Victorian drawing-room ballads on the other'.⁷¹ Each of these (antithetical) verdicts is glib. The congeries of statements cited are sufficient to undo any bald binary framing of the question: that Williams either *knew* absolutely, or did not; that he *intended*, in a highly conscious way, to challenge the received canon, or did not. The indications are not that he failed to 'distinguish', but that, unversed as he was in nascent folk song establishment dogma, he distinguished after his own fashion—quirkily, non-doctrinally, intuitively. The twistings and turnings he performs do little to extend understanding of the problem, but signify indirectly. Emblematically messy arbitrations denote not a pondered position, still less a body of doctrine, but modes of nose-following (by turns inspired and ingenuous) shading into veritable bodging in places: he throws out, to some extent *extempore*, a scatter of statements, some of which anticipate on deutero-revival revisionism. In this context, *improvisation* may be a more apposite concept than 'intention(s)'. If Williams is reacting to the exigences of the moment—a given adversary, a publication circumstance—then his pronouncements are subject to elucidation in those terms. Psychologically, the array of positions he adopts is partly attributable to his multiple personæ: the champion of rustic culture, the autodidact with his defensiveness, the combative loner making his stand against a mandarin. In this light, assertions which appear at the level of content anomalous, not to say flatly contradictory, may in some degree be accounted for ('motivated').

Especially, the vote of confidence Williams performs in the singers' powers of discernment, at odds with empirical record, is attributable to partisan proclivity:

they were 'his' people and he was intent upon defending them. Hence the assertion that 'certain errors are to be avoided. A common one is that of imagining that the inhabitants of a locality are incapable of appreciating their ballads and songs.'⁷² The subtlety he misses is that singers 'appreciated' *differently*, according to an endogenous scale of values largely unrevealed to interlopers. Elijah Iles had 'Woodman spare that tree' alongside 'John Barleycorn': he may have *sensed* a distinction of newer and older songs without regarding that as grounds for not singing them.

Uniquely in his case, the collector to a significant degree shares the relation of his singers to the musical corpus: he did not spot the number in Child, or conversely identify a music hall item, any more than they did. (Perhaps more precisely: his intimations of these differences were scarcely more sophisticated than were theirs, though not isomorphic.) The chasm of arbitration accordingly yawns less wide. Whether the resultant body of record is thereby rendered more 'representative', as some have maintained (p. 300 *supra*), it is assuredly more wide-ranging. Williams did well at picking up the textual unicorns—via his literary knowledge—but was less adept about identifying the warthogs as such (not really enough of a zoologist to be fully confident of the distinction): so sometimes, like Marco Polo (p. 18 *supra*), he mistakes a rhinoceros for a unicorn ('My Village Fair', picked up by Kidson); and sometimes, *a contrario*, he passes off a unicorn as if it were no more than a rhinoceros as with 'The Lover's Ghost' (Child 272, as 'The Suffolk Miracle'). So the characteristic twist is there: Alfredian zoology is less than fully taxonomically grounded—'I was at no particular pains to connote and classify'⁷³—a possibility Lloyd for example seems not to consider. If they were not necessarily warthogs to the collector neither, more to the point, were they to the rustic bearers: so who decides what constitutes a warthog anyway? Hesitations in the second table above suggest a vague intimation that the prevailing canon was too restrictive, without that ever crystallizing into doctrinaire contesting (though he generally inclines to acceptance as valid). In the matter of canonicity, a half-declared aim is achieved half-wittingly: the meaning is *in* the tangle, not in some neat realm resulting from disentangling. This issue remains, alluringly, part of the indecryptable enigma of the man.



§2 VALUE ('ITS PRECIOUS QUALITY AND DEFINITE VALUE')

The second root postulate built into the notion of 'folk' is *value*: a domain not merely deemed discrete but exhibiting worth on its own terms. This results from a mid-late nineteenth century attitude shift more dramatic than is always recognized. In the immediately preceding period, there was little sense that the music-making of untutored country people might be worthy of attention: the forces of order had actively sought to suppress it, indeed. It was not vernacular song *in itself* which suddenly took on enhanced value after c. 1890, but the wider world which moved around it.⁶ Williams's endeavours are necessarily situated within this historical moment, of which he shows himself to be partially conscious:

What was wanted was knowledge, and, of course, a proper amount of sympathy with local life, customs, and pastimes. But current fashion was against it. Literary taste ignored or condemned it. Complex and diversified as was the culture of the Victorian period, it was still incomplete, inasmuch as it was not able to appreciate the simplicity and artlessness of the folk performance. Nor yet its precious quality and definite value. That is why the recognition of the folk song and Morris dance was so long deferred. The delay was costly, because, in the meantime, much valuable material perished beyond recovery; than this nothing could be more safely established.⁷³

Wherein, typically, does Williams seek to ascribe the essential value, *qua corpus*, of this congeries of song discovered in the mouths of country people? (Worth inherent in the fact of its occurrence within a rustic world is evident from the body of commentary discussed in Part 2, *supra*.) This extends the tangle encountered in the case of *differentia*. What are his criteria, his assumptions, his canons of merit? On what foundation does his evaluation rest? In commenting on particular songs, Williams lays himself open to ridicule more obviously than in contextualizing passages. Virtuous sequestration (the *isolation* claim, *supra*) becomes potentially most self-defeating: if he repudiates the body of specialist scholarship in the period (such as it was), then he must draw on *ersatz* forms of equipping. This means, essentially, his (self)formation in high literature (Chapter III, especially part 2). Here, as much as anywhere in his intervention, response is determined by extraneous *baggage*.

⁶ As evidence that benighted attitudes of the earlier period lingered on, W C Hazlitt wrote in 1905: 'Modern principles of instruction will eventually extinguish most, if not all, of the foolish prejudices and superstitions recorded here, and while it will be an unquestionable blessing, that such a change should occur, it also seems desirable that we should possess in a tolerably complete shape the means of comparison between the Older and the Newer Life of this Empire.' (*Dictionary of Faiths and Folklore: Beliefs, Superstitions and Popular Customs* (London, 1995 [1905]), Preface p. x.)

Williams, of course, does not attend to music in any form, whether tunes as such (organizings of sound) or *performance* (the musico-textual construct as instantiated in the throat—and heart—of a singer not formally tutored). Even here, there are exceptions in the form of nine nods in the direction of music proper, some of them positive, if token, recognitions of the part played by tunes in a song's popularity:

'Nightingale sing' (Wt 495): 'The tune is very sweet, which accounts for its success.'

'Aaron's Lovely Home' (Wt 349): 'The tune was pleasant, and perhaps this had something to do with its success among the villagers.'

'Down in Moorfields' (uncatalogued): 'An old song, that was sung to a plaintive melody.'

'Yonders sits a Pretty Creature' (Ox 225): 'Its composition and balance are perfect: one is surprised to find such music in the bare enumeration of a score of figures.'

'The Sailor Boy' (Gl 115): 'It is old, and the air is very pleasant, well suited to the words of the piece.'

'There is a Tavern in the Town' (Wt 497): 'The air is sweet, and well suits the words of the song.'

'Ground for the floor' (Wt 423): 'It is old and the air is good.'

'Love it is easing' (Wt 496): 'A simple ditty, with a pleasant air.'

'The Spanish Cavalier' (Gl 153): 'The air is very sweet, and the words deserve to be remembered.'

As a generality, inverting the judgement, melodic character—'the tunes were counted too simple'—is also adduced in passing as a determinant of decline.⁷⁴

So evaluation reduces to *characteristic textual properties*. Williams works to default discriminations, essentially: **1 SUBJECT MATTER** (subsuming topoi: this is the least overtly evaluative of the three); **2 ANTIQUITY** (how old is it?); **3 OVERT EVALUATION** (endless variants on 'is it good / is it bad', but also embracing the 'completion' problem). These strands are, as usual, variously intertwined according to the assumptions of the mediator: good *because* old, complete *therefore* original *therefore* the oldest form, and so forth. A case could, indeed, be made for 'antiquity' as the primary organizing theme, a primary motivating factor, the fascination with all that is deemed ancient.

I. SUBJECT MATTER: CONSPECTUS

Williams had a keen sense of the range of subjects covered in the songs, displayed in this compendious paragraph (the paean to 'Life let us cherish' is taken up *infra*):

The songs, as well as being numerous, were of infinite variety. Their range was positively amazing. They were upon every conceivable subject. No thing and no person escaped a composition. The king, the nobleman, the knight, the admiral and general, the squire, the soldier and sailor, the farmer, the miller, the mower, the reaper, the waggoner, the dairymaid, the shepherd, the ploughman, the cobbler, down to the barber, sweep, and ragman were honoured in song. Every event and occasion was celebrated. There were songs as sweet as the roses on the bush, or the dewdrops on the hedgerows. Others were as strong as brine, or the cool northerly breeze. Some were of classic beauty. The song, "Life let us cherish," which I have on the broadside sheet, is equal in conception, phrase, and spirit to much of the finest of the Greek lyrical poetry; Horace at his best could scarcely have surpassed it. These pieces were pure narrative; those were romantic or historical. Hundreds dealt with the imperishable theme of love. Some were concerned with pirates, outlaws, and highwaymen; others told the delights of hunting, poaching, the occupations of the farm, of cattle, and sweet rustic joys. Many were most quaintly and cunningly humorous or satirical. In fact, they left nothing untouched, and no part of life unreflected or unrepresented.⁷⁵

This range of subject matter evidently struck him, as the lecture notes show:

Range of Songs (Glees, etc.) Great range of Songs; Range of songs. 4,000. 1,000 years old. (L. Bateman) Arthur O'Bradley, mentioned by Shakespeare. Glees. Carols. Drinking and Hunting songs; QUAINNESS of the songs old songs the best "Old Moll" "Crow" etc "Lord Bateman" may have come from the crusading times.⁷⁶

One particular subject Williams singles out for comment is songs of war, making the topical connection to, and contrast with, bellicose events then in progress:

It is extraordinary, and significant of the tenacity with which country people cherish old traditions, that while British soldiers are holding the troops of the Kaiser, and waiting to triumph, the aged villagers of the Upper Thames are still naively singing war songs celebrating Marlborough's campaign in the Netherlands, Flanders, and High Germany, 1702-1704, and others dealing with the American War of Independence, and battles with the French towards the end of the eighteenth century. At the eastern end of the field, within a short distance of the City of Oxford, one sings "Rodney so Bold," the British admiral who defeated the fleet of our present gallant Allies in battle off St. Lucia, 1782; at the further extremity, close to the Thames Head, another sings of valiant Captain Brooks, and the fight between the *Chesapeake* and the *Shannon*, off Boston, twenty years earlier.⁷⁷

Evidently a topic which struck a chord, this paragraph is recycled largely intact in three further articles (though it does not feature in the original Essay), in headnotes and in the lecture notes:

Old men still singing songs dealing with Marlborough's campaign in High Germany 1742-43 [*sic*] General Wolff. Privateersmen songs⁷⁸

On this point of subject matter, Williams shows himself to be alive to the theme-and-variations character of the song texts he found. He comments in the headnotes on topoi, offering in the process further evidence of his 'ballad writer' line:

'In the City of Limerick' (Gl 105): [*theme of crime-punishment-repentance*] 'afforded the ballad writer abundant materials. The songs themselves seldom exhibited any particular brilliance.'

'The Farmer's daughter and her servant man' (Ox 270): 'The subject of the following piece [*brothers remove suitor*] is a well-laboured one; it has provided the ballad singers [*sic*] with much capital material.'

'The Lady and her Apprentice Boy' (Wt 455) [*a love story*]: 'I do not know how ... the ballad writers would have fared without it for a subject.'

2. DATING: THE SET TO ANTIQUITY

The most obvious, reflex form of evaluation is the antiquity question: how old is it? Williams's attempts to ascribe to individual texts a location in time are beset by the usual problems attending matter that is orally derived, and informed by his particular model of origination (the work of individual authors rather than collective Sharpian-Darwinian evolution). Williams instinctively signs up to what might be termed the *set to the archaic*: the automatic assumption that the interest—and value—of the subject lies predominantly in its (presumed) antiquity. This defining connection to a world passing and past is built into the motivation for seeking out and recording in the first place. (See his use of the term 'relics' passim.) For this reason ascription of date or period, however inspecific, becomes a headnote staple, despite very few traditionally occurring songs being datable.

Given that there is little direct external evidence against which to check off this music, we are left with the question of how Williams grounded his datings. *Grosso modo*, there are two kinds of indicator: internal evidence (stylistic features and historical references), and external evidence (documentary record or circumstance, such as family details). Though the bulk of his comments on the point occur in the notes to individual texts, Williams offers the following synthetic passages:

The age of many of the pieces is astonishing; some of them date back three or four hundred years. It is to be noted also that the oldest are the best, whether they be purely ballads, folk-songs proper, or comic or humorous pieces. In support of this it will be necessary to mention but a few compositions, such as "Captain Barniwell," "The Bold Dragoon," "The Maid's Wager," "~~The Banks of Green Willow~~," ["Bold Sir Rylas"]

"The Seeds of Love," "Lord Level," "Old Moll," "Gossip Joan," "Georgie Barnell," or "The Bugle played for me," as against "Brennan on the Moor," "The Lincolnshire Poachers," "The Cottage by the Sea," "Willie, we have missed you," "The Banks of Sweet Dundee," "Smiling Tom," "Joe in the Copper," and others.⁷⁹

Many of the songs are of great age. This is evident in their style of composition, the subjects of which they treat, their simplicity, and other features. The date of some we recognise through references made to them by writers of past times. The song of "Arthur O'Bradley," for instance, which was popular at several points in the Upper Thames Valley, is mentioned by Shakespeare, and we do not know how long it had existed before his day. Other pieces known to be of good age are "Captain Barniwell," "Bold Sir Rylas," "The Banks of Green Willow," "The Shepherd's Daughter," "Lord Thomas and fair Eleanor," "The Bailiff's Daughter of Islington," "The Blind Beggar's Daughter of Bethnal Green," "The Seeds of Love," "Jolly Brown Ale," "Henry Martin," "Fairlop Fair," and numerous others which I have obtained.⁸⁰

These statements give some idea of the instances Williams identified as notable for their antiquity. The second passage in particular posits dating procedures, without specifying inferential details: style, subject matter, printed references. (The latter may appear to be at odds with his denial of printed collections, *supra*, though he may mean here passing references to songs in literary works rather than formal collections of music.) The newspaper articles and lecture notes contain little on this aspect beyond citing emblematic instances by title.

DATINGS OFFERED IN HEADNOTES Date ascription is the most numerous order of judgement in the headnotes. Qualitatively, each instance is given in varying degrees of precision, though all are perfunctory, usually offered without justification and sometimes further qualified ('probably') so as to be almost meaningless. The examples which follow are sorted in diminishing order of specificity.

'SIXTEENTH CENTURY/ELIZABETHAN' (4): 'Arthur O'Bradley O' (Wt 427): 'A very old song, dating at least from the sixteenth century, and it may have been earlier'; 'The Blind Beggar's Daughter of Bethnal Green' (Wt 434): 'An abridgement of a very old ballad well-known at the time of Elizabeth'; 'Carrion Crow and the Tailor' (Wt 393): 'A very ancient piece, dating at least from the age of Shakespeare'; 'The Shepherd's Daughter' (Gl 126): 'a very ancient song, dating at least from the age of Queen Elizabeth'.

'SEVENTEENTH CENTURY' (7): 'Barbara Allen' (Gl 144, this from Morley, *supra*); 'Old Moll' (Bk 19), 'probably'; 'The Admiral's Return' (Wt 480), 'probably'; 'The Old

woman drinking her tea' (Wt 408), inference from the advent of tea drinking; 'Off to Flanders' (Gl 108), 'c. 1690'; 'Twanky Dillo' (Wt 373), 'probably'; 'When Joan's Ale was new' (Wt 507), possibly from a printed source (it 'figures in many collections').

'EIGHTEENTH CENTURY': 'The Blue Cockade' (Wt 517), '1750'; 'No money and plenty' (Gl 148), 'Its style discovers its age'; 'The Transport' (Ox 222), 'Obviously of late eighteenth century date'; 'My Bonny Girl' (Ox 176), 'I think it is of the eighteenth century'; 'Fair Eleanor and the Brown Girl' (Gl 132), 'The piece dates from about 1700' (no source cited, but clearly derived from print). Many in this category are adjudicated from military endeavour: 'The Rifles' (Wt 348), 'An eighteenth century war song'; 'To Holland we were bound' (Gl 66), 'This dates from the eighteenth century, and refers to one of our Continental wars of the period'; 'In the Lowlands of Holland' (Wt 456), 'One of the many songs composed at the time of Marlborough's campaign in the Netherlands, 1702'; 'Duke of Marlborough' (Wt 442), 'The Duke of Marlborough ... died in the year 1722. The age of the song may easily be conjectured'; 'The Fate of the Ramillies' (Bk 9), 'HMS "Ramillies" was lost on the Bolt-head, 15th February, 1760, only twenty-six men being saved from the wreck. The song was presumably penned immediately afterwards'; 'Rodney so bold' (Ox 302), 'Rodney was Admiral of the British fleet in the naval battle off Cape St Vincent, 1780, in which he won a gallant victory.'

'NINETEENTH CENTURY': 'I'm a stranger in this country' (Ox 259); 'The Bonny Blue Handkerchief under her Chin' (Wt 436), '*I am told it* dates from about the middle of the last century' (by whom?); 'The wind across the wild moor' (Gl 89), 'probably'; 'The Gallant Hussar' (Gl 135), 'dating probably from the opening of the nineteenth century'. Several are adjudications from stylistic indicators. 'Bonny Old England O' (Ox 232) is held to be 'much older' than the time of Arch: 'from the phraseology I think it must date at least from the opening of the nineteenth century.'

FROM INTERNALS, PERIOD UNSPECIFIED: 'The Isle of Wight' (Gl 133): 'It is old, as may be recognised from the style and treatment of the subject.' 'The Pitcher of Water' (Wt 364): use of the archaism 'hind' 'indicates some age of composition'.

These moderately specific examples provide illustration of all three methods posited by Williams in the *Highway* piece. Particularly, he displays some knowledge of historical events, which could only derive from reading, and which, in instances

such as the 'Ramillies' disaster, he must have acquired expressly in composing the note. An additional indicator of relative antiquity is furnished by circumstance of circulation. He commonly notes a song learnt from a parent or grandparent (Chapter II, part 2), which, combined with age of the singer, enables a rough estimation of minimum vintage: 'The Downhill of Life' (Gl 122) had been in the singer's family for 100 years; 'Christmas Carol' (Gl 124) he had from a singer of 80 who learnt it from her grandfather; and 'Billy and Nancy' (Gl 79) had been 'sung around Cirencester for more than a century', presumably based on a similar calculation.

Beyond these details, intimations of antiquity are merely asserted. Songs which are 'ancient' ('Fathom the Bowl', Wt 335); 'extremely old' ('Captain Barniwell', Bk 16); 'very old' (Bk 15, Bk 20, Bk 23, Gl 58, Gl 71, Ox 172, Ox 220, Ox 268, Wt 383, Wt 392, Wt 414, Wt 423); 'of great age' (Gl 90, Gl 119, Gl 167, Ox 223, Wt 493). In a small number of cases, conversely, a song is said to be 'of no great age': 'Florence Nightingale' (Ox 289), 'Bob Ridley' (Gl 48), 'The Spanish Cavalier' (Gl 153)—'It is not of great age; I think it is about forty years old', an opinion for which no grounds are supplied.

Finally, inspecifically, Williams routinely adjudges a song to be 'old' with no further elaboration. Too numerous to list, the tallies from the *Standard* instalments are: III 7; IV 5; V 7; VI 3; VIII 5; IX 3; X 6; XI 5; XII 5; XIII 9; XIV 5; XV 5; XVI 6; XVII 4; XVIII 7; XIX 5; XX 5; XXI 4; XXII 4; XXIII 3; XXIV 6; XXV 5; XXVI 3; XXVII 5; XXVIII 5; XXX 3; XXXI 3; XXXII 1; XXXIII 3; XXXIV 2; XXXV 5; XXXVI 5; XXXVII 3; XXXVIII 4; XXXIX 5; XL 1; XLI 4; XLII 5; XLIII 4. Total 175.

Egregiously, Williams's frame of putative antiquity is notably shorter than that posited by some commentators, before and since: when he says 'very old' he tends to mean eighteenth century rather than late medieval. Thus, for example, of 'Butter and Cheese and All' (Ox 304): 'It is very old, as is also the song preceding ['Will the Weaver']; I believe them to have been in existence for more than a century'. The song 'Paul Jones' (Gl 109) he estimates to be 'about 140 years old', implying that to be a substantial age. (An apposite comparison here is the note to 'The Game of "All Fours"' in *Marrowbones*: 'This song employing the erotic symbolism of a popular, but now forgotten, card game is probably only 140 years old at the most'.)⁸¹ Williams's efforts at dating are, clearly, insufficiently sophisticated or erudite to have the effect of extending knowledge. What emerges is a case of the set to the subject rather

than to the object: this says more about his own assumptions and motivations than about the materials themselves. His use of 'old' as a stock qualifier in the headnotes tends to function as a sign of legitimacy, almost a rhetorical ploy: *all that is old ...* The implicit value-equation 'old and *therefore* best' is in a number of cases rendered explicit, as the next section makes clear. This emphasizing of the antiquarian interest of the songs is consonant with Williams's resolute anti-revivalism (what should be consigned to the past), in contrast to the Sharpian-Ralphian position which carefully dissociates antiquity and æsthetics with the inverse end in view: the philo-revivalist agenda decrees that resuscitation must pitch beyond quaint historical curiosity.

Generally, the accuracy or otherwise of Williams's pronouncements on vintage is, given the orally-occurring nature of the materials, inadjudicable. In the case of certain interpretations, however, his commentary can be shown to be naive, mainly in what concerns the *lingua franca* (Reeves) to which commentators have become more receptive in recent decades. The most glaring of these misreadings occurs in the note to the text Williams has as 'As I walked out one May Morning' (Wt 342):

A quaint old song, composed by one who, whatever other qualifications he might have possessed, was never a naturalist, or he would not have wished to climb up to the highest tree top to rob the cuckoo's nest. Obtained of Robert King, Castle Eaton.⁸¹

This is pilloried, gleefully and typically, by Purslow (p. 311 *supra*), though in terms which are question-begging (an industrial 'man among men'): would 'Bovril', 'Kekky Flapper', 'Blubber' or any other railway worker of urban formation⁸² have grasped the veiled meaning in many songs circulating among, and instinctively understood by, country people? In his note to 'Will the Weaver' (Bk 27) Williams performs a deadpan summary of the story topos (ejection of interloper, coupled with 'Butter and Cheese and All') without noting—and therefore noticing?—the subject (adultery): 'I saw with her Will the Weaver | Very free and close together' (verse 5). This he glosses as 'one who was surprised in the house of another'. The ingenuousness displayed is perhaps not so unusual in the period before Freud had properly seeped through.

⁸¹ An entertaining parallel instance is the celebrated (possibly apocryphal?) review of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in *Field and Stream*: 'this fictional account of the day-to-day life of an English gamekeeper is still of considerable interest to the outdoor-minded reader, as it contains many passages on pheasant-rearing, the apprehending of poachers, ways to control vermin, and other duties of the professional gamekeeper. Unfortunately, one is obliged to wade through many pages of extraneous material in order to discover and savour these sidelights on the management of a Midlands shooting estate, and ... this book cannot take the place of J R Miller's *Practical Game-keeper*.' (Quoted in Hamish Henderson, *Alias MacAlias* (1992), p. 148.)

3. EVALUATION PROPER

INTIMATIONS OF WHAT IS 'INCOMPLETE' AND 'ORIGINAL'

Many of his headnote comments reveal that Williams was working decidedly to canons of textual *completion* and *original* form, these being two sides of a coin: complete *because* in original form. Here, too, comments are jejune, the model of *well-formedness* of texts to which Williams is evidently subscribing remaining intuited rather than conceptualized, and as such difficult to subject to further testing. It is important to recall that the bulk of these notes were composed whilst fieldwork was still in full flow: the first three notes cited demonstrate that the posited (complementary) criteria *complete/original* also actively drove the search, as Williams diligently chased, however mistakenly, a notionally pristine form of a text (see also Chapter V).

'The Three Jolly Huntsmen' (Wt 472): [*he has experienced*] considerable difficulty in securing the complete copies, as the versions differed radically in almost every village

'Poor Old Horse' (Ox 217): *he is still seeking (at 18 March 1916) a second, 'complete' version*

'Over the moor and over the mountain' (Ox 228): This song may not be complete, but it is all I could get. I imagined there might be another stanza, and made inquiries, but without effect

'Betsy Baker' (Ox 288): It is probably scarcely complete

'Ere around the huge oak' (Gl 42): I do not think it is quite complete

'Betsy of the moor' (Gl 40): The following piece is not quite complete.

On the matter of what is 'original' the judgement tends to be framed in explicitly comparative terms (primacy established against an inferior instance):

'When I wore my apron low' (Wt 424) [*compared to 'There's a Tavern in the Town' (Wt 497)*]: the former 'may be prior ... though one cannot speak with certainty'

'Once I had plenty of Thyme' (Wt 451) [*compared to 'The Seeds of Love'*]: I am of the opinion that this is the original

'The Old Grey Man' (Gl 161) [*compared to 'another version extant' possibly in Bell*]: this is evidently the more simple and original

'The Boys of Kilkenny' (Gl 47): We have had a verse of this song before, incorporated with something akin to it in sentiment. This is really the correct copy, however. [*Verse 3 of 'Far from my home' (Ox 246) corresponds to verse 1 here.*]

A third strand added to this evaluative tangle is 'antiquity' (connecting to the previous section), variously equated with 'completeness' or 'original form':

'Barbara Allen' (Gl 144): I am printing three versions procured within a space of twenty-five miles. It is difficult to say which is the oldest and most nearly original form

'The Fox and the Grey Goose' (Wt 354): held to be 'older' and 'more complete' than 'Daddy Reynolds'

'If you will walk with me' (Gl 159) [*compared to 'Cheshire County Song'*]: Possibly this is the older and more original form.

Finally, there is what he takes to be the definite corruption of texts:

'When morning stands on tiptoe' (Gl 67): There are several verbal errors, I expect

'When Joan's Ale was New' (Wt 507): The song is met with in several corrupt forms

'The Jolly Red Herring' (Wt 360): Perhaps this is imperfect. I have heard it at Cricklade, Longcot, and Sevenhampton

'Where the Cannons loudly roar' (Ox 269): The last line but one of the song is rather hazy. For "widows" I have heard "villas," but I do not think either word right

'The Rich Merchant's Daughter' (Wt 515): This is obviously imperfect; there is a gap after the second verse. Still, it is all I could find, and it will not matter much

(Note, in passing, that Williams here gives the impression of accepting textual 'imperfections' as they stand with no effort to 'correct' them. See Appendix I on his editing practices.) The implication of these judgements is that corruption occurs in the transmitting, as heedless yokels pervert a putative original in the flawed crucible of memory. Significantly, where these judgements finally effect a connection to the bearer it is tacitly of a negative order. Reassuringly, in his note to 'Hist! The Mighty Winds do Blow' (Ox 182), Williams performs a classic hedge in connecting to the capital issue of the status of memory (orality):

A very sweet and superior song. The first line of the chorus is probably incorrect. As it stands it is deficient in sense, though, in spite of the most careful inquiries, I could not discover another reading. The song was popular at Aston, near Bampton, Oxon. I have not met with it elsewhere. *As practically every song I have was obtained by the oral method there must necessarily be some defects; at the same time I have been astonished at the accuracy of memory of most of the old men. They are often more trustworthy than the printed sheet.* Communicated by David Ball, Oxon. (Emphasis added.)

Thus he sets forth his own version of a common root ambivalence regarding the workings of orality, over which Sharp himself had stumbled (Chapter IV.2).

EVALUATION PROPER: OVERT JUDGEMENTS OF QUALITY

In what terms, then, did Williams endeavour to gauge the (literary) quality of the rustically-occurring verse he had gathered? The question brings discussion to the crux of how he proposed to locate the value of the materials, and, by extension, of the activity of music-making. Not given, as we have seen, to rigorous analysis, his judgements are characteristically summary but forthright, ungrounded in a way that is scarcely illuminating. Least specific of the comments are these:

1: FAVOURABLE JUDGEMENTS (NOT JUSTIFIED)

- 'Cupid's Garden' (Wt 487): a superior little piece
- 'Good Company' (Gl 81): It is a superior piece
- 'Joe the Marine' (Ox 172): A very old and a very good song
- 'The Cuckoo is a Merry Bird' (Gl 127): very quaint and pretty
- 'The Ripe and Bearded Barley' (Ox 300): An exquisite song
- 'My Love is Gone' (Ox 296): An old, curious song
- 'Spencer the Rover' (Wt 327): A simple, yet sweet and pleasing song
- 'My blue-eyed Nellie' (Ox 230): A simple little song of slight pretensions, but not on that account to be despised.

2: UNFAVOURABLE JUDGEMENTS (NOT JUSTIFIED)

- 'The Deserter' (Gl 80): It has no special merits
- 'Sarah Bloom' (Gl 72): It is not one of the best of folk songs
- (The 'Marrowbones' family) (Wt 417): not the best of pieces
- 'I had an old father' (Wt 428): not of a very high quality
- 'William and Harriet' (Wt 477): One of the commoner folk ballads
- 'Roger' (Gl 64): A plain old ditty
- 'Billy and Nancy' (Gl 79): A plain old song, one of the simpler kind of ballads
- 'At seventeen years I was young' (Ox 204): plain and simple, yet not unworthy of interest
- 'As I was taking my evening walk' (Bk 24): A plain old piece, that was not without some popularity, however
- 'Come, my lads, and let's be jolly' (Wt 438): A second rate drinking song, that enjoyed great popularity.

3: JUDGEMENTS WITH CRITERIA SPECIFIED (MAINLY FAVOURABLE)

More pertinent are the judgements whose criteria are more definitely specified:

- 'Nothing else to do' (Gl 157): A charming old song, with real poetry, gentle wit, and pure sentiment; one of the better class of folk pieces

'The Admiral's Return' (Wt 480): a superior folk song. The subject is a good one, and it is developed with skill and considerable imagination

'The Shepherd on the Mountain' (Ox 220): This is a very old country song, rude and unpolished, but not without a certain charm of language and sentiment

'My dashing little hunter' (Gl 125): [*bas*] something pleasantly human

'The Wild Rover' (Wt 476): We have had "Spencer the Rover." This song is of a different kind and lacks the poetry and human feeling of the above-mentioned.

These, of course, are largely the terms in which he had evaluated the European poetic canon. None of these comments, however, explicitly states the standard by which evaluation, *ipso facto* comparative, is being conducted. Did Williams postulate terms specific to 'folk' song? A note in which he adjudges one of his (two) versions of 'John Barleycorn' (Wt 404) superior to—what he takes to be—Burns's reworking suggests that he to a limited extent did:

The poet Burns gave it a Scotch cast and is said to have improved it, but it will not require a very astute critic to perceive that the English versions, with all their rudeness, are much better than the one penned by Burns: they are more pointed, simpler, stronger, and truer than his.

In these remarks, Williams commends (though not without qualification) a certain prosodic 'rudeness' as a virtue particular to rustic song, understood *in opposition* to polite forms. (See also remarks on 'The Bailiff's Daughter of Islington', p. 475.)

The inverse case, much more fruitfully, is approving comparison with authors from the canon of Græco-Roman antiquity. Here, the effects of Williams's immersion in high literature explored above most flagrantly obtrude. All but one of the clutch of references occurring in headnotes are to authors or works he has been shown (Chapter III.2) to have favoured, prominent among them Homer:

The "ocean" of the Irish Channel sounds something like Homer's Helles-pont, that was usually spoken of as "boundless". ('Sweet Peggy O', Wt 414)

Homer was the first poet—to my knowledge—to liken a man to a leaf. No doubt the idea is much older than he; ~~certain it is that almost every singer since him has somehow or other given expression to it, and~~ here we see it embodied in a popular song. The piece is old, and was a favourite throughout the Thames Valley. ('What's the Life of a Man any more than a Leaf', Wt 513)

There is a passing reference to Æsop (the fact of this mention being, unusually, a 1923 addition is explicable in terms of the Sanscrit title, the study of which he was just then embarking upon):

Obtained of David Sawyer, the sheep-shearer, of Ogbourne. He learned it of his mother. [The subject appears among the Fables of Æsop, and also in the Hindu Hitopadesa.] ('A-begging Buttermilk I will go', Wt 432) [Ⓞ]

The remaining two parallels more overtly make the qualitative judgement:

An old drinking song, of which very many, of one kind and another, formerly existed. The ancient Greeks had drinking songs, which they called Skolia, and of which some relics survive in classical literature. Our own drinking songs are ~~not~~ [little] inferior to them: if they were put into Greek they would receive greater, though not more deserved, admiration. ('Push the Bowl About', Ox 297)†

The strongest resonance concerns Horace, with whose work Williams was most intimately acquainted, prompting a parallel with a poem he had translated:

The song, "Life let us cherish," which I have on the broadside sheet, is equal in conception, phrase, and spirit to much of the finest of the Greek lyrical poetry; Horace at his best could scarcely have surpassed it.⁸³

It would be quite superfluous for me to point out the qualities of the following: ~~they are obvious to the most casual reader. The piece is very fine, either as a poem or a song, and any collector of folk literature should be proud to have it in his possession.~~ It reminds me strongly in some respects of the Fourth Ode of the First Book of Horace: though the Roman poet sang in a more exalted strain, his verses have not such [more] felicity of description. The piece was sung at Culkerton, where I obtained it of Mr Arthur Halliday. ('The Four Seasons', Gl 73)

Here literary autodidact and extemporizing song collector converge, a collusion of personæ in response to the evaluative needs of the moment. In their very customary quirkiness—what manifold echoes from his wide reading Williams might have detected in the texts of folk song—these parallels bespeak the less than entirely

[Ⓞ] The reference is presumably to 'The Woman and the Hen': 'A widow had a hen which laid an egg every day. She imagined that if she gave the hen more barley it would lay twice a day. So she increased the hen's ration accordingly. But the hen became fat and wasn't even capable of laying one egg a day. This fable shows that if, through greed, you look for more than you have, you lose even that which you do possess.' (*The Complete Fables*, Harmondsworth, 1998, p. 71.) Williams's own working copy was, *Fables from Æsop and myths from Palaephatus* (Longmans, Green & Co, 1901). No copy of the *Hitopadesa* survives in his library, though notes for a translation from the Sanscrit are preserved at WSRo 2598/37, and references occur in the correspondence in the 1920s.

† The entry for **SCOLIA** in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (3rd edition, 1996) notes that some of these pieces are preserved in Athanaeus (late 6th / early 5th Century), and that they were generally sung in the *prytaneion*: 'a singer held a myrtle-branch and, when he had finished, passed the branch to another and called on him for a song'. (The *prytaneion* was the 'symbolic centre of the polis, housing its communal hearth, eternal flame, and public dining-room where civic hospitality was offered; usually in or off the agora.')

apposite improvisations symptomatic of his intercession. Importantly, classical analogy is weighted in favour of (selected) orally-derived verses, where adverse comparison might have been expected. Williams's eagerness to find *textual* commensurability is consonant with enlistment of classical reference in the context of country life generally: what flourishes under the aspect of eternity.

APOLOGIA | APOLOGY

Ascription of literary value contained in the headnotes proves to be a congeries of the dismissive and the approving-tinged-with-condescension, merit accorded in proportion to approximation to elite forms. It is, rather, in passages of synthesis that Williams betrays the primary schism in his condition which will work to inhibit the cogency of his construction, a first manifesting of which occurs on the subject, routinely in the period the occasion of discomfort, of bawdy songs:

Besides the legitimate pieces there were many "rough" songs in circulation. I make no apology for them. I do not know, indeed, that any is needed.⁸⁴

This manifestly self-defeating form of *occupatio* is amplified later in the Essay:

I hope that I have not claimed too much on behalf of the folk songs. And here I wish it to be distinctly understood that throughout this article I have had in view not the perfect and polished composition, nor even that one which is moderately correct to literary form, but that which was regularly recognised and sung by the people. I do not pretend to have a faultless collection. They are, emphatically, not a classic lot. Many of them are not as I should prefer to see them, but they were not my songs. I make no apologies for the musical tastes of the people; I cannot help what they liked. That is no business of mine. I want to show not what they *might* have sung, nor what they *ought* to have sung, but what, in fact, they *did* sing. ... ~~I have been asked what the people sang, and I have told you what they sang. I, at any rate, am not ashamed of the pieces, and there is no reason why anyone else should be so.~~⁸⁵

These seem, in the light of his designs, extraordinary statements for Williams to perpetrate, an act of hand washing amounting virtually to a volte-face in relation to the dominant tenor of his intervention. Heedlessly, unflinching apologia (as part 1) has at this point given way to its inverse—apologizing—an idiom in the main foreign to his larger tableau of country life. That so fundamental a mutation should occur in the context of song (popular verse) lies at the heart of the Alfredian predicament. Manifestly, to draw back from according value in terms of internal (literary) properties is to pose the problem of wherein it *is* to be located. A comment in the lecture

notes reiterating this concern not to overstate the case ('I am not going to over-laud the Folk-Song') is preceded by the obvious question raised: 'Only fools and fiddlers learn old Songs.[□] Why do we like these old things?'

Why are we interested in Folk Songs and Folk Lore? The bases of a more mature art; they show the evolution of poetry literature & ritual, and put us in contact with simple, genuine life free from the artificialness of what we are pleased to call the present time. We are called "old-fashioned" I am old-fashioned: I like simple things: simple things the great things elemental ⁸⁶

The remarks with which Williams concludes his Essay substantially spell out his position on this capital issue:

We want to preserve the words, not for their artistic or strictly literary value, but in order to have records of that which amused, cheered, consoled, and so profoundly affected the lives of the people of an age that has for ever passed away. ⁸⁷

Much of his idiosyncratic slant thereby finds reflex encapsulation: *words* more than song (with its musical associations); the modalities of demotic culture; what attaches, irrevocably, to the past. The fullest and neatest formulation of Williams's verdict is contained in an article of 1926, by which period he had had opportunity to clarify his position:

It is not the beauty of the songs altogether that attracts, not their strictly artistic pretensions, though many of the pieces are gems of lyrical design. They impress one like a landscape loved in childhood—something mysteriously strange yet always familiar, with a charm and a fascination that we could never properly explain. But very often it is not the songs themselves we like to hear so much as to be told about the singers, and to understand the part the pieces played in the life of the people. That may be the chief importance of the folk song to many, whose interest is not so much in the artistic as in the historical. ⁸⁸

Here, in considered form, is the Alfredian angle on song as encountered: recognition, rather grudgingly, of æsthetic merit in certain instances ('gems of lyrical design') is ultimately subordinated to other, non-artistic considerations. He rules, finally, in favour of a circumstantial (historical), rather than properly literary, view of value.



□ This was a favourite rustic saw, an additional example being: 'They [informants] are surprised that you should discover yourself to be interested in such a thing as a country ballad, and I have more than once been reminded that "only fools and fiddlers learn old songs".' (See p. 367, *supra*.)

§3 GENESIS : ORIGIN OF THE SPECIOUS

The impressionistic, rather *ex cathedra* judgements thus far cited, a lit crit manner Williams had doubtless evolved through his literary studies, treat the songs (verses) *in abstracto*, as transferred to the page. Yet the essential question is not, primarily, the status of the melodico-verbal materials *in themselves*, but their putative value expressed *in terms of the bearers*. Any convincing account of the specificity of the problem must show the song-singer relation to be one of more than mere custodianship. The most manifest form of connection is to suppose rustic *creation*. In contrast to Sharp's (ostensibly sub-Darwinian but probably more Teutonic-Romantic) orthodoxy which dwells on peasant creation as central to explanation—discrete and having peculiar merit *because* evolved in sequestered conditions—Williams's heteroclit position on the putative origins of folk song is perfunctory, slipped in almost incidentally (an unobtrusiveness which may account for absence of attention by commentators). The principal declaration is confined to half a paragraph in the Essay (1915):

~~But there is this interesting fact to record: many ballad-sheets were printed at Cirencester [and Highworth]. I have in my possession four broadsides bearing the imprint, Clift, Cirencester, and one bearing the name J. Ricketts, Highworth. At the same time, I am certain the pieces were not composed in the locality. The ballads were probably out of print and unprotected by copyright. I also have sheets that were printed at Wotton-under-Edge, Bristol, Newport, Birmingham, Winchester, and London. The majority of the songs and ballads, in my opinion, were written in London and other large towns and cities. There appears to have been a school of such ballad writers, very well trained to their work, and admirably informed as to the best means of captivating the ear of the public. No doubt the work was remunerative. We know that enormous quantities of the sheets were sold up and down the countryside: hundreds, if not thousands, were commonly disposed of at a single fair-time.⁸⁹~~

COMMENTARY: This, in every sense summary, is the extent of Williams's volunteered reflection on the matter (he was later prodded into elaboration). As framed, an aggressively print-specific construal of this order—that 'folk' song was exclusively the work of gutter poets, printed up and distributed on broadsides—is at once confidently unequivocal and too evidently simplistic to accommodate the complexity of the problem: though not, in certain respects, entirely wide of the mark. Most importantly, this exogenous thesis creates a distinct dissonance with the founding terms of his own enterprise. What led Williams to adopt this particular line, given that, on

the whole, he had not read into the subject and certainly had not carried out original archival research, but essentially placed his faith in encounters in the field?

If he deems the broadside business constitutive, it follows that the cogency of his construal of the object will be subject to the trade's particular logic, dividing *grosso modo* as production and consumption. Deferring the latter, the former turns on what might be termed the print nexus: composition, publication and circulation, in this case corresponding to hack, printer and hawker (with the further twist of the crusading field collector who subsequently records the songs from the lips of the singers—and thereby returns them to print, or at least manuscript). What knowledge could Williams have had of these three components, locally or generally, given that the trade belonged by then to the past? A determinedly nose-to-the-ground ethos means his broaching of the sequence would have occurred *à l'envers*. From his transactions with country singers in the Upper Thames, he had direct oral and documentary testimony of the existence of broadsides, finding that a number singers had printed matter in their possession. (See Chapter II.) In this way he knew what the broadsides were, and what they looked like. On the matter of hawkers, too, informants could supply personal reminiscence, in particular of a couple whose oddity ensured them a favourite place in Williams's writings.⁹⁰ His awareness of printers, local as much as national, would have come from imprints on the sheets. At the time of investigation, therefore, grass roots record survived of two out of three stages of the process, a combination of material spoors and embers glowing dimly in the rustic memory. What Williams could *not* have had testimony of from investigations in the villages was the inaugural point of composition, given that the broadsides themselves do not attribute authorship and that there was no direct contact between hack and country consumer. The only possible source of information for this component, published and unpublished documentation, Williams dogmatically ruled out of account.

Read against these givens, the redactive texture of the passage cited proves illuminating. The qualifiers in Williams's considered form of words (as emphasized) enact the condition of his affected knowledge—the relative degree of certitude and doubt—on each of the three primary points: he *knows* that sheets were printed locally, and that they circulated in bulk; he is *fairly sure*—‘probably’—that the trade was piratical; but he is forced to *speculate* about actual provenance: what is ‘opinion’,

and what 'appears' to have obtained. At this point, where the terms of the problem begin to exceed what could be settled empirically, the knowledge issue is, in comparison with conclusions derived from personal observation, more pointedly posed. If Williams's ballad-writer ('scribbler' is a favoured term in the headnotes) explanation is unfounded either in oral or documentary testimony, then it must be a postulate, an inferential rather than evidential reverse extrapolation from the other stages—there has to be something *to be* printed and disseminated—such that his conclusions owe more to expository improvisation than to any scholarly apprenticeship.

THE POET AND THE PEASANTS

As articulated, however, this hypothesis is corollary to the categorical, and potentially more suggestive, position, 'I am *certain* the pieces were not composed in the locality', a conviction inviting elucidation in terms additional to the conjectural closing of a lacuna in the logic of the problem. A hint is afforded of what is otherwise passed over in silence in his initial, elective, gloss: to cast origination purely in favour of instances beyond the tribe is tacitly to deny any role to the singing rustics, ostensibly his primary object. What that gloss further leaves out of account, more predictably but also more tellingly, is the connection to his own condition (idiosyncratic capabilities and values), of especial pertinence in this context of literary composition (versifying) given Williams's endeavours, not to say self-imagining, as published poet. He was soon to find himself goaded, however, into a statement on both counts by Frank Kidson's intervention in the *Standard* (introduced above), which drew a defence containing several crucial formulations:

The definition of the folk song is necessarily vague. It is obviously incorrect, however, to insist that it was evolved from the people, that is from the unlettered. It was evolved for the people, not from the people. There is the difference. *No person with a complete knowledge of the villagers, and knowing the difficulties of literary composition, would say that the rustics were capable of producing the words, much less the melodies, of the many hundreds of folk songs formerly in circulation. The great majority of the labouring classes could not read or write, and it would have been utterly impossible for them to make the songs.*⁹¹

Here, haply unmasked, is Alfredian ethnographic dogma in all its singularity. (As with the canon issue, Kidson performed an unwitting service in drawing a statement on these points.) In authentication of his counter-endogenous line, accompanying a reiteration of the cherished claim to propinquity, the self-identification 'knowing the

difficulties of literary composition' declares an unthinking disaffiliation of poet from 'folk' song (text). (The token nod to 'melodies' does not alter the point.) Williams's heroic autodidactic lucubrations, in particular his grappling with the intricacies of versification, left him viscerally unwilling to accept that any form of even half-decent literary creation might be possible by working country people of no formal education. These efforts at self-education were too herculean, this poetic competence too hard won for him to believe that a rustic from the next parish could have composed what he knew to be frequently well-turned popular verse. The corollary to this self-traducing extension of credentials is duly set forth in a display of heterodoxy: that rustic illiteracy precludes categorically musical composition, unconcernedly inverting the founding Sharpian-Ralphian postulate that what permitted 'peasant' creation was precisely the noble illiteracy of its progenitors.

In all this, a principle of *negative determination* is at work. Williams's persuasion against endogenous genesis was founded not on rigorous investigation of the modalities of vernacular song but on presumption prescribed by his unique situation: what he was disposed *not* to accept, and thereby leaves out of account. On this reading, his 'scribbler' explanation derives from the need to fill the empirical blank of rustic (non)-creation rather than from knowledge proper of verbal engendering.

I: INTERNAL IMPEDIMENTS TO COGENCY

Deviation from the contemporary paradigm aside, the second (in)congruence question bears on the articulation of Williams's creation story within the larger terms of his own account. In two respects, the implications of the scribbler thesis jar with capital Alfredian tenets: conditions and mechanics of *acquisition* of songs by country singers (circumstantially, but potentially representatively, in the Upper Thames), essentially the (i)lteracy issue; and the dominantly *local* slant of his agenda.

PRINT CIRCULATION: CONSUMPTION From the consumption end of the genesis-transmission nexus, the logic of exogenous creation is to require a layer to account for dissemination unnecessary to endogenous theory: the means of insertion-cum-acquisition. The capital point here is that, if these songs were distributed on printed sheets, the rural populace must, at least in part, have possessed the *literacy* to accommodate them. Thus, the putative illiteracy which Williams pleads as inhibitor of rustic composition will, by extension, inhibit adoption, and not only by implication:

It must not be forgotten that very few of the agricultural labourers of a hundred years ago could read or write. *They consequently could not have learned the songs from the ballad sheets.*⁹²

This seems an extraordinary assertion, blithely completing the severance of the rustic bearer from her materials, denying the means of assimilation in addition to those of creation. This assumption of (near) universal illiteracy stands, furthermore, at odds with the findings of the literacy survey in Chapter II. In blunt contradiction are these remarks on transmissive mechanisms (the network of country gatherings in which the broadside trade once flourished is also described in Chapter II):

Since few, if any of these [*list of examples*], figure in the literature of their time, we must conclude that they were unknown to the educated, and were perpetuated by means of the common broadside, or passed on from one generation to another by the process of oral tuition.⁹³

Essentially, Williams blurs here an entailed distinction between *insertion* of material on paper, necessarily supposing a degree of literacy, and its subsequent *perpetuation* orally and aurally within the tribe by means of quite distinct aptitudes. The blurring enacts a separation of perspectives traceable to schisms in his condition: whereas 'illiteracy' is a postulate peculiar to his noble savage variant—a condition to be defended against elite denigration: *apologia*—rather than an empirically grounded finding, literacy is an unwilling concomitant to a creation story, itself negatively generated. This skating over of the complex inter-relation of printed and oral transmissive modes forms part of a larger failure to ponder the specificities of *orality* which is a prime shortcoming in Williams's thinking, symptomatic of his contrived saturation in print culture.

A LITTLE LOCAL DIFFICULTY In all essentials, homage to his native locale is the very *raison d'être* of Williams's endeavours. This aggressively parochial focus carries over into the dominant modes and self-proclaimings—apologetics, the isolation / propinquity compound—informing his pursuit of song. As long as he descants upon social and circumstantial aspects, his picture is of a piece: what is encompassed within the Upper Thames. The musical (textual) object in itself once broached, however, a glaring disjunction is inscribed: if these songs are not endogenous in creation, it follows that they are not local. As if intent upon magnifying the disparity, Williams ushers in his genesis conclusions precisely from this angle:

For, of course, hardly any of them are local. Songs are often claimed for this or that locality, but if you should make careful inquiries you would find that the evidence upon which the claim is based is invalid. The mention of a place name in a song or ballad is by some taken as a certain sign that it is a local piece. But very often the evidence is absolutely untrustworthy. The song will usually admit of almost any name being used. The professional ballad-singers, passing from town to town, substituted a fresh name to fit in with the locality. It helped the song to "catch on," and served to sell their sheets. And even though the printed sheet showed the original place name, the local singers substituted one well known to them.⁹⁴

Conviction of provenance from beyond the locale only hardened as the project unfolded. To Frederick Bingham's contribution to the *Standard* serial, he responds:

It is singular that one of our songs this week mentions 'Cupid's Garden.' I thought the allusion was figurative, but in the light of Mr Bingham's letter it is highly probable that the "City Ranelagh" was intended. *This supports the theory I have adhered to: that very many folk songs, especially of a certain type, originated in or around London and several other of our large cities, and were never really local to the Thames Valley.*⁹⁵

However he arrived at this conviction of musical currency, and by extension genesis, as supra-parochial (given, that is, the claim to 'isolation'), it found anecdotal confirmation in the traces Williams later discovered of extensive distribution of the core materials he had found in the Upper Thames: the accident of military service enabled him to carry out sampling in Essex and Ireland, and a post-war holiday took him to North Wales (see p. 380, *supra*). Thus the stock point he recycles throughout his writings that the songs were 'not local' has three related senses: that the country people who performed were assumed not to have created them; that the 'ballad scribblers' who did create were metropolitan rather than parochial; and that the same items occurred all over the country. This is the 'ubiquitousness' (*sic*) point he makes a number of times, without pondering its implications.⁹⁶

MORE BLACK SHEEP THAN HERETIC? On this point, too, of territorial *découpage* Williams provides a mirror image. The determining agenda for most of the first wave of collectors was national(ist): in vaunting the music of a supposedly prelapsarian peasantry, they clutched zealously at a quintessential Englishness (rather than Britishness), product of musical innocence. The theoretical complications thrown up (as Chapter IV.2) are inverse to those engendered by Williams's amalgam. Where Sharp & Co aimed to distil a collective essence, Williams by contrast aggressively

plays the local card: his quarry is not *English Folk Song* but what occurred in the Upper Thames. The difficulty created, of which he is evidently unaware, lies in reconciling this goal with implications built into the tenet, apparently inalienable, of extra-parochial genesis and distribution. Whatever the specificities of Alfredian Uppert Thamesishness, they are not properly *musical*—or are only incidentally such.

In attributing the textual element predominantly to the broadside trade, Williams places himself only apparently in concert with establishment thinking: luminaries such as Sharp and Vaughan Williams also considered that the bulk of the text they encountered derived in this way, but with a quite different meaning attached. The paradigm principle of 'folk' (non-reflexive creation by those insulated from formal instruction) is presumed to apply originally to both elements of song, tune and text—a form, in effect, of 'folk' poetry—but that by the time of collecting the latter had been largely overlaid by the vulgarities of the broadside trade; that what they were collecting was pure 'folk' tune married to hack-work text. The role of the broadsides was thus acknowledged in order to be deplored as a destructive force, and on those grounds to be marginalized. (A version of the Fall.) Williams's line, *a contrario*, at least in his Essay statement, is that the hack-broadside nexus obtained *de facto*: if all folk song was engendered in this manner, then there was *nothing for it to be a corruption of*. In not perceiving any *a priori* conflict between print and 'folk'—quite the reverse—Williams's position in relation to contemporary orthodoxy is egregious more than positively heretical: there is no particular indication that, at the point of formulation, he was studiously contesting the received view, or even that he knew of its terms (as on the canon issue). Destruction of innocence consequent upon Kidson's unwelcome counsel is not embodied in any significant adjustment, still less repentance. Furthermore, these models, ostensibly diametrical, exhibit a degree of anisomorphy which problematizes the comparison.

What, especially, is noteworthy in this unargued conviction that his rustic informants could not have created the song they possessed is that it crystallizes—at least by the circumstances of birth and upbringing—from *inside* that very section of the population (most sceptics stand outside the tribe). It is this essential difference that serves to ironize a postulate built into the problem. Whereas the attraction to such as Sharp and Vaughan Williams of the noble savage (musical) variant mythified as

'folk' was its otherness to the givens of their privileged condition, Williams, proceeding from the inverse position, fatally fell prey to the siren summons of high literature, which he instinctively located in opposition to his native yokel environment. This, manifestly, is an ethnomusicological avatar of the grass being greener on the other side of the fence, enacted in both directions: where the well-heeled sought exotic creation in mythologized rusticity, Williams (the quondam ploughboy) sought it in bourgeois art. The two parties, mandarins and margin-dweller, divide irreconcilably over the relation of 'illiteracy' to creation: enabling/disabling. *Importantly, the elementary form is not the relative greenness of grass (over which there will be debate until the cows come home), but the presence in itself of a fence: it is the fence, not so much consciously erected as unavoidably consequent upon the act of intervention, that brings the problem into being: for Elijah Iles there is—musically—no fence for the grass to be greener on the other side of ...*

As far as it goes, Williams's creation story predicated on the intentionality of gutter poets and jobbing printers—'it was evolved *for* the people'—may not be wide of the mark (these grubbing artisans must have had a rustic market, at least partly, in mind); though to understand 'folk' in these terms lends a patently nonsensical cast to the problem. Leaving aside intentions at the point of production and the fact that this reductive gloss will not in itself explain *differentia*, his according of a cardinal *constructive* role to the broadside trade anticipates adventitiously on later thinking, a point scarcely recognized by commentators. The sticking point is a model of *assimilation* of the flimsy sheets to bucolic musical practice. Unlike the example of his fellow Moonraker littérateur Richard Jefferies, who repudiated unreservedly both rustic musical creation and any worth in music possessed,⁶ Williams does not so much pitch on the reverse side of the fence as perch himself *à cheval*: his conundrum is how to reconcile exogenousness with value deemed specific to a locale.

⁶ 'The songs sung by the labourer at the alehouse or the harvest home are not of his own composing. The tunes whistled by the ploughboy as he goes down the road to his work in the dawn were not written for him. Green meads and rolling lands of wheat—true fields of the cloth of gold—have never yet inspired those who dwell upon them with songs uprising from the soil. The solitude of the hills over whose tops the summer sun seems to linger so long has not filled the shepherd's heart with a wistful yearning that must be expressed in verse or music. Neither he nor the ploughman in the vale have heard or seen aught that stirs them in Nature. The shepherd has never surprised an immortal reclining on the thyme under the shade of a hawthorn bush at sunny noontide; nor has the ploughman seen the shadowy outline of a divine huntress through the mist that clings to the wood across the field. These people have no myths; no heroes. They look back on no Heroic Age, no Achilles, no Agamemnon, and no Homer. The past is vacant. They have not even a "Wacht am Rhein" or "Marseillaise" to chaunt in chorus with quickened step and flashing eye. No; nor even a ballad of the hearth, handed down from father to son, to be sung at home festivals, as a treasured silver tankard is brought out to drink the health of an honoured guest. Ballads there are in old books—ballads of days when the yew bow was in every man's hands, and war and the chase gave life a colour; but they are dead. A cart comes slowly down the road, and the labourer with it sings as he jogs along; but, if you listen, it tells you nothing of wheat, or hay, or flocks and herds, nothing of the old gods and heroes. It is a street ditty such as you may hear the gutter arabs yelling in London, and coming from a music hall.' Richard Jefferies, *Hodge and his Masters* (1880), Chapter XXIV.

It is precisely the scrivener view of 'folk' song, founded upon elite canons of authorship and print culture (Chapter III.2) and by which perceived textual value (or its lack) can only be ascribed to the prowess of the scribblers held to be progenitive, that engenders this root difficulty. Credits of the kind litter the headnotes:

'When Morning stands on tiptoe' (Gl 67): ['unapproachable'] 'The figure expressed in the first line* is magnificent: no one but a true poet could have written it.' * *'When morning stands on tiptoe 'twixt mountain and sky'*

'The Sower's Song' (Gl 102): 'A superior piece, evidently penned by one possessing more than the average ballad-writer's skill.'

'Phyllis and the Shepherd' (Wt 363): 'evidently written by a master hand'

'Old Adam' (Wt 378): 'The writer ... was no common scribbler of ballads.'

'The Sailor and his True Love' (Wt 466): 'If Thyrsis or Daphnis had been substituted for the rather mean sounding "Jimmy" of the present piece it might have wrought some improvement. But the ballad-writers were sometimes poor artists and blurted out the most unlovely lines and phrases, conscious, I suppose, no one would deign to waste studious criticism upon them. And if they had thought otherwise they would not have been very deeply affected.'

Conversely, Williams is satisfied that the inferior quality of what he took to be isolated instances of rustic composition bears out his stance:

Here we have a song written by a rustic, evidently by a local leader at the time of the agricultural disturbances of the middle of the last century. It is, in reality, little more than a catalogue of place-names, connected with an exhortation to the workers to stand out for better wages and conditions. It is, at the same time, of some interest, and I think it supports me in what I have said concerning the folk songs, i.e., that they could not have emanated from the illiterate population of the countryside. Words obtained from an old ballad sheet given to me by Alfred Howse, Latton. ('The Wiltshire Labourers', Wt 521)[□]

In espousing a model of genesis which severs bearer from creation, Williams complicates his parochial-probative (exceptionally) purposes (*apologia*): how can a musical (textual) nexus deemed constitutively hard-nosed and diffuse come to embody a specifically local significance and (homely) *value*? The capital consequence of this positioning is that, within the Alfredian scheme, any connection from the putative value of song to its humble enactors must take a form other than creation.

[□] The sheet (not extant) bore the imprint 'William Bailey'. The most likely candidate is the printer of that name at Calne (Wilts), listed in a number of directories including the *Universal British Directory* (1791). (References supplied by Roly Brown.) Another instance of a text taken to be endogenous is 'On Compton Downs' noted from Shadrach Haydon: 'An old shepherd song, local to the Berkshire Downs between Wantage and Streatley, and one of the very few that were obviously written by rustics.' (Ox 197)

AD CAPTANDUM VULGUS : AGORA AS CRUCIBLE OF CORRUPTION

In two articles printed in the *Wiltshire Times* in 1926, 'The Evolution of the Local Folk Song' and 'Folk Song and Locality', Williams moves a little towards reducing this disparity. Returning to the genesis question, he expounds a position which ostensibly renders more *nuancé* the simplistic agoracentrism of the inaugural view.

The folk were uneducated. They could not even read, much less compose songs and poems. The farther we go back the more ignorant the people were, and yet the songs were superior in quality. Later, the folk composed rhymes, but they had no artistic or literary merits. We have only to compare "The Seeds of Love," or "Lord Thomas and Fair Eleanor" with such a piece as "The Wiltshire Labourers," or "On Compton Downs," both of which were written by uneducated people, in order to be assured of this. The difference is startling. I think the folk song was adopted by the people, not produced by them. ⁹⁷

(The last two instances reiterate judgements in the headnote cited *supra*.) This appears consonant with the original position yet contains a significant complicating element: *The farther we go back the more ignorant the people were, and yet the songs were superior in quality.* In the same piece, and the one that followed, Williams dilates at some length on this apparent historical paradox. Following a potted piece on the demise of the minstrels (itself a departure from the earlier writings), he continues:

This does not mean that the songs and ballads became less popular or less numerous. As a matter of fact the versions multiplied rapidly in the hands of the ballad-mongers, much too rapidly, really, because the purity of the originals was lost or concealed through the clumsiness and illiteracy of printers of broadsides and others whose interest was not so much musical now as commercial. Thus began the cheapening and decay of the pure folk song, which may easily be traced by a study of any of the better known historical ballads, such as "Lord Bateman," or "Sir Lionel," existing in this district as "Sir Rylas."

The range of the later songs and versions was very great. Too much was attempted, and this explains the mediocrity of many of the pieces. It was a case of "fools rushing in where angels feared to tread." Still, many of the best pieces, and especially of the shorter pieces, remained in all their grace and beauty. *This was because they circulated in oral tradition only, and escaped the attention of the travelling ballad-singers.* Such songs were to be met with not in towns or large centres, but in peaceful and remote districts—in quiet corners of villages and hamlets where life had been undisturbed for centuries. This is one reason why North Wiltshire and the villages of the Thames upon both banks to Oxford yielded a large number of songs surprisingly correct and true to their originals. The stream of oral tradition ran pure at this point, and it was entirely innocent of its origin; but I have no doubt the same might have been observed in other places if a careful search had been made.⁹⁸

COMMENTARY: CHEAPENING AND DECAY In all this, Williams appears belatedly to align his thinking more nearly with the establishment view.[□] His original line posits the hack-printer-hawker symbiosis as exclusive generative matrix, urban and commercial by definition, and where internal distinctions of *quality* are attributable solely to the literary *habileté* of the hacks, rather than expressed in terms of rustic authenticity and urban corrosion. He now ostensibly introduces just such an internal division, adjudging 'the clumsiness and illiteracy of printers of broadsides' responsible for 'the cheapening and decay of the pure folk song'. The division is motivated as a function of topographical scatter—'In the popularising of the printed ballad as distinct from the folk songs proper, which existed for the most part in oral tradition, local fairs and markets had much to do'—corresponding to mode of subsistence (what 'circulated in oral tradition only, and escaped the attention of the travelling ballad-singers') and articulating, by extension, a disjunction of *taste* within the populace—'their wares would not always appeal to village singers, whose taste was often superior to that of town dwellers.'

Where Williams's founding position construes the patavine agora as primary, exclusive even, locus of exchange by which this popular music enters the rustic realm (externally generated music—heedlessly valorized as 'folk'—is routinely inserted into the minds (and hearts) of country people via the transactive tumult of country occasions), he now turns against the hurly-burly of the market place in favour of a pristine rusticity lingering in the lanes, an apparently capital development.

□ Thus Vaughan Williams: 'in the case of the words the printing press began early to destroy this tradition, with the curious result that folk-music has preserved its vitality much longer than ballad poetry, which early began to be replaced by such broadsheets as "Maria Martin." When these broadsheets were sold at country fairs and elsewhere there was, of course, no music printed with them and the country singer would adapt to them his favourite tune with the result that the tune survived but that the words that went with it often disappeared before the ballad-monger's doggerel.' (*National Music* (Oxford, 1934), p. 62.) Sharp's strictures on the trade are at *English Folk Song: Some Conclusions* (1907), p. 101 *et seq.* Lloyd elects to acquiesce in this antiquated judgement, commenting on the inferior quality of the sheets, seldom in 'the true laconically dramatic style of folk verse', often 'turgidly literary' and so 'hard for the folk tradition to absorb despite the sturdiness of its digestive system'; 'With its melodrama and its passivity, "The Isle of Cloy" bears the inky thumbprint of broadside writing. Perhaps more characteristic of true folk creation ...' (*Folk Song in England* (1967), pp. 29, 224). The example of 'Maria Marten' picked out by Vaughan Williams is stock. Lloyd: 'For instance the broadside containing the text of the ballad of the murder of Maria Marten in the Red Barn, sung by the "street screamers" to variants of the handsome carol tune "Come all ye faithful Christians", sold 1,650,000 copies according to Henry Mayhew who seems to have got his information from the publishers (Charles Hindley, historian)' (*op. cit.*, p. 28). Williams himself—evidently unprompted—picks this one out as an emblem of poor stuff: 'These men knew hundreds of songs, and the pieces showed great variety, ranging from the historical ballad down to a doggerel version of "Maria Martin," or lines composed on a local execution. These usually came last, and were often introduced to provide a taste of comedy.' (*Oxford Times*, 31 August 1928, p. 10.) And in the lecture notes: 'Ballad sheets: uses of. Life let us cherish. Religious poems. "Watkins". Red Barn murder of Maria Martin drunkards catechism. (wsro 2598/36) His own set of the text is unattributed (Mi 628), and thus possibly copied from a printed source. In contrast, a report in the *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard* lamenting the putative decline of the Cirencester Mop fair lists this song among the attractions deemed better in years gone by: 'the bull's eyes sweeter, the peppermints more stinging, the tragedy of "Maria Martin or the Red Barn" far more thrilling than anything we see now.' (16 October 1869, p. 4, reporting the fair of the 11th.)

A trawl, however, of headnotes reveals traces of this view present in the initial period (remembering that the composition of these notes largely dates from the first phase of activity, 1915–16). Williams's invoking of a 'rural muse', implying some creative spirit peculiar to the countryside, is a case in point:

This quaint old duet was formerly popular around Highworth and Longcot (Berks). It dates probably from the seventeenth century and is a very good specimen of the rural muse, differing widely from the common street ballad. ('Old Moll', Bk 19)

Dating from a week or two earlier, the note to 'Gilderoy' furnishes the most evident foreshadowing of this distinction introduced within the object:

Of Scotch origin, and formerly common on broadsides. It should be borne in mind that many of the finest folk songs, the older ones especially, are not to be found on ballad sheets. The choicest songs seem often to have escaped the notice of the ballad printer. Obtained of William King, Purton. ('Gilderoy', Wt 482)

Further expressions of this qualitative disjunction occur in headnotes, *passim*:

It is one of the original type of folk ballads, of such as survive in the most remote villages. ('The Chain of Gold', Ox 206)

written for those of an entirely different temperament, and was probably popular rather in the country towns than in the villages. ('The Hackney Coachman', Wt 377)

In this light, the 1926 shift can be read as elaboration of an embryonic discrimination rather than as radical departure. The case of 'Of all the Brave Birds' serves neatly to link the two periods. As well as citing it in one of the *Wiltshire Times* articles, Williams reprises this example in a further newspaper article:

Another instance of the tenacity of the folk tradition here is evidenced in the piece, "Of All the Brave Birds." This was printed in an old play, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, in 1609, yet I found it circulating in oral tradition at three different places; i.e., at Aston, Lechlade and Coln St. Aldwyn. Folk-lorists could scarcely credit the fact, because there was hardly a line that differed from the printed version of the lay, and there was no evidence that the piece had ever figured on a ballad-sheet.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ 'OF ALL THE BRAVE BIRDS' Now this is a most interesting survival. The reviewer of my *Folk Songs* in the *Westminster Gazette* (several years ago) pointed out that this appears in an old play (*Knight of the Burning Pestle*) printed in 1609 ie over 300 years ago, and he could scarcely believe that I had met with it three times in oral tradition in the year 1914. But I did, and since I printed the names of my singers, with the pieces, in the *W&G Standard* it was open to anybody to challenge me if they cared to, at the time.' (Lecture notes, wsrno 2598/36.) Only one copy of this song is extant in the Williams Collection, noted from Mrs Bond of Quenington (G1 130), the headnote to which reads: 'I first heard this at Aston, afterwards at Inglesham, and finally obtained the complete words of Mrs M Bond, Quenington.' Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* was first produced in 1607.

As it stands, this more subtle account appears to restore the balance in favour of *echt* rusticity and away from the urban weighting of his original formulation, this informing *urbs / rus* axis aligning with the *Weltanschauung* identified in Chapter III (except that the 'urban' pole here is represented by small market centres rather than the industrial mass of Swindon). It falls short, however, in several significant respects. Customarily, Williams declines to ground his conclusions in analysis of the materials, confining exemplification to a solitary favourite instance. To sustain a thesis of this order would require rigorous, extensive correlating of musical instances against (degree of remoteness of) location, ideally factoring in the sociological dimension.

More fundamentally, Williams skates over the root form of the problem: the question of how that capital qualitative schism of urban ('coarse') and rustic ('pure') comes into being in the first place. He elects to expound the problem in terms of 'printers' and their accomplices (the 'ballad-singers'), with no mention of the hacks initially deemed exclusive *fons et origo*. *In nuce*, the capital distinction foregrounded at this point is unaccompanied by the shift concomitant to it—rustic *creation*—so that the postulate of a pure musical stream remains, finally, disconnected from its rustic bearers. In thus stopping short of the full embrace, he succeeds more in compounding the quirkiness of his construction than in refining it—and at the same time remaining aloof in terms of this cardinal tenet of the contemporary paradigm.

Williams articulates a series of capital polarities—ancient / modern, permanent / ephemeral, remote / bustling—around the cardinal axis of (literary) *quality*, in terms of which the broadside trade is now indignantly equated with the negative pole: modern, ephemeral, quasi-urban vulgarity; the bastardizing agent of a bucolic 'purity' residually guaranteed by 'oral tradition'. In converting the crude agoracentrism of the Essay into an agorafugal design, Williams partially reduces the bearer / song divide through the medium of 'taste', but fails to achieve the full (re)connecting to the rustic musical matrix which the shift seems to promise. Instead, it confirms that rejection of endogenous creation was a constant in Williams's model: there is no recanting.

Differentia | Value | Genesis: little of what Williams presents on these aspects is a direct transcription of the real; it passes, rather, through the prism of the psyche.



PART IV : USES

'DISPOSAL': LITERARY PURGATION | RUSTIC RESTITUTION

Diachronically, this chapter has charted Williams's chronicling of song in the Upper Thames in the recent past (dissemination and flourishing) and in the present (inexorable atrophy). What, then, of the future? This is the question of *disposal*—the infelicity is his—of materials amassed, which much exercised him. The connection is evident to purposes (part 1): his gambit (not adding to the mass of *undigested* materials) is noble (and a hostage to fortune in that it poses the question of what 'digesting' might involve, precisely); and he denounces the evils of 'hoarding' songs:

They should not be looked upon merely as so many crown pieces scraped up here and there for profit's sake, afterwards to be stuffed in bags and boxes and hoarded up for the selfish pleasure of one or two individuals. Money is meant to be circulated. While it is in use it remains bright and begets interest; hoarded it has no value, but rusts and moulders away. Songs also need circulation. Given that, they retain their brightness and beget other songs; denied publicity, they waste and wither, and soon vanish into the dust of things. Such circulation they had formerly.¹⁰⁰

What form should this (re)circulation take? *Grosso modo*, three options obtain, not necessarily exclusively: revival as such ('reperformance'); materials for adaptation (renewal in other spheres); and scholarship (formal study). Importantly, the remarks with which Williams concludes the Essay unequivocally rule out the first:

The songs themselves, as far as singing goes, are practically defunct. There is no need to revive them. To do so, in fact, would be impossible. It is also undesirable. We live in a new age, almost in a new world. Life has changed. There are other amusements. We move at a quicker pace. Time and custom decide what shall or shall not continue. Fashions in everything accept modifications. It is the same with morris-dancing. Where a desire to sing or dance does not exist naturally, and is not spontaneous, no amount of artificial activity will suffice to restore the practice. Though you should resuscitate it for a time the life would not be permanent. You cannot graft a dead branch on to a living body. Let us, then, be content to say that the folk song is dead.¹⁰¹

Such an uncompromising anti-revival stance makes perfect sense against his idiosyncrasy—that he did not much care for musical performance gave him no stake in perpetuation (the apostles of revival were all musically inclined); and his line that the conditions within which song had had meaning had passed accords with a wariness towards *passéisme*—but complicates the imperative of (re)circulation.

LITERARY PURGATION On the second main option—materials for adaptation—Williams's line is cast, necessarily, in terms of high literature (poetry) rather than of music. Contiguous paragraphs in the original *præambulum* to the Essay suggests a programme for the regeneration of a national literature become degenerate, by means of folk song (text):

For the past century the people of England have been befooled in much of their literature, and especially in their lyrical poetry and songs. They have been fed on blown nonsense, and have lost the taste for the simple and original. The poets have got away from the people. That is equivalent to saying they have got away from nature; for the peasantry of every civilised race and nationality stands for nature, while the educated classes stand for art, real or so-called. The plain old songs and lyrics have been forgotten, or, if they have not been forgotten, they have been allowed to fall into disuse, and even into disrepute. This was for Art's sake. Scores of fine old songs and ballads have been allowed to perish under the eyes and nose of superfluous Art. They were born beautiful, but they were become old. That should have been a recommendation, but it served, and still serves, as an objection. People will not sing them merely because they are old. Of course, the taste is a perverted one, but it was inevitable, under the circumstances. The children have been taught to be smart and modern, and I agree that such a course is highly necessary, up to a certain point. But it has its penalties. One thing it brought about was the fatuous condemnation, for all practical purposes, of such things as old histories, philosophies, poems and songs. They are considered out of date and antiquated, and one has to be courageous nowadays to stand in their defence, or to insist upon their value and the advantages to be derived from a study of them.¹⁰²

The development of this view amplifies a belief in what is 'elemental':

For my part, I must confess that I am old-fashioned, and have an affection for simple and elemental things. I am not ashamed to say this. For the simple things are the great things, and the elemental are also the fundamental things, and they remain when every other part of the superstructure has been swept away. And it has always happened that when Art, in literature and poetry, as well as in sculpture and painting, has become corrupt, obscured, or debased by a diversion from its true course, the process adopted for its recovery has been a total and unconditional surrender and repudiation of the means, and a return to and re-employment of the original and elemental forms. That is what needs to be done just now with much of our literature, and especially with our poetry, both lyric and epic. We want not to kill the new spirit, nor suppress it, but to chasten and purify it. We want, as it were, new blood in the old veins, not old blood in the new veins. Things dead are dead, the good as well as the bad. But be sure a thing is dead before you heap oblivion's dust upon it. I claim that the spirit of the old poetry, and even that which animated the ballads and folk-songs, is not, and cannot be dead, and that it might, in part, at least, be revived to advantage, not in the form, nor in the absolute spirit, but as a basis for future work.¹⁰³

Pleading the case for popular forms as corrective to a wrong turning in the literary life of the nation is, of course, hardly original.⁹ Whether or not Williams derived this view from his studies in English Literature, its purport remains undeveloped. It certainly was not enacted in his own poetic output, which was all but complete by this point. (It may be questioned how seriously Williams intended this idea.) More pertinent, customarily, are the undertones. If the content is virtually a textual version of Sharp's musical purification of the English soul, the messianic tone of the diatribe is no less Sharpian ('peasantry' as bedrock of the nation), placing Williams's thinking within the contemporary paradigm. The usual anomalies apply. The instrumental (*sic*) implications of vernacular song as a means to a better world (or at least a better literature)—'their [songs] value and the advantages to be derived from a study of them'—pertain in this context to the literary few, though the many may benefit as readers. Yet this jars with his genesis model, by which these songs were not the product of the 'peasantry' but the effusions of gutter poets (hardly what Wordsworth, for example, had in mind). Furthermore, both the implication of removal from original habitat contained in 'basis for future work', and the reference to what might be 'revived', run counter to other postulated forms of disposal, positive and negative.

RUSTIC RESTITUTION? What sense, *a contrario*, would 'fixing' song in its locale (stated as purpose, part 1) have? Williams's elaborations are hardly illuminating:

Consequently, the average collector, when he has obtained any pieces, never thinks of restoring them to the peasantry, to whom they belong, but carries them off into a new atmosphere, exhibits them to a few intellectuals and is satisfied with that.

I always think it radically wrong to take from many thousands in order to give to several hundreds, and probably less [*sic*] than that. ... We are all ready and eager to give a man that which belongs to another. But who will ever be so simple and ingenuous as to think of rendering him his own? That is what we want to do in the matter of the folk songs. Give them back to the people. Schools and universities do not want them. They are lost amid our great towns and cities. They cannot live in the atmosphere. And the dwellers there have other compensations, poor ones though they be. It is in the villages and small country towns where they would be welcomed.¹⁰⁴

⁹ James Reeves, writing in the context of the later Elizabethans, usefully frames the point: 'At its most healthy and vigorous, English poetry has never been far removed from the rhythms of everyday speech, and these prose rhythms always have a vitalising and quickening influence. Whenever poetry has fallen into a rhythmical habit exclusively poetic, as with the later Augustans, it has been attacked by a certain deadness, and the only way to renewed vitality has been through a return to the sound and movement of common speech: this is the essence of the rediscovery of the popular ballad rhythms by the early poets of the Romantic movement as an escape from the *impasse* of neo-Augustan practice.' (*A Short History of English Poetry* (1961), p. 64.)

Thus speaks a high-minded chronicler eager to (be seen to) circumvent the dual crimes of ransacking and hoarding through an agenda of 'giving back to the people'. A hint of triumphalism perhaps obscures the questions begged by the *désinvolté* formula 'giving back', given the categorical ruling out of revival as (re)performance. The key to the anomaly lies in the opening qualification: 'The songs themselves, *as far as singing goes*, are practically defunct.' What was not, in his scheme, defunct was the corpus as *text (as far as reading goes)*. The way is open for Williams's particular take on the restitution problem: (re)circulation as print. This is more idiosyncratic in its first phase—a local press serial—than its second, the book made from the serial.

The *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard* serial (1915–16) printed each instalment in a distinct panel, intended to encourage cutting out. Initially the serial appeared on page two (of eight) of the paper, moving to page three from the end of January 1916. The panels varied in size but always occupied fewer columns than the total width of the page. (In those days the *Standard's* pages were articulated on a spacious seven columns, the folk song panel sometimes being done as a bastard measure of three over four to accommodate the greater line width of the texts).[⊞] This project of giving back the texts to the people through the parochial press raises the question, however, of whether they wanted them back. (Or: why were they ceasing to sing them in the first place?) The vision of the humble cottages and farmhouses of the Upper Thames strewn with yellowing cuttings of old song texts smacks of quixotry—and tells us something important about Williams's thinking.†

Is there any evidence, then, that the rustic readership cut out and retained the instalments as intended? Somewhere in the district, surely, someone must have gone along with the plan. The only (apparently) known instance is supplied by Bob Arnold (1910–1998), who lived all his life in and around Burford. In an interview for *Folk on 2* (4 June 1986) he recounts how a neighbouring farmer, knowing of his interest, gave his father the cuttings to give to him. Replying to a letter which sought to clarify the story, Mr Arnold wrote from retirement at Wood Falls, near Salisbury:

[⊞] It is a first principle of page layout that any item, such as a coupon, intended to be cut out by the readership should be sited on one of the outer edges of the page so as to facilitate excision. The first dozen or so song instalments, run on page 2, occupy the inside edge, although the move to page 3 corrected this. By the time I made my fleeting contribution to laying out the paper in the early-mid 1990s, this had come to be regarded as a sub-editorial cardinal sin.

† Burns, an Alfredian *bête noire*, was conceivably more clear-eyed: 'Burns always understood that his books would be mused over and perhaps used by a bourgeois market, not by the country people and musicians whose work formed its raw material.' (Harker, *Fakesong*, p. 26.)

I have got all the cuttings, from "Wilts and Glos", very carefully cut out, and pasted in two large scrap books. They came my way, from Farmer Teagle (or it could be Teakle) who farmed at White Hill, some mile out of Burford, on the Oxford side. Sadly he passed on many years back and away in Gloucestershire, after he had retired.¹⁰⁵

The farm at White Hill near Burford stands at what was then the extreme north-eastern edge of the *Standard's* circulation area; date of acquisition is probably 1930s.

This means of publication was, however, merely an improvised measure occasioned by the war. From the very outset, Williams had in his sights a *book* of songs (texts), which belatedly appeared in the spring of 1923.

In time—not till after the war, probably—the songs, with the notes, will be published in book form. It will not matter much then whether few or many in this locality obtain copies, since readers of the *Standard* will be in the favourable position of having already perused most of them.¹⁰⁶

Rejecting 'classification', he avers 'we want a book and not a catalogue of songs'.

~~If it were in my power I would see that there were not a cottage in the land but possessed a book of the ancient national folk songs and ballads, together with examples and summaries of other choice and useful literature.~~ People would read them if they had them. [*Restates 'boarding' point from here*] One of the things most to be deplored, in my view, is the fact that so much that is good, beautiful, and vital should be kept locked up in books and libraries out of the sight and reach of all but a privileged few, while millions are languishing daily for the want of it.¹⁰⁷

(In passing: note that he shifts to a *national* perspective, contrasting with his dominantly parochial purchase; and the typically moralistic tenor of 'choice and useful'.)

It is clear that, unlike his more prominent contemporaries, Williams's design was to bring about not a folk song revival but an experience on the page: musical performance becomes reading act. What is recovered from the mouth is fossilized

□ Bob Arnold's subsequent enlisting of the cuttings in field collation and (re)performance is amusing in the light of Williams's categorical anti-revivalism: 'I could very often go into a village, find somebody who could remember the verse—you know, the melody—hadn't got the words, but with the use of Alfred Williams's cuttings and their singing, I could put the song together.' (BBC Radio, *Folk on 2*, 4 June 1986.) There are further instances. Bob Copper found the book useful in prompting his father's lapses in memory: 'It was, incidentally, not until 1954, shortly before his death, that we were able to hear him sing the fragments as complete songs. I had come across a copy of *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* by Alfred Williams and I lent it to him to read. He lapped it up [,] recognising many of the songs printed in it and he wrote a supplementary index, giving the song title, page number and the name of the village man who used to sing it. Fortunately, he was well enough to sing them over softly to me and so, with the help of the words from Mr Williams' book, we were able to salvage more of the songs that used to be sung in Rottingdean.' (*Early to Rise* (1976), p. 203.) Operating within the district, John Baldwin also made use of the book: he cites informants Bill Whiting (Longcot) and Albert Agg obtaining the book as a result. (*Folk Music Journal* 1969, p. 320, and MPhil dissertation, p. 109.) This ploy was not obvious to all collectors. Peter Kennedy writes of his 1950s Upper Thames field trips: 'For my part we only had a few days with a machine on the road and certainly did not have the opportunity to do preliminary research using Alfred Williams [sic] book and in the 1950s was [sic] unaware of the Mss.' (Private letter, 19 November 2000.) Thus *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* has been used as tool both of further collecting and of revival (performance), to both of which the author was opposed! Williams the convinced anti-revivalist could no more control the uses to which his book might be put than the arch-revivalist Sharp could control the genie of reperformance so quixotically released from her bottle.

as printed artefact: significantly, he only becomes comfortable with his materials once they have been transposed from the realm of oral enactment to that of the *constitutively* textual. In espousing recirculation-as-print, he constructs a response perfectly intelligible in terms of his *peculiar mixture*: the Gutenberg animal with few musical instincts. This idiosyncratic orientation shapes, by extension, the form that he gave to his publication: essentially a word-book with headnotes and introduction, a format that had by then gone out of vogue. (His copy of Bell may have influenced him in this.) The primacy of the book is not just directed towards its recipients, actual or postulated. Williams's defining self-promotion as *author* generates the imperative of publication: he needed titles to his credit. Without imputing self-glorification or material gain (he quite legitimately had an eye to modest royalties), Williams conceived his disposition of song as grist to the mill of letters.

For all his laudable sensitivity to the pitfalls of antiquarianism and extractionism, Williams none the less (perhaps unsurprisingly) stumbles into them. His cast of expression exhibits an antiquarian turn, stated in terms of the *curio*.¹⁰⁸ Additionally, his purposes as framed are populist ('the people') and anti-*passéiste*, but also non-negotiably anti-revivalist. He is left, finally, with a kind of *attenuated antiquarianism*, an idiom that less than ideally addresses the problem. In his *sui generis* variant, rustic restitution is conceived in exclusively documentary form: in every humble cottage—not vicarage or manor house—a copy of *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* would take its place on the shelf alongside Shakespeare and the Bible; ordinary working people—not scholars—would take it down on dark winter nights and marvel at the one-time vernacular musical (textual) patrimony of the countryside.

How, by deploying greater clarity of thought, might Williams have synthesized the singular, largely extemporized position he came to adopt on the folk song tangle?

Song recovered from country people has *value* (though the precise character of that value is uncertain); it therefore should be *recorded* (so as not to be 'lost'); since its proper conditions have now passed, it should not be actively *revived*; nor should it be *studied*; but ordinary people should have ready *access* to the records of it.



PART V: JEKYLL & HYDE (2)

RECALCITRANT OBJECT | FRACTURED SUBJECT

§I The founding problem remains of how the root components of song integrate, within an unpretending bucolic habitat. Conditions pertaining inside the Upper Thames (Chapter II), set against the larger ‘folk song’ horizon (Chapter IV), show porous communities endowed with a musical amalgam made of the demonstrably supra-ethnic (verses by varying registers of scribbler circulated in catchpenny print), the ethnically equivocal (a corpus of melody for which no Ur-provenance may conclusively—*pace* Sharp & Co—be ascribed), and the ethnic-*a-fortiori* (an articulatory habitus which can *only* gesticulate within the tribe), the whole complicated by the local / national relation, connection to *place*. The exacting task the folk song exegete faces is to construct a cogent account of how the object’s manifold components mesh. By what cogent compact are the root constituents of *song (words and music)–singer (performance)–locality* bound up in musical and social practice? Where, ultimately, in this nexus to locate the *ethnic imprimatur* which defines identity and value? Sharp fails convincingly to reconcile these constituents, disparate as dissected, compelling as bodied forth (Chapter IV.2). Williams, for his part, presents a quirky variant on the imperative in proclaiming, unelaborated, the goal of *incorporation* of song into his larger canvas of local country life. The particularity of his construction as set out in this chapter may be epitomized around the elementary permutations of the triad.

1 *Singers-Localities* While the privileging of place (‘Upper Thames’) and denizen in Williams’s project accords salience to belonging, the bond in *musical* terms remains circumstantial: *that* singing was once commonplace in the district answers his apologetic preoccupations but is insufficient to ground musical specificity proper.

2 *Songs-Singers* How do the possessors relate to their materials? Were country people merely conduits of the *dérobé* songs which energetic fieldwork found in their mouths or was their role more constitutive? Any serious inspection of the specificity of the problem turns manifestly on the latter. In typically off-beat fashion, Williams floats three orders of bringing-into-relation—each subsequently deleted—of agent and verbal construct, sketching specifically ethnic modes of sense-making. In the first, he suggests that ‘incompleteness’ of a verbal set may not be the absolute (flaw)

he elsewhere implies, but rather a form of understood ellipticality engaging the imaginative response of the rustic, performer or listener:

'The Maid's Wager' (Ox 210): A characteristic of [some of] the oldest pieces ... was their brevity and **apparent incompleteness, by reason of which the singer or reader [sic] was left to mentally supply the deficiency.** The songs, where they did not actually express, suggested the situations and details of the story.

A further instance of this effect intimates that rustic singers may have deployed a distinct model of intelligibility, foreign to Williams's own expectations of sense:

'Aboard the "Resolution" ' (Wt 433): An old song, probably imperfect, and puzzling in its relations. The story, or circumstances, are suggested rather than told. **When I first heard it I confessed I did not quite understand the scheme of the piece, but my informant readily pointed out to me the chief facts—they were all sufficiently evident to him.** [...] I obtained my copy of David Sawyer, the sheep-shearer, late of Ogbourne, Wilts.

In similar vein, he uses an instance in support of the generality that performers (and listeners) worked to a scale of values proper to the group, in which finer points of prosody are subordinated to the allure of the story:

'The Bailiff's Daughter of Islington' (Ox 187): ~~I think the piece as it appears in Pepys bears the evidence of polish: the irregularity of rhymes in the present version would not have seemed fitting to his ear. It has to be noted, however, that the village minstrel cares not so much for accuracy of rhyme as for accuracy of sense: provided the story runs well he will overlook deficiency of versification.~~ I obtained my copy of Mrs Collis, Aston, near Bampton, Oxon. I pointed out to her the differences between her song and that more commonly known, and she said that she was aware of them, but she was entirely convinced that hers was the true and oldest version. Her grandmother sang the song and she also used to say that the version containing the line "One penny, one penny, kind sir," had been ~~touched up and~~ altered from the original.

In these three cases, reporting the judgements and prowesses peculiar to his informants, Williams limns a specificity of rustic music-making. By posing the problem in terms of the mediating *activity* of the social group in question, he fleetingly comes closest to inscribing the singers fully in their own musical endeavour. The point hazily in here is of a discrete realm of activity operating to its own *lex non scripta*, specific conventions internalized by the participants as a 'competence' in the linguistic sense: though this characterization is, of course, quite alien to Williams.

Tantalizing *aperçus* such as these are, all too evidently, exceptional. Exposition

throughout this chapter has shown that, while elements in Williams's egregious compound are perfectly cogent, as a totality it will not serve. He clings to 'folk' as essentializing category but gestures at *if-they-sang-it-it-is-valid*; he instinctively estimates the value of *song-as-verse* in terms of elite canons foreign to its custodians; and, most decisively, espouses exogenous composition, entailing acquisition from print by rustics proclaimed to be illiterate. Rejecting endogenous creation, the primal connector clutched at by his contemporary mediators, Williams needs some alternative model of radical melodico-verbal *belonging*. Inherent to the print view, predicated on *boundary crossing*, a porousness of worlds in which verse passes out of print via hawker and back again through intercession of interloper, is a tendency to elide the defining middle: the fact of having been in the mouths of country people. Absorption to ethnic habitat needs to be in some degree transformative; there must be some sense of *touching the sides of the mouth* (not to say the heart), the essential form of which is transmutation in performance, a conferring thereby of ethnic imprimatur. (The loop is duly made to Green's point cited in the footnote to p. 191.) On active skill in performance, its manifold, fugitive nuances, there is a solitary comment:

'Gossip Joan' (Ox 262): A quaint old song, that depended, for its highest success, upon the ability of the singer to observe the proper quantities and modulations.[□]

In passing over this dimension, Williams denies himself a node decisive to the integration of elements.

3 *Songs-Locality* ('Upper Thames' 4) Conjoined with this conviction of exogenous creation, the connection to place assumes a peculiarly Alfredian complication. There is (as he fully understood) no 'Upper Thames folk song', any more than there is 'Wiltshire folk song' (in the sense of a corpus of melodico-verbal materials peculiar to that constituency); yet his apologetic mission was, precisely, the admission of song (text) to the larger quarry of a quasi-mythological (*most*)*UpperThamesishness* (Chapter III.3). His consequent hierarchizing of components reverses the usual

□ Oddly, Williams's most intriguing observation on this aspect belongs to the period before song collecting: 'It is a singular fact that a great many of the down labourers, and especially carters, have a shrill, piping tone of voice quite peculiar to them, and which is not to be met with anywhere in the valley. This can only be accounted for by the climate of the downs, and the continual breezes there; such conditions must of necessity tend to affect the voice in time'. (*Villages of the White Horse*, pp. 140-1.) This calls to mind, but does not compare in exoticism with, A. L. Lloyd's celebration of the pigmy elephant-chasers of the northern Congo: 'On the eve of the hunt they perform magic-making ceremonies—accompanied by a sweet polyphonic yodelling that is a musical ethnographer's delight'. (*Folk Song in England*, 1967, p. 99.)

music-territory precedence: a tendentiously nationalizing agenda chasing the shibboleth of 'Englishness'. The methodological exigence is no longer, now, to show how the locally derived (from fieldwork) is national in identity, but to distil from materials construed as supra-parochial (in provenance) an order of interest aggressively parochial, a locale *musically neglected*. **PREGNANT PREPOSITIONS** The defining relation of these root components is contained (or not) in the preposition favoured in a capital rubric. Accordingly, when Sharp edits selections of songs found in the field they are presented as *from Somerset*; when he strives to draw some conclusions, they concern *English folk song*. Williams's choice *per contra* of 'of' in preference to the customary 'from' undesignedly embodies a fraught music / region relation: 'from' entails no more than *circumstantially found*; 'of' conjoins without articulating, sign of a telling silence marking the space where theoretically grounded exposition should be.[□]

By introducing into the equation what is, by his own construction on the question, a foreign element (what blows in from the four corners of the kingdom), song problematizes rather than crowns the quintessential Alfredian psychogeographical postulate-expedient 'Upper Thames'. Objectively—in the sense of *what pertains to the object of scrutiny*—it creates, within an entity which in other respects may be read as self-sustaining, a need to reconcile native and foreign, the protectively parochial with the dismissively ubiquitous. Subjectively, Williams the musical sceptic struggles to accommodate song to a cherished domain constituted as state of mind more than as neatly mappable landscape. Consequently, the *glissement* by which, in general terms, a country of the bicycle morphs into a country of the mind receives a particular twist in this specific connection. The (peculiar) amalgam of his understanding of song—gutter-bardic, print-centred, categorically extra-parochial—impedes its intimate aggregation with the life and aura of 'his' locale; so that, in whatever (*most*) *Upper Thamesishness*—fugitive quintessence of the Alfredian quest—may be said to consist, it cannot, save circumstantially, be a musical quality.

□ It is noteworthy that, of the two components of Williams's enterprise ('Folk Songs' and 'Upper Thames') only the first has tended to attract critical attention—as, for example, Kidson and the *Times* reviewer of 1923—when the second is equally open to dispute. As for prepositions, 'from' is to such an extent customary that some have unthinkingly rendered the title 'Folk Songs from the Upper Thames'. (Thus Purslow in a letter to Ivor Clissold, undated but 1966 from context, in Clissold papers; and the bibliography in the notes to the LP *Unto Brigg Fair*, Leader Lea 4050, 1972.) The way apparently apposite rubrics contain central questions in the silences they create offers, unintentionally, a route into the problem, connecting in this case to the parlour game suggested by the *Times* reviewer to devise an alternative title (of which he professes himself incapable—see p. 291 *supra*). Such a renaming must here seek to clinch the melodico-verbal elections of bucolic singers having affiliation to a *découpage* astride county divisions. Therefore: 'Songs—problematically valorized as 'folk' as a consequence of outsider interest at a certain historical moment—found by Alfred Williams lurking in the mouths of unlettered rustics—in—a district which he determinedly mythified as—the 'Upper Thames''. What this rococo formulation gains in cogency it loses, manifestly, in concision.

§2 To an extent, the insufficiencies and anomalies in the Alfredian construction are explicable as difficulties inherent in the object. Cecil Sharp, unknowingly, failed to effect a cogent fit of elements; A L Lloyd contrived a degree of humility before the magnitude of the problem. Yet Williams's predicament in part derives from complications introduced by his own tangle of formations and ends: how to make sense of materials which are music(ologic)al by definition and extra-parochial by his own view within a horizon which is aggressively parochial and avowedly extra-music(ologic)al; how to bind the singers to their songs (verses) from a conception of literary confection and acquisition implying the inverse. It follows that a clue to the motivation of these defining disparities may be sought in the baggage, extensively explored in Chapter III. Disparate participations enabled making in many media—iron and steel, poetry and prose, bricks and mortar—craftings of a restlessly productive but potentially dissonant play of personæ. If there is a cardinal schism in all this it is not literacy as such but high lettering, the more pronounced for being autodidactically achieved. The self-taught scholar and poet-published-in-adversity derived his canons of 'education' and literary creation from an elite culture of print, divorced from the specificities of what is orally-aurally transacted.

The foreign body dropped unexpectedly into this mixture, less uneasy than might be supposed, with the effect of releasing an immanent antagonism of selves was not, primarily, song as such. The persona-participant most evidently missing, in this context, from the ensemble (musician-cum-(ethno)musicologist) represents a simple blank: no tunes recovered. It must be emphasized that Alfred Williams did not, *stricto sensu*, collect songs, 'folk' or otherwise. He transcribed from the rustic mouth and variously published—in that sense, he textualized—the verbal component of a practice of singing primordially oral in character. It is this idiosyncratic reduction, more than omission of the musical dimension proper, which complicates his engagement with the problem. Where he had unthinkingly expected to brush 'song' into his canvas, he finds himself to a degree discommoded by a body of (formal, patterned) language not hitherto present to his ethnographic accommodations. In so far as he had wrestled heroically with knowledge and personally endured the *affres* of creation in verse, he could not credit that these children of the soil might be capable of composition; nor, in so far as he evaluated in terms of an established, rarified literary

canon known through self-education, was he disposed to accord merit to the effusions of the printer's hack—with isolated exceptions. These authorship tenets are themselves underpinned by discordant assumptions about the status of 'education'. He at once vehemently championed a form of vernacular wisdom owing nothing to book-learning *and*, in rendering himself the creature of that book-learning, acquired reflexes alien to the rustic mindset. Musical savages who in the Sharpian account are noble *because* untainted by formal education remain, in musico-literary terms, merely savage (because not formally educated).

Collusions, in the prose works, of the champion of parochial rusticity with the belletrist (self-taught) ethnographer transmutes now into collision with the scholar-poet. The tribal apologist who strove valiantly *avant la lettre* to fix the figures in the (musical) landscape is undone by the disciple of Gutenberg who unthinkingly denies them a full place in the tableau. Cast in terms of the Stephensonian archetype, Mr Hyde (a poetry scholar and published poet) emerges from the shadows where he had lurked largely undetected while Dr Jekyll, missing the musical (literary) component, assiduously, if impressionistically, chronicled bucolic life in the Upper Thames. It becomes apparent that in the domain, ostensibly incidental, of song, the elements of the Alfredian tangle teased out in Chapter III converge without merging: in that he tends to rule out options he denies the singers full possession of their materials; in that he is, avowedly, not a thinker he struggles to see the problem whole; in engaging with song then, partially, drawing back from it, he tempers appetite with alienation; as visceral insider-outsider, he is (ethno)music(ologic)ally more out than in. In these ways, idiosyncrasies constitutive of his condition are not merely a feature of the song writings but acquire extra salience therein, a kind of culmination. Of this order are the opacities and contingencies of mediation. Observation alters.

A prodigious stride, determinedly lengthened to compass all that fell in its path, Williams was led to check when presented with a seeming bagatelle. (Even before the song episode was brought to its belated conclusion with preparation of the book, he had regained this stride by starting to teach himself Sanscrit: a negotiation much more his genre.) What the seasoned fieldworker rejoiced to document, the (musically) abecedarian exegete struggled, through entanglements peculiar to himself, to rationalize. Underestimating the complexities of his quarry, inappositely

apprenticed, Williams projected as perfunctory an incorporation of song that proved in the event fraught. Beyond the triumphant ferretings of fieldwork to which he had grown accustomed, all the angularity of 'folk' song as object-notion exposed limits to his improvising paradigm not evident in conventionally more exacting undertakings. The result is an instructive upending of simplistic conceptions of knowledge: a recalcitrant object of enquiry obliquely betrays disjunctions set deep in the subject enquiring after it. What went before does much to explain what came after. An intercession, which it was imperative to assay, which it was exhilarating to conduct, and which it might be thought gratifying, and even virtuous, to put before the public, became the occasion of occulted hesitations and paraded disparities.

Folk Songs of the Upper Thames, the long looked-for book of orally-derived verses, remains in all essentials indistinct from an edited selection of broadsides. Williams's honourable defeat lies not (so much) in the want of a proper pondering of *orality*, a constitutive ensemble of oral-aural musical habits conferring ethnic imprimatur, as in *not grasping the need for such*. In electing to be too much the creature of print culture, its postulates and practices, to accommodate what—exotically—exceeds its bounds, Williams ensures that rustically-occurring song, in the construction he places upon it, is not organically integral to a demotic way of life but prosthetic to it. The prospect of his valiant but unfulfilled (pros)thesis of a singing Upper Thames is epitomized by the case of Elijah Iles, a *homo* celebrated as *faber* (turning his hand to the range of agrestic tasks), *ludens* certainly (engaging with customary life as well as song), in decisive ways *sapiens*; but only incidentally *cantans*. Within the Alfredian equation, the *agents* of this domain of song which he so unshakeably champions never authentically assume their place as *singers*. There is no intimation of a tribally specific cantolect. What Williams's clustered fore-meanings preclude, finally, is any sense of the exquisite strangeness, the earthy particularity not of what may *mutatis mutandis* be transferred to the page but of what forms in the ethnically tutored throat: as if, on the chill waters of the (most) Upper Thames, a swan with two necks were to glide, svelte and unperceived, by.



PART VI : ALLEGORIES OF VALUE

Yet this account of divided self and multiplex object uneasily coexisting without entwining does less than justice to Williams's enterprise. The dominant persona within the Alfredian tangle is not the apostle of high literature but the moralist, subsuming, and present in, all other selves, as the concluding sections of Chapter III establish. In contrast to the equivocations of Williams the scholar-poet before popular verse, the moralist in him transposes steadfastly to a founding grammar of value. A means of conjoining is thereby articulated, both the singer's relation to materials, and the interloper's embrace of the object, cast typically in extra-musical terms.

The first of these relations obtains through what he terms the 'principle of taste', an intuited mechanism governing the unerring elections of country people:

The rustic population—in spite of their illiteracy—discovered wonderful taste. This is evidenced by the kind of flowers they cultivated in their gardens, by their furniture and chinaware, and, as we have seen, by the songs they sang. And the taste for good things still remains, at any rate, in the case of the old villagers yet surviving. They abhor the cheap, trashy, tawdry materials offered for sale nowadays. They dislike photographs. That fact alone is significant. They cling to the old coloured prints and woodcuts, to their antique tables and chairs, to their old clocks, watches, beds, pots, pans, and utensils. This they do not merely by reason of any stupid conservativeness, or unconquerable prejudice, but because they are convinced that the newer things generally are inferior. They cannot tell you their reasons for thinking this, if you should question them, but they feel sure that it is so. They are guided by the principle of taste.¹⁰⁹

This is the nearest Williams comes to articulating a constitutive, rather than purely circumstantial, interlacing of song (text) and bearer, what might be termed an ethnically specific (musical) screening. The diagnosis he sets forth here is amplified in the 1926 shift of emphasis, in which bucolic cranny-dwellers are held to repudiate the vulgarisms of the market place. All this accords an active role to singers within the nexus as arbiters, in partial correction to exclusions implicit in the *scribbler* line, yet remains essentially extra-generative and extra-performative. On grounds strictly musical, taste-in-selection is an oblique connection, reducing song to one more object of worth on the rustic mantelpiece.

The paragraph preceding the passage cited furnishes clarification of the ethos underpinning Williams's endorsing of the countryman's powers of discrimination:

What is the outstanding difference between the old and the new popular songs? There are really very many points of difference. The chief one, however, is that of simplicity. And the older the songs are, and the more nearly they touched the people, the simpler they were. But simplicity is not their sole virtue. A good many new pieces are simple. But their simplicity is of poverty and weakness, while that of the others is born of strength and riches. That is an elegant and artistic simplicity, rich and delightful with music and suggestion, and true to nature and life. Another difference is in their fragrance—I am speaking now of the best of the old folk songs, not the commoner sorts. We have plenty of chiselled songs and poems in our own time, but are they sweet? Unfortunately they are not. Sweetness proceeds from the heart, never from the head; and since the preponderating bulk of our poetry and songs is the result of brain-work the pieces have not sweetness. The natural thing is invariably sweet; the merely beautiful may never be so. It depends upon what we call beautiful. Many of the old-fashioned flowers our grandmothers planted and cherished have gone out of cultivation. They were simple and sweet, and therefore beautiful; but they were not gaudy. Now, however, our gardens are full of gaudy flowers, but they have no fragrance. They are materially beautiful; perfect in form and colour, but without souls. We have followed the same plan in regard to our gardens as to our literature. We have sacrificed the heart to the eye. What we love most of all about the folk songs, however, is not their beauty, which may be conditional and dependent upon a cultivated taste in the individual, but their old-fashionedness. They are like the quaint figures and ornaments we find on the mantelpieces in the cottages, that were bought centuries ago and handed on from generation to generation, dear and delightful by reason of their association with a time that is past, and the memories they awake in us.¹¹⁰

Disserting now on the corpus *in abstracto*—in effect, ‘folk song’ as *idea*—Williams reveals the true cast of his agenda. This building in of a musical element takes on value *by association* with a social order located in opposition to hateful modernity, a shift to the primacy of a kind of *bucolic virtue* integral to a larger (extra-musical) bucolic world already freighted with value in the Alfredian scheme of things. Confluence with his critique of the spirit of the age set out in the prose works (Chapter III *supra*) is evident. An invoking of ‘we’ marks the give-away *glissement*, ethnic song situated not in terms of its aboriginal enactors but of a putative cultural false trail. The thesis of persona-specific response—which Alfred Williams is speaking (evaluating)?—finds confirmation in this passage as the moralist-apologist drowns out the critic-poet. The loudest echoes are with *A Wiltshire Village*, in which the horticultural parallel, for example, is prefigured: rural children as Nature’s ‘sturdy, hardy plant’ are contrasted with the ‘hot-house plant’ which is urban youth; country conditions generally represent the ultimate mythical garden, Eden.¹¹¹ The table identifies direct lexical chimings between the Folk Song Essay and the earlier work:

FREIGHTED LEXEMES CARRYING OVER INTO THE WRITINGS ON SONG

1915: *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* p. 17

'their [*the new songs*] simplicity is of poverty and weakness, while that of the others is born of strength and riches. That is an elegant and artistic simplicity, rich and delightful with music and suggestion, and true to nature and life.'

'Sweetness proceeds from the heart, never from the head; and since the preponderating bulk of our poetry and songs is the result of brain-work, the pieces have not sweetness. The natural thing is invariably sweet ... Many of the old-fashioned flowers our grandmothers planted and cherished have gone out of cultivation. ... they were not gaudy. Now, however, our gardens are full of gaudy flowers, but they have no fragrance. They are materially beautiful; perfect in form and colour, but without souls.'

1915: *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* p. 18

'The rustic population—in spite of their illiteracy—discovered wonderful taste. This is evidenced by the kind of flowers they cultivated in their gardens, by their furniture and chinaware, and, as we have seen, by the songs they sang.'

1912: *A Wiltshire Village, passim*

• **SIMPLICITY**: 'that jewel, so easily lost and hardly recovered—simplicity of taste' (p. ix); 'stark stern simplicity' (p. 22); 'What we have lost! What ... simplicity' (p. 53); 'simplicity which is virtue itself' (p. 125)

• **SWEETNESS**: what affords 'sweeter' recreation (p. 135); 'thought itself is fresher and sweeter, more pure, and untainted in the open air.' (p. 287); **HEART** is implicit in his 'anti-brains' line on education (*supra* p. 232)

• **OLD-FASHIONED**: 'an old-fashioned agricultural village' (p. vii), and *passim*

• **GAUDY**: 'Do you think we are happier today, in our brick-and-tile houses, stuffed up with gaudy furniture and trappings' (p. 17)

• **WITHOUT SOULS**: industrial workers are 'helpless, soulless, and spiritless' (p. 19)

• **TASTE**: 'It is this cultivation of the false and superficial taste that is largely responsible for dissatisfaction with rustic conditions, and the rush that is made from the villages to manufacturing centres.' (p. 131)

DISAFFECTION, YEARNING, ALLEGORY

Despite Williams's own considered verdict that the interest of song was primarily *historical*, there is a more compelling case to be made for the primacy of the *moral* dimension, connecting to his larger life and work. Lexical correspondences identified above are simply the clearest indicator of a more general confluence in terms of disenchantment with the contemporary world, a repudiation of the new in favour of all that is 'old'. In his own locality, 'these old villages' are deemed to be 'unspoiled by the prejudice, affectation, and tasteless formalities in vogue in our own time',¹¹² as refuge from which he equates country song with 'the taste for good things' (p. 481 *supra*). This invoking of 'taste' is the cardinal shibboleth through which he seeks to sustain a moral scheme to which he became wedded at an early stage: all that he abhors is lacking in taste, all that he cherishes exhibits that quality. In this way,

the *idea* of folk song, and by extension its rustic possessors, acquires its worth. In conceiving incorporation of the musical component in these terms, Williams values song, and thus singing, not *in itself* but as recruited to serve a larger jeremiad.

It is this moral dimension which, most decisively, enacts the carrying over from his accumulated baggage explored in Chapter III: an englobing ethos gestated by the hearthside and confirmed in the fields, at the forge and through high literature. We witness, in the context of vernacular song, the Alfredian moral-mental pabulum feeding off itself. Moral imperatives acquire a force of their own, largely doing service for elucidation of the object on its own (verbal and melodic) grounds. In that the ambivalences and peculiarities in Williams's song construction are intelligible, if not radically explicable, by reference to his prior salmagundi of postulate and predilection, the approach adopted here is vindicated: each component in the position he confects on song finds its counterpart in his idiosyncratic consciousness.

Williams is, for all that he stands out from the flock, of the age in being disillusioned with it. Song he aligns with what has been destroyed by the remorseless encroachments of the modern, its instruments of dissemination of vulgarity, a turning across the tide which renders his stance less removed from that of his contemporary song mediators than might otherwise appear. Intimations are of *looking for something*, of some psychological *carance*, in which song is enlisted as one element in a struggle to create wholeness out of alienation; an inexpungible yearning after a 'better' world. In place of knowledge proper, conceptualized understanding founded on apparatus specific to the task, there are forms of allegory: of a certain view of the historical moment, of his disaffection with it, of defeat before the mysteries concealed in the convenience qualifier 'folk'. Refractions in a singular prism.



NOTES TO CHAPTER VI

- 1 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 26.
- 2 *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 30 October 1915, p. 4.
- 3 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, pp. 25-6. The closeness of expression with the preceding passage suggests a degree of recycling.
- 4 'The Local Distribution of the Folk Song and Folk Music', *Wiltshire Gazette*, 6 August 1925, p. 3.
- 5 'Folk Song and Locality', *Wiltshire Times*, 28 August 1926, p. 9.
- 6 As note 4.
- 7 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 7.
- 8 Letter to J B Jones, 11 May 1923 (WSRO 2598/74).
- 9 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames District', *Word-Lore*, 1, no. 1 (January-February 1926), p. 13.
- 10 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, pp. 9 and 11.
- 11 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames', *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 9 October 1915, p. 2 (passage deleted from book).
- 12 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, pp. 11 and p. 26, 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames', *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 2 October 1915, p. 2 (passage deleted from book).
- 13 Preface newly composed for *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* (1923); 'The Local Distribution of the Folk Song and Folk Music', *Wiltshire Gazette*, 6 August 25, p. 3; lecture notes (WSRO 2598/36); 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames District', *Word-Lore*, 1, no. 1 (January-February 1926), pp. 13-14.
- 14 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames', *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 2 October 1915, p. 2 (passage deleted from book).
- 15 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, pp. 16 and 25.
- 16 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames', *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 2 October 1915, p. 2 (passage deleted from book).
- 17 *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 27 November 1915, p. 4.
- 18 Byett, p. 60.
- 19 Byett, p. 65.
- 20 *Round About the Upper Thames*, *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 27 February 1915, p. 2; book revision 1922, p. 89.

- 21 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames', *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*,
2 October 1915, p. 2 (passage deleted from book).
- 22 Dean-Smith, p. 23.
- 23 'The Local Distribution of the Folk Song and Folk Music', *Wiltshire Gazette*,
6 August 1925, p. 3; letter to Henry Byett, 17 January 1926, WSRO 2598/38/2);
three separate mentions in the lecture notes (WSRO 2598/36).
- 24 Clark, p. 93. Harker's assertion that 'Williams is known to have had some
admiration for Sharp's collecting work' (*Fakesong*, p. 215) parrots Clark.
- 25 'Alfred Williams, Song Collector', *Folk Music Journal*, I, 5 (1969), p. 295.
- 26 Clark, p. 94.
- 27 Letter to John Denwood, 2 August 1916 (WSRO, 2598/60).
- 28 Byett, p. 65. Clark, p. 164 reads like a rehash of Byett, though he has a more
specific date—'June'.
- 29 Dean-Smith, p. 38 (there is no evidence of correspondence with
'other collectors'); Clissold, p. 297; Sanderson, new preface to *Folk Songs of
the Upper Thames* (1970), p. vii.
- 30 This correspondence is preserved at Vaughan Williams Memorial Library,
MPS/10 (31). Malcolm Taylor, VWML librarian, reports: 'I have looked
through the Folk Song Society minutes for the relevant period and can find
nothing at all about Williams.' (Private letter, 16 July 1999.)
- 31 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames', *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*,
2 October 1915, p. 2 (*Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 13).
- 32 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 25.
- 33 Letter to Reuben George, 21 December 1911 (WSRO 2598/67).
- 34 Letter to Henry Byett, 27 February 1922 (WSRO 2598/38/2).
- 35 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames District', *Word-Lore*, 1, no. 1 (January-
February 1926), p. 12.
- 36 Lecture notes (WSRO 2598/36).
- 37 Preface to *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* (1923).
- 38 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 23.
- 39 *Ibid*, p. 14.
- 40 *Ibid*, pp. 18-19.
- 41 'The Folk Carol in Wiltshire', *Wiltshire Gazette*, 29 December 1927, p. 7.
- 42 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 19.

- 43 *Ibid*, pp. 19-20.
- 44 *Ibid*, p. 22.
- 45 *Ibid*, pp. 21-22.
- 46 *Ibid*, p. 21.
- 47 *Ibid*, p. 22.
- 48 *Ibid*, p. 20.
- 49 *Ibid*.
- 50 *Ibid*.
- 51 *Ibid*, p. 24.
- 52 *Ibid*, p. 23.
- 53 *Ibid*, p. 24 (author's emphasis).
- 54 'Village Singing Matches', *Oxford Times*, 31 August 1928, p. 10.
- 55 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 23.
- 56 *Ibid*, p. 24.
- 57 'The Williams Manuscripts', *Folk Music Journal*, I, 5 (1969), p. 304.
- 58 *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 30 October 1915, p. 4.
- 59 *Ibid*.
- 60 *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 20 November 1915, p. 4.
- 61 *Ibid*.
- 62 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 18.
- 63 *Ibid*, pp. 21-22 (emphasis added).
- 64 *Ibid*, p. 16.
- 65 *Ibid*, p. 24.
- 66 Note to 'What can a young lassie?' (Gl 137, emphasis added). A third instance occurs as: 'there was not then such a ready recourse to *standard works*, classical pieces, and so forth. Rustic people understood and appreciated the folk music.' 'Folk Song and Locality', *Wiltshire Times*, 28 August 1926, p. 9 (emphasis added).
- 67 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 20.
- 68 'The Local Distribution of the Folk Song and Folk Music', *Wiltshire Gazette*, 6 August 1925, p. 3 (emphasis added).

- 69 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames District', *Word-Lore*, 1, no. 1 (January-February 1926), p. 13 (emphasis added).
- 70 Clark, p. 161.
- 71 'The Williams Manuscripts', *Folk Music Journal*, 1, 5 (1969), p. 302.
- 72 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 11.
- 73 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames District', *Word-Lore*, 1, no. 1 (January-February 1926), p. 12.
- 74 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 23.
- 75 *Ibid*, pp. 15-16.
- 76 Lecture notes (WSRO 2598/36).
- 77 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames', *The Highway*, 8, no. 94 (July 1916), pp. 164-5. This favourite military theme Williams points up in many other articles, such as the *Word-Lore* piece of 1926, 'Folk Song and Locality' (*Wiltshire Times*, 28 August 1926, p. 9), and 'The Thames Folk Tradition', (*Oxford Times*, 15 June 1928, p. 10), as well as in a number of headnotes to individual songs (Gl 66, Gl 138, Ox 302, Wt 442, Wt 447, Wt 456).
- 78 Lecture notes (WSRO 2598/36).
- 79 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, pp. 13-14.
- 80 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames', *The Highway*, 8, no. 94 (July 1916), p. 165.
- 81 Frank Purslow, *Marrowbones* (London, 1965), p. 106.
- 82 For nicknames see *Life in a Railway Factory* (1915), pp. 79 and 164.
- 83 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 15.
- 84 *Ibid*, p. 16.
- 85 *Ibid*, p. 24.
- 86 Lecture notes (WSRO 2598/36).
- 87 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 29.
- 88 'The Evolution of the Local Folk Song', *Wiltshire Times*, 1 May 1926, p. 5.
- 89 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, pp. 11-12 (emphasis added).
- 90 For hawkers see p. 185 *supra*.
- 91 *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 27 November 1915, p. 4.
- 92 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 14.
- 93 *Ibid*.
- 94 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 11.

- 95 *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 15 April 1916, p. 3 (emphasis added).
- 96 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames District', *Word-Lore*, 1, no. 1 (January-February 1926), p. 15.
- 97 'The Evolution of the Local Folk Song', *Wiltshire Times*, 1 May 1926, p. 5 (emphasis added).
- 98 *Ibid* (emphasis added).
- 99 *Oxford Times*, 15 June 1928, p. 10.
- 100 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames', *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 2 October 1915, p. 2 (passage deleted from book).
- 101 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, pp. 28-9.
- 102 As note 100.
- 103 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, pp. 10-11.
- 104 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames', *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 2 October 1915, p. 2 (passage deleted from book).
- 105 Private letter, 30 July 1997.
- 106 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames', *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 2 September 1916, p. 3 (passage deleted from book).
- 107 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 11.
- 108 This slant is confirmed by Williams's use of the term 'relic' in two articles, *The Highway* (p. 164) and *Word-Lore* (p. 12).
- 109 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 18.
- 110 *Ibid*, p. 17.
- 111 *A Wiltshire Village*, pp. 129 and 163.
- 112 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 27.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUDING

Victor malgré lui?



VICI: ALFRED WILLIAMS STANDS
DEFIANT AT HIS STEAM HAMMER



HETERODOX NEGOTIATIONS : DEFEAT INTO TRIUMPH?

AFTER HIS OWN FASHION—EGREGIOUS, BODGED, HETERODOX—DID ALFRED WILLIAMS clutch, within the confines of his native Upper Thames, at this slippery quarry of demotic song, a knowledge variant more fraught with pitfalls than he can have supposed when he pedalled boldly forth to supplement a chronicle of country ways. Schematically, enquiry entails the situating of an object of attention having prior embodiment in a circumstantial body of record (*materials*) in terms of a conceptual-evaluative apparatus (*model*) imported by a goal-oriented subject, giving rise to a play of inherited pre-textualizings (record is predominantly, though not exclusively, *written*) and willed re-textualizings. These are the founding components of an endless play of contingent, culture-specific (re)conversion whose goal is knowledge but whose emblematic product is, instructively, a version of defeat. Where no documentary corpus obtains, as with expressive enactments of the (formally) untutored, the inaugural mediatory layer must be supplied by means of fieldwork. Thus was the late Victorian and Edwardian scramble to ‘folk’ song transcription called into being. Materials once gathered, the enquirer faces the quagmire of meaning-ascription, a set of difficulties inscribed beyond the purely empirical (is any enterprise *purely* empirical?). Given that, in the early period at least, ‘folk song collector’ designates a condition eminently adventitious, extraneous purpose and equipping will come to bear. In the recesses of the psyche, finally, proclivity acts out its conflict, involuntary and thus revealing, with what the reasoning self presumes to master. As the mediating instance is coaxed from the shadows, so in Eco’s sense her ‘background books’ will prove determinant, conducing to the effect of *serendipity* so entertainingly set forth. An array of perspectives—empirical chronicle | conceptual construction | public enlisting | private percolation—thus opens up within which to inspect the relative weight of elements constitutive of intercessive idiosyncrasy. Along this path the evident question *What does Alfred Williams have to tell us about folk song in the Upper Thames?*—how adequately does he document the musical contents, how adroitly negotiate the tangle of musical and social questions, blithely dubbed ‘folk’—modulates to the issue of whether the egregiousness of his point of departure enriches, or compromises, the result; that is, of a *distinctively* Alfredian contribution. *What does Alfred Williams’s intercession in folk song in the Upper Thames have to tell us about him?*

§I CHRONICLE : DEBIT AND CREDIT

The documentary product of a collector's field investigations—abstracted, that is, from any hermeneutico-evaluative complexion she, inescapably, confers—will divide as: places visited, singers documented, quantity and quality of song materials recovered (informed as a totality by context, the 'veracity' generally of the resultant picture). This essentially is the subject matter set out in Chapter II, and the field notations (Chapter V) from which it largely derives. Adopting the balance sheet as mechanism, what pundits have variously identified as salient properties are ranged under the simplistic heads of defect and merit (significantly a problematic separation).

THE DEBIT SIDE : I GEOGRAPHICAL SPREAD Williams himself concedes that he neglected a sizeable quarter of his designated zone, the motivation for which remains indeterminate. **II SINGERS** For all that he is the apostle of methodical scouring, he almost certainly failed to locate a number of singers in his area (this is tentatively reconstructed at Chapter V.6); and of those he did collect, he displays a lack of rigour in noting routine information—date of visit, a singer's age, occupation, sources—a documentary failing not generally remarked upon by commentators. **III SONGS (TEXTS)** Most obvious here, and most commonly observed, is the failure to supply tunes to the texts he noted (the twists on this are discussed *infra*). Defects as to texts divide as absence / presence: what he might have missed, or declined to note; and, of what he did note, the defects pertain to editing practices—collation, amendment, bowdlerization—as Appendix I seeks to show. All these editorial aspects, however, are less establishable than comment (judgement) tends to imply: the means of confident adjudication effectively do not obtain. There is, therefore, a certain patchiness in Williams's endeavour on all three counts, evident failures of chronicling.

THE CREDIT SIDE This patchiness of record is, of course, tempered by the notable thoroughness with which he covers the greater part of his district. The two acknowledged virtues, however, of his endeavours are that he notably sets country song within its milieu, and that he offers up song texts of unusual extension and variety. **I SINGERS AND THEIR WORLD** Williams instinctively gives us the singer as person—his fondness for the people and the confines of their unadorned world is manifest. As he wrote to Jones when the song book appeared:

your saying that it cheered you a little pleases me, because it has the same effect upon myself. It was this feeling that stimulated me to persevere in collecting them, and perhaps I may be forgiven if I feel a sort of fondness for the old things especially when I am reminded, by looking at them, of the dear old people I visited, and who are now no more with us here.⁶³

II SONG (TEXT) The notable amplitude of many of Williams's texts (thus Dean-Smith, p. 297 *supra*) stands out in an era when words were habitually subordinated to tunes. Among possible explanations for this—that Upper Thames singers had unusual powers of recall (implausible), that Williams fleshed out his field notations (unverifiable)—is that, unhampered by the demands of tune transcription, he was able to accord more care to fullness of words. In this light, a positive effect results from failure to note music, which is only a failing where tunes are deemed primary. It is an important qualification that Williams's musical illiteracy was rendered the more glaring by chancing to operate in a period when tunes were in the ascendant: critics may lament the (original) lack of tunes in Child but do not adduce it as 'fault'; and, post Sharp, the pendulum swings back. There is, endlessly, a 'balance' of tunes / words to be 'restored'. This destabilizing of the merit / demerit polarity (a shifting discrimination sensitive to frame) is best exemplified by the topic which has most divided Williams commentators: canon. Attitudes on this issue of the ethnic validity of identifiable compositions describe a trajectory (sketched in Chapter IV) from categorical dismissal by the proto-revival establishment through a period of hesitant concession to polemical approbation among deuterio-revival protagonists. Along this route, emblematically, Williams graduates from marginal heretic to fêted ecumene by courtesy of a unique textual *olla podrida* deriving as much from felicitous ignorance as from doctrinaire contesting. An alluring illustration is thereby furnished of the shift in perspective by which First Revival faults turn into Second Revival virtues. While he does not, absolutely, purvey 'what was actually sung' in the Upper Thames, Alfred Williams *to a greater extent than other collectors in the period* records what he found in the mouths of country people. Leaving aside the problems posed by dubbing this as 'representative', it may confidently be stated that, sharing the period emphasis on fieldwork, he brings into being materials necessary for a revised understanding of the whole picture. The significant twist, however, is that, viewed within this national perspective, what he supplies is a piece for *someone else's* jigsaw.

⁶³ Letter to J B Jones, 11 May 1923 (WSRO 2598/74). An earlier part of this document is cited at p. 399 *supra*.

§2 ON THE FAR SIDE OF FIELDWORK

Not content to bequeath this deal of record of a musical province which otherwise must have passed into oblivion (though not qualitatively all that might have been gathered), Williams determined to confront the entailed tangle of conceptual-evaluative questions ('folk song'), an altogether more exacting enterprise for which he was signally ill-equipped. Overlaying the root matrix common to all vocal music-making—melodic component, verbal component, articulatory idiom, milieu of performance—is the *differentia specifica* of a domain gestured at, but not defined by, the rubric *what people do for themselves*: unselfconscious, non-doctrinaire melodico-verbal enactments within a demotic habitat, in determining the specificity and distinctive worth of which genesis may or may not be deemed capital. By whatever means, any cogent account of the problem must, finally, locate an indelible association with its aboriginal custodians—*ethnic imprimatur*—an imperative compounded by any determinedly national(ist) gloss: *English* folk song. Decisively, these modalities of attempted sense-making lie beyond what may be directly apprehended in the field: a locality-specific country singer offers up her songs for notation, but she cannot deliver a model of (historical) creation, (musicological) identity, (aesthetic) worth. How do partialities of fieldwork stand in relation to a putatively national object? How may documented particularity yield to generality ('folk')? In striving to supply these conversions through cogitation, the emergent Sharpian-Ralphian paradigm, so publicly assured, so woefully founded, articulates a vision of song (reducing, in its dismissal of a verbal component deemed corrupt, to a distilled corpus of melody) as radically discrete, categorically the outcome of endogenous collective shaping, and having as a result unique beauty and moral force; the urgent redissemination (regulated performance) of which must constitute a corrective to creeping degeneracy of the race.

Williams, ingenuously inserting himself into this problematic, founds his position on an abstracted verbal element (for 'song' read *verse*) set within an aggressively localized bucolic habitat ('Upper Thames'). Genesis of the verses he ascribes to a shadowy sodality of metropolitan scribblers in the pay of a gutter press; *differentia* he construes uneasily as an amalgam of the putatively self-evident alloyed by materials conventionally deemed non-legitimate; and *value* he locates less in terms of internal (literary) qualities than through association with a 'better' world rapidly receding.

From this conception of worth it follows that Williams saw no future in striving to summon back what had (he believed) irrevocably passed. What he consequently presents to his readership is the poignancy of embers in preference to the quixotry of proselytizing revival. *In nuce*, the Alfredian folk song mixture (reducing, in its omission through incapacity of the melodic component, to a congeries of popular verse) does not accept that the rustic possessors created the songs they sang, identifies the privileged character conveyed in the marker 'folk' by association with a bygone age rather than intrinsically; and restricts any enlisting as an improving force in the wider populace by blunt rejection of reperformance. On most capital counts, therefore, Williams departs from contemporary orthodoxies, his construal of discreteness only fitfully matching received canons, and regarding these materials, in contrast to Sharp & Co, to be non-transferrable. (The Ralphian vision of folk song as a *divertissement* for discerning males attended at the keyboard by an obliging female[□]—this from one who derides the tea-and-biscuits dilettantism of the embryonic Folk Song Society—is a thousand kilometres from the Alfredian design: a well-thumbed copy of *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* perused for armchair edification at the humble hearthside.) The capital interest of this baroque conjunction of positionings—no more empirically derived in Williams's case, for all his worthy invocations of veracity based on personal witness, than in the case of his contemporary collectors—lies less in their character as heteroclitite in relation to received thinking at the time than in a degree of *internal* discordance. In particular, the negatively cast outer points of his construction—non-negotiably anti-autochthonous as to provenance (setting up the double conflict of supra-parochial composition : regional valorizing | (urban) print primacy : universal rustic illiteracy), determinedly anti-revivalist as to destination—stand as constants having complicating implications for the core (related) questions of *value* and *uses*. In striving to explain these discordances, so potentially instructive, it is necessary to situate them firstly against his primary agenda (§3, an essential reminder that any framing of an account of folk song as such is incidental to his intervention), and secondly within the idiosyncratic tangle of assumption and belief which emerges from his multifarious endeavours in the preceding period (§4).

□ Sharp 'published several volumes of these wonderful tunes which the average amateur could easily sing, and fitted them with accompaniments which their sisters or girl friends could easily play.' Ralph Vaughan Williams, 'Cecil Sharp: An Appreciation' (1954), reprised in *English Folk Song: Some Conclusions* (4th edition, 1965), p. viii.

§3 APOLOGIA | 'INCORPORATION' | PROS-THESIS

Perhaps more than most, Alfred Williams was song collector incidentally and accidentally. A self-anointed role as parochial advocate means that his memorializing of country life does not start—or end, indeed—with song gathering. Rather, his initially crabwise pursuit, an oblique *trajet* which proclaims from the outset exceptionality, orients the gloss he comes to place upon the problem (subordination of song to the larger picture). With admirable perspicuity, he saw the case for recording quotidian hoi polloi doings, assembling a largely musicless jigsaw of country life in his neighbourhood—*A Wiltshire Village, Villages of the White Horse, Round About the Upper Thames*—which he believed to be complete by 1914: that is, he did not think there *was* a musical piece to insert. That omission once recognized, its rendering as a ‘corporate part’ of the existing picture turned on an apparently straightforward, though operose, extension to gleaning in the field. Whereas musical interlopers will typically pursue song and ‘contextualize’ (if at all) afterwards, Williams thus inverts the sequence, so that his task becomes to *musicalize context* (what, *post hoc*, serves as context). The capital corollary to this project of incorporation is apologetics, giving the lie to the view, real or imagined, that the district was ‘unmusical’. In valorizing his quarry, however, not as synecdoche of a national whole (*English Folk Song*) but as having resonance in terms of a *plaidoyer* for ‘his’ people in ‘his’ locale, he compromises the model examined above (§2). A view of creation as supra-parochial, and of merit residing with the creator (scribbler), effectively, haplessly severs music from bearer: if the singers did not create their songs, and if there is no attention to affiliation in performance, in what sense other than that of circumstantial possession were they ‘theirs’—and how by extension is apologia to be effected? In this way, the musical piece as Williams supplies it does not obligingly fit the hole of *his* intentional jigsaw (Upper Thames); or, more precisely, *his* attempt discursively to effect this integration is imperfectly fulfilled. (As enacted by its aboriginal possessors, song-singing necessarily ‘fits’ into their way of life.)

Symptomatic of this difficulty, unrecognized as such, in accommodating song to life is Williams’s self-consciousness both in the determination to defend the songsters of the Upper Thames and in a need to justify his own role as purveyor. Importantly, the awkwardness betrayed in these laboured self-justifications is specific to song:

the disavowal of expertise, the anxious apologetics (he does not, for example, feel the need to vaunt the capacity of Upper Thames countrymen to plough or milk or mill as well as any), the worries over 'extraction'—all are effectively absent from his writings on industrial and agrestic life. It is as if he *senses*, but cannot concede, the foreignness of this musical component to the ways he knew. From the imperatives of the problem, however, such protestations of inexpertise could not insulate him. At root, Williams's project founders on a discordance of the proprietorially tribal-regional character of his primary *telos* (apologia and incorporation) and the extemporized construction he places on the larger object (inverse to the circle Sharp fails to square). He is, significantly, egregious at the level of *purpose* as well as of conclusion. At the intersection with entangled oeuvre and selfhood, finally, an ethnographic paradigm idiosyncratically improvised for the task of textualizing country life will not extend to the compelling embrace of song. The grounds of this instructive conflict must be sought in the *peculiar mixture* informed by his 'background books' (Eco).

§4 MASKS AND VOICES

In seeking to motivate these disparities, unwitting and self-defeating, at the heart of Williams's refraction of song, there is a need to ask, beyond proclaimed purpose, *which* 'Alfred Williams' is at any moment responding. Psychologically, he is (invents himself as) the meeting point of multiple, potentially conflicting personæ: plough-boy, hammerman, autodidact, poet, chronicler in prose, and finally song collector. Predominant here is the votary of the book as consumer and producer. Classical authors especially become his cherished companions, the fount of a defining deposit of touchstones, moral as much as æsthetic; and authorship emerges as his principal self-identification, the striving to achieve recognition propelled by a starting point in poverty. These selves, for all their heterogeneity, are initially sustained in productive conjunction, converging (as materials and means) in a widening gyre of prose works. Except in the case of the railway book, in which hostility to subject matter causes discord to obtrude, no especial sense is evident of these personæ in disharmony. The initial energetic documenting of the world about him, industrial and bucolic, is bound together by uncompromising apologetics for a locale and its inhabitants, visceral inquisitiveness, and a protuberant moral scheme.

Song, by contrast, broached as a particularizing afterthought to the sequence, proves instructively recalcitrant to easy assimilation. While the tracing of singer milieu(x) falls readily within his established horizon of prowess and acquaintance, Williams encounters difficulties when musical—in this case verbal—contents must be inspected as such. Decisively, the modulation from circumstance (fieldwork) to substance (concept) marks a *de facto* caesura, bringing to the surface deep set ambivalences alongside an evident lack of tooling. A retarded working through of the schism founded, blithely, on protracted self-instruction, in which the effects of book learning flagrantly and belatedly collide with country ways, has as its occasion an extra-utilitarian component not previously stumbled upon: a contrived (patterned) order of language—the verse element of song—distinct from ‘natural’ uses. Williams’s elite canons of authorship, grounded in personal toil, determine his stance on genesis of ‘folk’ song, which in turn restricts what he can make of specificity and value. By implication, the bucolic custodians are severed from the very trope for which they are being extolled. References to the Classics, few in number but rich in resonance, provide purchase on the problem. Intended to chime with approbatory uses found in the prose works (a harmonizing with timeless paradigms), they in practice connote *discontinuity*: the procedure equates a literary gem of antiquity with a (postulated) extra-bucolic instance of creation, effectively eliding the singer in whose mouth it is found, and disturbing otherwise studiously parochial horizons.

Within this frame, the grapple with song is impeded not by an absolute *want* of formation—Williams could not have come radically toolless to the task—but rather by the *presence* of a congeries of apprenticeships with which he had adventitiously equipped himself. As these translate into a strange play of personæ, enabling and disabling, so a non-destructive variant on Jekyll and Hyde forms,⁶ a multiple self undone in venturing fearlessly upon unidentified territory. Song, as a consequence, remains, in all respects of internal (verbal) property, an element which stands awkwardly proud of the workaday surface of country life: the incorporatist thesis become pros-thesis.

⁶ The analogy may be taken too far, but also not far enough. Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), more invoked than read, offers a proto-Derridean meditation on the (de)composition of the self: ‘I hazard the guess that man will ultimately be known for a mere [sic] polity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens.’ (‘Henry Jekyll’s Full Statement of the Case’.) Isolation and elevation of one attribute of the self destroys the equilibrium of elements which judgement requires. The effect is of an intruder, of one’s own creating, who cannot be expelled; a structure which cogently epitomizes Williams’s condition. Unlike Jekyll, however, who displays a marked capacity to observe and record what he, progressively, cannot regulate, Williams appears unconscious of the jostle within and attendant effects.

§5 : 'FOLK' AS SUBJECT-OBJECT EMBRACE

Thus to trace how the acts of the collector serve to expose the quirks of the man is, on its own terms, engaging but necessarily of limited interest: why, within the specialist horizon of folk song, would we want to know about Alfred Williams? A second twist, therefore, is required to reconnect to larger perspectives. The vexed issue of *value* potentially offers a key. The anomalies of Williams's position, exacerbated by the dominantly inapposite character of his equipping, are most clearly betrayed not in his rough-hewn but unequivocal creation (genesis) thesis, but on the problem of how the worth of the corpus is to be located. At root of the impaired coherence of his account is a failure to align what, in his scheme of things, are divergent orders of value. On the one hand, the world of the singers as people—which was, at least by accident of birth, *his* world—is deemed to exhibit the cardinal virtues of simplicity and genuineness. On the other, song (verse) as such is adjudged either to be of low worth, or of a worth which owes nothing to the rustic bearers. Here the want of a properly grounded model is most flagrantly apparent, the dimension in which paradigm-cobbling most evidently fails him.

Instead, Williams locates merit as a kind of virtue by association (the nearest he comes to integrating music and life): song acquires an aura of privilege not in itself but as embosomed in a milieu adjudged *on extra-musical grounds* precious. His ethos pivots on affiliation with a passing (bucolic-agrestic) order, sited in opposition to (urban-industrial) modernity; such that his discoursings do not so much elucidate song as inscribe it within this already framed, essentially untheorized, world-view. Encroachment on a strange domain gives rise to a modulation by which the formal exigences of knowledge (ventured elucidation of a designated ensemble of problems—'object'—in the form of (con)testable reasoned constructions) cede tendentially to variants of allegory (the subject's expression of her entanglement in time and place *in terms of* a specific modality promoted as emblematic). Within this axiology, the Alfredian enterprise converges as much as it will with the wider revival. The qualifier-problem 'folk' comes less to designate a discrete sphere of musical content and activity (the 'discreteness' of which proves notably elusive to formal delimitation) than to signal a more deep-rooted antipathy towards the climate of the times. To speak of a *crisis of values* may be melodramatic, but a widespread disillusionment with a

perceived polluting of the national soul none the less indisputably infects the apostles of proto-revival, including, after his own manner, Alfred Williams. This, perfectly appropriately, opens a window onto a Housmanian land of lost content, where many hoped it would be possible to come again in song and dance. Preoccupation with *ethos* necessarily engenders an element of crusade: the enlisting of retrieved (musical) means to (broadly) moral ends, a purposive set quite foreign to its aboriginals. 'Folk' is what gives voice to larger uncertainties and anxieties peculiar to the historical moment. In that Williams's scribblings embody in singular guise an epochal mutation—'folk' as *allegorical of alienation from contemporaneity*—his intercession is at once idiosyncratic and, at an abstracted level of signification, paradoxically symbolic.

§6 A FINAL RECKONING : DEFEAT AND VICTORY?

THREE FORMS OF SERENDIPITY In this obscure tale of discovery, we may ask who—or what—is doing the 'discovering'. *Alfred Williams discovers folk song in the Upper Thames*: saving that *folk* is a projection, and that song had actually been there for some time, this is the 'natural' relation of parts. The encounter is as exhilarating as it is unsought, one more victory in the long sequence of private conquest sustained on an exceptional exercise of the will. Yet there is a sense in which *Folk song in the Upper Thames discovers Alfred Williams*. The *Umkehrung* is at once facile and, refined as *Alfred Williams discovers himself through folk song in the Upper Thames*, instructively pertinent. Perfectly embodying the position against which this reversal operates is the valediction addressed to a parochial readership in conclusion to the serial in the *Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard* on 2 September 1916, later excised *in toto*:

At the end—though not yet at the end—I am happy, and happiest when I am on the road, having found, or hoping presently to find, another old song to add to our collection, at the same time not forgetting matters of graver import—the tragedies of life, the prolonged agonies and privations of this terrific war, and the greater and more glorious future that is most certainly before us. Perhaps then our songs may be treasured with tenderness, and our labours kindly remembered; mine, who have toiled to save what is rare and valuable, yours—so many of you—who have assisted me and made my path easier, either by direct help, expressed pleasure, or sympathetic interest. I thank you all. A new world has dawned upon me since I undertook the collecting of the folk songs. If I loved the countryside before, I do so far more dearly now. A new bond of friendship, that can never be broken, has been forged between it and me. I realise this as one of the most happy efforts of my life. The Upper Thames Valley is mine till I die.

Here, rhapsodically, is the tourist in his own *pays*, embarked on an odyssey of (self)discovery in which we join him through the printings—book and its periodical precursor—which he was so eager to perpetrate: serendipity turned back upon himself.

The third—decisive—serendipity is less discovery than unwilling (self)uncovering. While pursuit renders the ‘Upper Thames’ landscape and its occupants, a backwater whose charting he had hitherto valiantly but imperfectly effected, fully *cognita*, song-singing itself remains, in all respects other than the merely circumstantial, *terra incognita*. Chiefly deficient in the Alfredian amalgam is not, as routinely observed, straightforwardly a corpus of tunes (a failure merely of fieldwork), but a whole *musical* dimension: he has no sense of, or interest in, performance *per se* (the specificities of articulation), arguably, in that it represents the inalienable locus of possession by its aboriginal bearers, the decisive modality. By airily passing over this aspect, Williams denies himself the compelling mode of connection of singers to songs, a means potentially of repairing the severance implicit in his exclusively literary conceptions of genesis and value, and thereby further compromises fulfilment of the integrationist project. If this seems a harsh verdict on an avowedly non-specialist intervention, it remains the case that any cogent discussion of the problem needs to convey some sense of the transformative effects of *singer* mediation, a defining qualitative sheen from having occurred in her mouth (not to say heart), the formally untutored as agents of a distinctive imprimatur, not mere conduit.

This defect at the core of Williams’s project assumes its place within the tangle. Where the ploughboy-chronicler boldly peddles in, the literary autodidact hesitates to tread: the apologist of rustic ways jostles with the scholar-poet who, without reflecting, apologizes, a jarring of voices expressive of his deep-set divide of allegiances. At root, the alienated countryman determines to ascribe *value* to a corpus (and practice) from which the votary of canonical letters viscerally draws back: appetite and alienation. Apprenticeships, contrived and empirically given, (re)act to create a skein of impediments *in absentia* and *in praesentia*, a unique conjunction of absence of formal equipping and baroque baggage which obtrudes, none of it properly consonant with a self-inflicted task of mediating song. The consequence, significantly, is to *accentuate* heterogeneity in the object rather than permitting a model intended to effect a cogent reconciling of constituents privileged within a locale.

With lengthening stride at each stage of his resolute advance, Alfred Williams aspires (characteristically by every strenuous means) to command of all that falls in his path: agriculture, industrial forging, the native poetic canon, Latin and Greek classics, and an attendant cacœthes scribendi. In scrambling to negotiate the treacherous precincts of redaction—inescapably a bodying forth (overt or oblique) of perspective and predilection—he risks giving unwitting voice to discordances immanent to so patently egregious a jostle of personæ (ploughboy, hammerman, autodidact, scribbler). Inaugurally, in that they designate a congress of stringent apprenticeship, grounded in variants of participation and conferring an idiosyncratic congeries of instruments, these agents prove mutually sustaining as, through an accumulating chronicle of urban and rural habitats, autodidact-author transmutes the experiences of artisan-countryman in domains extra-literary and (initially) extra-musical. An unengineered amalgam of propinquity and remove engenders, in non-scholarly guise, the participant-outsider of ethnographic requirement, linguistically endowed to confect an improvised documentary modus. Into this predominantly felicitous collaboration—unheralded, almost an afterthought—stumbles, least apprenticed of Alfredian conditions, the folk song collector. Determined to propound, but making a virtue of sequestration from the findings of others, he must draw on a body of postulate and conviction inapposite to his object such that cracks in his consciousness are involuntarily uncovered: no longer a participant in what he (re)textualizes, he finds himself, in this domain of outlandish melodico-verbal enactments, pure stranger: at once too far removed from music and too immersed in elite poetry. Within the Alfredian opus, song thus proves not incidental finishing touch but central complicating element, stumbling block indeed: unwittingly, an improvisation too far. In this passing but instructive checking of stride a rare defeat is inscribed.

Situated thus within the full horizon of life and work, Williams did not so much, in ‘discovering’ folk song (which it only became as a consequence of intervention, by him and others) in the Upper Thames, find himself as find himself found out by it. However much recovery of song in the field—resolute scouring and determined publication—entitles the gladiator to chalk up, as at the forge, one more victory, incapacity to align the parts consigns the apologist to ultimate defeat: it rather got the better of him, as it gets the better of us, an ethnic strangeness to which our ears are now largely closed. To the extent that Williams could not hear this, any more than Cecil Sharp could (Grainger, *lui*, distinctly inkles), his condition is cautionary: can we learn to ironize our deafness, to strive after knowledge through (self)exclusion?

VICTOR MALGRÉ LUI?

Effects, negative and positive, attendant upon Williams's improvised intervention are paradoxical: he makes a virtue of sequestration, but cites printed works; the prowess he (pro)claims (propinquity to his bucolic objects) yields some incidental illumination but is of little service in comprehending song as such; the expertise he avowedly lacks (music proper) permits him to countenance, in contrast to his contemporaries, a broader spectrum of musical kinds: a gathering of the felicitous fruits of ignorance. On this point of canon, particularly, he does more than merely endorse the picture painted by more renowned perpetrators of the movement intent upon valorizing traditionally-occurring song as 'folk'. *Alfred Williams furnishes the elements of adjustment to the folk song picture in the period* is a formulation preferable to a more dramatic assertion that he 'shifted the paradigm'. If his work does not, in a scholarly sense, succeed in extending knowledge, it usefully points up difficulties inherent in the object, in ways of which he was not fully conscious: stock complexities overlaid with idiosyncrasy. In entirely characteristic fashion, Williams renders his contribution to song *malgré lui*, as the *acharné* cyclist productively *pedalling in the dark*. Just as his account lacks constituents customarily present—flagrantly, melody—so *a contrario* he supplies dimensions to the object—richness of text, particularity of milieu(x), variety of repertory—wanting from the endeavours of his fellows. In that some of those aspects are not, or are not entirely, a result of deliberation, he may be adjudged to exhibit *the merits of his faults*; or, cast in less overtly judgemental terms: inaptitudes translate, fortuitously, into an augmentation of the picture. That Williams ultimately found his stride as expositor checked by the coils of the folk song nexus does not, therefore, finally diminish the scale of his documentary achievement. He establishes within his native region, as would not otherwise have been achieved, a prevalence of the singing habit and a core repertory of 'folk song' equal, at least in its verbal aspect, to that recovered with greater fanfare elsewhere in the country. The cherished partisan project is, to that extent, accomplished. In his founding ambition of bequeathing extensive testimony of musical mettle among the working people of 'his' Upper Thames, Alfred Williams prevails, admirably, and with exemplary conviction.

QED



POSTLUDIUM

*Nescia mens hominum fati sortisque futurae
et servare modum rebus sublata secundis!*
Aeneid, X [Ⓢ]

THESE MEAGRE RUMINATIONS, OF COURSE, BARELY SCRATCH THE SURFACE OF WHAT might be written of Williams's trespass into rustic song in the Upper Thames. In terms of the materials themselves, there is need for a comprehensive checking off of the song (text) collection against other contemporary manuscript collections and against the extensive deposits of broadsides. A more uncompromising, psychologically sophisticated probing into the workings of the mind and a minute examination of its projection into the song writings (*mediation* in that sense) could be essayed. Alongside a fond, partisan portait of a locality and its musical natives, he leaves an account shot through with uncertainties; an epitome of ambivalences as much as a summa of belief. Perhaps what, supremely, the song intervention highlights is his pretension to victory. The little he had cheated, with such presumptuousness, from 'time's hoard' had finally to be repaid (time is not, of course, for cheating). His wife, devoted and long suffering, shared the bed of nails with him: they lie together in the little churchyard at South Marston, progressively one more soulless suburb of post-industrial Swindon. The Alfredian trajectory is of *ascente | palier | chute*, with the season in folk song forming the *palier*. A singular, though flawed, monument endures.



Ⓢ 'The minds of men are ignorant of fate | And of their future lot, unskilled to keep | Due measure when some triumph sets them high.' (Fitzgerald)

APPENDICES

I: WILLIAMS AS EDITOR

Polishing & Bowdlerizing?



II: SIXTEEN TUNES RESTORED

Williams's words reunited with music



III: LETTER FROM KIDSON

Frank Kidson to Williams, late 1915



IV: ELIJAH ILES'S REPERTORY

45 songs in the possession of 'Gramp'



V: THE STANDARD SERIAL

Table of song instalments, 1915-16



APPENDIX I

WILLIAMS THE EDITOR

§ I: INTIMATIONS OF TAMPERING

THE FIDELITY OF ALL PENCIL-AND-NOTEBOOK TRANSCRIPTION FROM THE LIPS OF COUNTRY singers remains, in any absolute sense, untestable. The adequate notation of tunes (absent in Williams's case) is most evidently problematic, given the exotic divagations of ethnic performance from the familiar canons of tutored delivery. Textual notation, by contrast, should pose fewer problems: very little 'folk' song found in England is in dialect proper, and country people's enunciation in song is typically less murky than their—earthy and often, to the interloper, unintelligibly rich—speech. In seeking to gauge the authenticity of field notations, there is a presumption in favour of the notebook, on the grounds that a collector would not perpetrate changes during the inaugural act of transcription; from this textual zero degree, comparative evaluations can be made to later conditions of the song.

Discussion of Alfred Williams's editing practices is emblematic: commentators are determined to believe he routinely tampered with the song texts he noted from the lips of his informants, without troubling to conduct detailed textual analysis in support of this intimation. Although considerably hindered by the non-survival of all but one of Williams's field notebooks,¹ extant materials yet offer substantial scope for investigation of this aspect of mediation. The principal Second Revival commentators instinctively dwell, with due suspicion, on the subject of Williams the text editor. Other editing dimensions reduce in effect to aspects of the hoary old issue of selection: those songs Williams either missed or encountered but declined to note (necessarily an unknowable province); what he did elect to record (significant in this case because of the number of 'extra-canonical' items he recorded, consciously or otherwise); and choice and arrangement of roughly one third of his corpus for publication as *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* in 1923 (a topic hitherto wholly neglected). Yet the main editing questions remain firmly, if elusively, textual.



§ II : POLISHING & BOWDLERIZING?

A TRIO OF SAPIENT SYMPOSIASTS By the time (1969) Clissold, Purslow and Baldwin[□] turned their attentions to Alfred Williams, the *Zeitgeist* was well and truly saturated in Dr Freud's disturbing contribution to the Hermeneutics of Suspicion. Nothing more graphically, and revealingly, expresses the schism between First and Second Revivals than attitudes to bawdy: the trend inaugurated by Reeves's selection from Sharp's manuscripts² is as much to do with holding the whiphand (*sic*) over the tight-arsed schoolmarm of early revival formation as with putative propinquity to the earthy sensibility of rustic informants.† It is possible to detect a very definite pendulum at work here: in seeking to correct the picture, the children of Freud may well overstate the case in a way which says as much about a postwar concern to appear sexually emancipated as it does about attitudes characteristic of the early folk movement.

So what evidence is there, in general terms, for textual retouching by Williams?

I want to show not what they might have sung, nor what they ought to have sung, but what, in fact, they did sing. And what right have I, or any one else, to condemn the taste exhibited in, or the imperfections of the old songs, and mutilate, patch, polish, or correct them in deference to the wishes of those trained exclusively according to the modern ideas of poetry and music, and who are unable to appreciate simple measures.³

Despite this pious disavowal, Clissold concludes that Williams did indeed impose his (hard-won) educated canons of prosody on the texts: 'there is no other way of explaining the myriad transplanted verses, crossed out and re-written lines and inserted words that occur in his manuscript texts.'⁴ Purslow is also intent on believing Williams extensively doctored his texts. His comments constitute an odd mixture of

[□] See *Folk Music Journal* 1, 5 (1969) devoted to Williams's work. The remarks of Dave Harker, the other main commentator on Williams, on the matter of textual editing are essentially taken: 'Though only one of his notebooks seems to have survived, on the basis of a study of texts which appear there and in print Frank Purslow concluded that Williams had 'indulged widely' in collating, editing and expurgating texts. This is the less surprising, given the real nature of Williams's purpose in publishing the texts at all.' (*Fakesong*, p. 230) Leaving aside the butchered syntax, this observation usefully raises the issue, largely skirted over by the symposiasts, of Williams's motivation in making changes, though Harker's conclusion (that Williams's purposes were 'overwhelmingly and unmistakably literary') is disappointingly perfunctory. His account of the problem amounts to little more than an unthinking patchwork of existing judgements, in this case by Ivor Clissold and Frank Purslow, indicating that the value of this ambitious, ground-breaking sweep of the ideological underpinning of 'folk' song mediation is vitiated by the superficial quality of the midrash upon which it is dependent—and which this thesis seeks in some way to remedy. (Purslow's conclusions are not based on a 'study' of the extant notebook.) This links to the larger point that much putative scholarship simply perpetuates sedimented error.

† Purslow himself performs on *Rap-a-Tap-Tap* (Folklore Records, 1960), a gramophone record of consciously bawdy songs tendentiously subtitled *English Folk Songs Miss Pringle Never Taught Us*. In thus pillorying the primness of the folk music establishment, he affects a kind of schoolboy naughtiness which seems as dated as the studiously risqué cover.

hesitant qualification and confident assertion ungrounded in detailed analysis. He notes ‘some evidence of grammatical re-writing’ without elaborating, or exploring possible motivation for such changes. Of the Williams ‘manuscript’ he opines:

close examination of the material and comparison with other collectors’ versions of the songs reveal that it is obviously not a precise record of the actual words sung by the singers from whom the songs were noted.⁵

The qualifier ‘obviously’ makes large assumptions, as does the following parallel:

[whereas Baring-Gould] seems rarely, if ever, to have altered the sentiments of a song, nor collated several different versions, Williams apparently not only indulged widely in these practices but also expurgated anything he considered might give offence.⁶

This verdict is loosely put: Purslow offers no support for the claim that Williams ‘altered the sentiments’ of a song; while collating from more than one source is not ‘apparent’ but readily acknowledged by Williams (list of composites, p. 538 *infra*). Interestingly, Purslow’s evaluations are based more on external than on internal comparison; that is, he draws on his extensive familiarity with other collections in the period to identify apparent tinkering by Williams. This approach offers a useful indirect means of gauging what we strictly speaking have no direct access to, but supposes a model of folk song text as universal rather than parochial: words in Williams are defined as deviant in relation to a textual ‘norm’ represented by other collections. (There are evident theoretical difficulties with this, but it chimes with Williams’s own view that the songs were ‘ubiquitous’ not aggressively local.)

The symposia’s chief preoccupation, however, is the issue of bowdlerization, over which Williams himself famously and self-defeatingly goes into contortions:

Besides the legitimate pieces there were many “rough” songs in circulation. ... They dealt chiefly with immorality; not to encourage or suggest it, but to satirise it. No doubt they served the purpose for which they were intended, in some cases, at any rate, though we of our time should call them indelicate. And such, to us, they certainly are. Yet the simple, unspoiled rustic folks did not consider them out of place. They saw no harm in them. But they knew not shame, as we do. They were really very innocent compared with ourselves. We have had our eyes opened, but at what a price! I have more than once, on being told an indelicate song, had great difficulty in persuading the rustic, my informant, that I could not show the piece, and therefore I should not write it. “But why not?” I have been asked. “There was nothing wrong with that.” Neither was there, really, though the eagerly apprehensive minds of most people to-day would soon read wrong into it. The unsophisticated villagers feel

hurt at the decision and often discover considerable embarrassment, though if I were to be candid, I should say that, upon such occasions, I myself have felt something of a hypocrite. Of a truth, the shame is on our side, and lies not with the rustics. And where the songs were professedly bad, this much might be said of them—they were so honestly. That is to say, they were simple, open, and natural. They were morally immoral, if I may say so, and not cunningly suggestive and damnably hypocritical, as are some of the modern music hall pieces.⁷

This laboured, rather odd, writhing can be taken as emblematic of a distinct propensity to self-justification. In thus devoting a lengthy paragraph to ingenuous confession, Williams is for ever more taken to task over an aspect of his mediation which might otherwise have passed without comment, now endlessly hoist with the petard of his own paraded 'honesty'. His anguished plea of *autres temps, autres mœurs* is, in fairness, perfectly justified: can he reasonably be expected to have courted controversy in challenging the moral consensus of the day? But the cynical climate of the later century would not permit the passing up of such an alluring stick with which to beat him: the symposiasts are not disposed to accord the benefit of any doubt on this particular topic—for fear of seeming 'naive' themselves?

So Clissold asserts 'it was in bowdlerisation that Williams shone' and gives two instances of the great sin. From a comparison of the text of 'What can a young lassie?' as published in the *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard* serialization with that in *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Clissold establishes that the final word is altered from 'man' to 'pan'—'setting a new criterion in prudery'. His other instance is an implied rather than stated change. Noting that Williams's set of the 'Bird in the Bush' lacks the verse in which, in most versions, 'the symbolism wears thinnest', Clissold considers the possibility that this might be the outcome of self-editing by the singer, but opts for the view that 'it is much more likely that Williams thought he could salvage a good song by dropping the offending lines.'⁸ By chance, this tallies with one of Baldwin's discoveries in the field, in which a nephew of the original informant habitually sang the verse identified as lacking in the manuscript (see text and tune, p. 567 *infra*).⁹

Purslow, especially, is bothered by the expurgation issue. In the context of the *Standard* serialization he observes that 'unavoidable expurgations have taken place',¹⁰ the nearest any of the commentators comes to recognizing that edulcoration might not be a matter of choice. He also usefully observes that, paradoxically, Williams's collection includes many of the more 'outspoken' pieces, instancing:

Valentine's Day, Seventeen Come Sunday, Rolling in the Dew, The Bed-making, Catch me if you can, Down by the Riverside, Lovely Joan, Three Maids a Milking, The Indian Lass, The Stonecutter Boy ... all of which, of course, have suffered some degree of bowdlerization in his copies.¹¹

Then he furnishes two more instances of the technique of lateral grounds for suspecting a text is altered. Here Purslow takes broadside copies as the point of reference: to the second line of verse vi of 'The Poor Drunkard'—'Then straight I did call her (a thousand times o'er)'—he appends the triumphalistic comment 'The broadsides put it differently!'; and in 'Pat Maguire', a portion 'missing' between verses iv and v concerning the violation of a female character he deems to have been 'probably expurgated by Williams'.¹²

While the handful of instances picked up by the symposiasts have some importance, the effect remains one of clutching at straws to confirm an *a priori* view of Williams's mediating practices, an impression of a scramble to catch him out exemplified in Purslow's singling out of the headnote to 'As I walked out one May morning' (Wt 342). (This is discussed at pp. 311 and 447 *supra*.)



§III : TEXTUAL COMPARISONS

The attempt to evaluate Williams's integrity as editor is necessarily a comparative project. As we have seen, he goes out of his way to disavow any tampering with the song texts he recovered from oral tradition in the Upper Thames. How far can this pious pronouncement be tested against the detail of extant materials? In principle, testing divides into internal and external, though in practice the latter tends to be problematic given the nature of the beast: strictly speaking, it needs to take the form of items noted from a common informant by different collectors, an extremely rare occurrence. Leaving aside Purslow's speculative use of textual parallels discussed above, direct external comparison is limited to a small but important intersection with Sharp's gleaning at Bampton, in the north-eastern quarter of Williams's patch.

Internally, a significant proportion of Williams's texts exists notionally in four distinct forms, corresponding to the various stages of recording and publication:

original notation in the field; manuscript fair copy; printed version in the *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard* serialization; and publication in *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*. In practice, the picture is less neat. The most obvious impediment is that only one of Williams's field notebooks, part-filled, survives in the collection, containing a mere 34 items. The fate of the remainder of what must have been a substantial number of notebooks is unknown, though there are no grounds for imputing, as Purslow does, that they were deliberately destroyed by Williams.¹³ (Or rather: if Williams did destroy them, it cannot be assumed that he was consciously covering his tracks; it may simply not have occurred to him that they could be of any interest once the contents were copied out.) A further editing complication is that there are some amendments to both notebook and fair copy forms, which brings the number of textual layers potentially to six, or seven including the material in common with Sharp. In round figures, starting from a total of 750 surviving song texts, the layers are:

- A field notebook (1916) : 34 items
- A* amendments to field notebook
- B manuscript fair copies (1915-16) : c. 750 items
- B* amendments to fair copies
- C publication in *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard* [WGS] (1915-16) : 440 items
- D publication in *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* (1923) : 267 items
- E texts also noted by Cecil Sharp at Bampton : 8 items

The possibilities this layering opens up for close textual comparison at the level of the line (the 'lineal' editing dimension) will make up the core of this chapter, centring on the field notebook. Two higher editing levels can be characterized as 'structural', essentially Williams's habit of creating composite texts, and 'selective-dispositional', the choice and arrangement of texts to form *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*. (This term is not ideal: all editing involves some form or degree of selection and disposition. Williams's folk song book is, however, a particular case: he took great care in distilling out and organizing what he knew would be the enduring account of his subject.)



I : MULTIPLE VARIANTS OF WILLIAMS'S WASSAIL TEXT

As a preliminary to close examination of the contents of the field notebook, analysis of a composite wassail text which Williams incorporated into his writings on no fewer than eight occasions offers a convenient illustration of difficulties involved:

A	no date	MS (Wt 367): Harvey, Cricklade and Smart, Oaksey	8 verses
B	1913	<i>Villages of the White Horse</i> , pp. 28-9 (Basset Down) (extract)	1 verse
C	1915	<i>Round About the Upper Thames</i> (WGS, 12 June 1915)	8 verses
D	1916	'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames' (WGS, 29 January 1916)	8 verses
E	1916	'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames' (<i>The Highway</i> , July 1916)	9 verses
F	1922	<i>Round About the Upper Thames</i> , p. 221	8 verses
G	1923	<i>Folk Songs of the Upper Thames</i> , p. 116	9 verses
H	1926	'The Wiltshire Wassail' (<i>Wiltshire Gazette</i> , 2 December 1926)	8 verses
I	1927	'The Thames Head Wassail' (<i>Oxford Times</i> , 23 December 1927) (extracts)	2 verses

Of those published, the first and last (B and I) are in effect fragments, the other six instances are full texts of eight and nine verses, of which only the pair D/G bears the attribution to Harvey and Smart. The pairs C/F and D/G are versions of the same works (newspaper serial followed by book publication); while versions E/H/I are used to accompany occasional articles in periodicals. The inclusion of the set in *Round About the Upper Thames* (completed during 1914) indicates that it was one of the earliest song texts to be noted by Williams, probably largely from 'Wassail' Harvey at Cricklade (see biography pp. 118-9 *supra*). It seems reasonable to suppose this (A/C) to be the foundation text from which the others are derived.

The analysis which follows takes as its *texte de base* the manuscript fair copy (A), essentially the same as the first printed version which appeared in the 1915 newspaper serialization of *Round About the Upper Thames* (C).¹⁴ Proceeding verse by verse, each term in the foundation text which is subsequently modified is marked with an asterisk, the variants being shown in the right-hand column. Where changes are more extensive than an isolated word, the variant is given in the note following each verse. This manner of presentation strives after a certain clarity, though no method perhaps will convey entirely the complexity of the matter.

FOUNDATION TEXT (A)	VARIANTS
<hr/>	
I <i>Verse common to all texts</i> Wassail, wassail all over the town, Our toast is white, and our ale is brown, Our bowl it is made of a maple* tree, And so is good beer of the best barley.†	ACDEG 'maplin'; BHI 'sycamore'
† <i>Text B has 'And a wassailing bowl I will drink unto thee'; text I has 'Here's a wassailers' bowl, I will drink unto thee', that is, last line of verses iii, iv, v and vii in main text (with modifications).</i>	
II <i>Verse common to all texts</i> Here's to the ox, and to his long horn, May God send our maester* a good crap* o' corn! A good crap* o' corn, and another o' hay, To pass the cold wintry winds away.	E 'master'; EF 'crop' EF 'crop'
III <i>Verse common to all texts</i> Here's to the ox and to his right ear, May God send our maester* a happy New Year! A happy New Year, as we all may see; With our wassailing bowl we will drink unto thee.	E 'master'
IV <i>Verse common to all texts</i> Here's to old Jerry, and to her right eye, May God send our mistress a good Christmas pie! A good Christmas pie, as we all may see; And a wassailing bowl we will drink unto thee.	
V <i>Verse not in H</i> Here's to old Boxer, and to his long tail, I hope that our maester 'll hae ner* a 'oss vail*; Ner* a 'oss vail*, as we all may see;† And a wassailing bowl we will drink unto thee.	F 'nor', DG 'ner'; F 'fail' F 'nor', DG 'ner'; F 'fail'

† *The Highway* article normalizes dialect in lines 2 and 3: 'I hope that our maester 'll have nor a hoss fail / Nor a hoss fail ...'

VI *Verse common to all texts*

Come, pretty maidens—I suppose there are some!
 Never let us poor young men stand on the cold stone.
 The stones they are cold and our shoes they are thin,
 The fairest maid in the house, let us come in!
 Let us come in, and see how you do.

Maid

Yes, if you will, and welcome, too.†

† Appended to manuscript (A) and *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard* 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames' (D) versions is this note of a variant: 'In place of "Yes, if you will, and welcome, too!" I have heard "Merry boys all, and welcome, too!"'

VII *Verse common to all texts*

Here's to the maid and the rosemary tree,
 The ribbons are wanted, and that you can see,
 The ribbons are wanted, and that you can see—
 With our wassailing bowl we will drink unto thee.

VIII *Verse common to all texts*

Now, boteler, come fill us a bowl o' the best,
 And we hope that thy soul* in heaven may rest, EH 'soul'
 But if you do bring us a bowl o' the small
 Then down shall go boteler, bowl and all,
 Bowl and all, bowl and all,
 Then down shall go boteler, bowl and all.†

† The last two lines are deleted in *The Highway* (E), and *Round About the Upper Thames* book (F); the penultimate line only is deleted from the *Wiltshire Gazette* version (H).

IX *Verse in EGH only (and one of two cited in I)*

Now, master* and mistress, if you are within, G 'maester'
 Send down some of your merry, merry men,†
 That we may eat and drink before* the clock strikes ten, E 'ere'
 Our jolly wassail;
 When joy comes unto our jolly wassail.

† The *Highway* text (E) has: 'Send something down to your merry, merry men'.

In considering what conclusions might be drawn from this editorial tinkering, it is worth quoting the headnote Williams composed to introduce the text as it appeared in the *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard* in 1916. His remarks show the currency of the song, without specifying the nature of the textual variations mentioned:

THAMES HEAD WASSAILERS' SONG

I have named this the "Thames Head Wassailers' Song" because I have not heard of it except around the Thames source. It has been called the "Gloucestershire Wassailing Song," though it seems to me to have been quite as popular in North Wilts as in Gloucestershire, especially at Brinkworth, Somerford, Oaksey, Ashton Keynes and Cricklade. The bowl is variously said to have been made of a sycamore, maplin, and maypole-ing tree, and there are other minor differences in the current versions. Copy obtained of "Wassail" Harvey, Cricklade, and E Smart, Oaksey, Wilts.¹⁵

Though this song text is unique in Williams's collection in being so widely published, it yet serves to illustrate a number of points relating to his practice as editor. Most obviously, the variants show that his editing takes the form predominantly of local modifications to individual words rather than wholesale recasting in the manner of a Baring-Gould. In addition, the quirkiness of these amendments points up the difficulty of drawing easy conclusions as to what may have motivated Williams to make the changes he did, potentially the crux of the problem.

The quirkiest feature here appears to be the appending in three instances (E/G/H) of a further (final) verse, bringing the total to nine verses. (This supplementary verse is also quoted in the *Oxford Times* article of 1927, version I.) The most plausible explanation is that Williams discovered these additional lines during his continuing fieldwork, some time between publication of his original eight-verse text in January 1916 as part of the *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard* serial, and the appearance of the article on song collecting in *The Highway* in July 1916. The verse was then included in the versions of 1923 and 1926. Its non-inclusion in the book form of *Round About the Upper Thames* of 1922 can be accounted for by the simple fact of failure to update the 1915 text. (What prompted him, conversely, to drop a verse (v) from the *Wiltshire Gazette* set of 1926 must remain a mystery.)

The bulk of the changes, however, are lineal in nature, and centre on a limited and uncharacteristic use by Williams of dialect renderings occurring in the second and fifth verses of the foundation text. On inspection, these tinkering seem quirky

to the point of arbitrariness. Thus, for example, between newspaper and book texts of *Round About the Upper Thames*, verse v retains *maester*, *hae* and *'oss* but replaces *ner* (*sic*—should be *n'er*?) rather oddly with *nor*, and normalizes the vernacular *vail* to *fail*. The nearest it is perhaps possible to get to an explanation of this revision lies in the circumstances of publication. Where the *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard* serial of 1915 was aimed at a purely parochial readership, the volume later issued by Duckworth would clearly reach a wider audience: this sociological shift may have prompted Williams to tone down his vernacular renderings. This consideration may come more evidently into play in the text exhibiting the most extensive polishing, that published in *The Highway*, the organ of the Workers' Educational Association. Williams had extensive contacts with the Swindon branch of the WEA, and would have been conscious of the composition of the magazine's readership. He reduces all dialect forms in the wassail text (with the token exception in verse v of *'oss* converted to *hoss* rather than *horse*), and introduces in ix the literary *'ere* for *before*, as well as giving a quite different sense to line 2.

2 : THE FIELD NOTEBOOK

To add to the aura of mystery surrounding Williams's fieldwork, we are left contemplating a single part-filled notebook from two years of intensive scouring in the villages of the Upper Thames. The table *infra* shows: notebook page number; title of text; place of collecting; reference number in the Bathe-Clissold master index; instalment number in the *Standard* serialization; page number in the book *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*; and whether the item is marked by Williams as having been copied out. Highlighted in bold are the mere seven items surviving in all four textual stages.

The notebook presents several anomalies, starting on the first page, which states: 'Begun May 19th 1916. Went to Bampton, Aston, Stanton Harcourt, Hardwick, Kingston Bagpuze [*sic*], Southmoor.' This list of villages mainly in west Oxfordshire appears to furnish a rare glimpse of Williams's collecting itinerary—except that only the first place in the list actually occurs in the notebook. The bulk of the texts were noted in villages in south Gloucestershire, punctuated with forays into west Oxfordshire and north Wiltshire. Then there is the question of why the book should remain part-filled. The obvious explanation—that it was the last one he used—collapses in

the face of evidence that he continued to collect right through the summer of 1916. A further oddity is that nearly half of the texts contained in the notebook were never copied by Williams into fair manuscript; this means the field notation is the only extant form, further reducing the scope for textual comparison to around 18 items.

The pocket-sized book measures 9.5 x 16 cms, with ruled pages, leather-bound. The first 86 pages are numbered by hand, presumably by Williams, this being the portion occupied with song notations; thereafter the pages are unused. Notionally, there are some 35 texts of varying length, scribbled down in a large sprawling hand with minimal use of abbreviations despite some evidence that Williams had earlier learnt shorthand as an autodidact's tool.¹⁶ Those Williams transcribed into fair manuscript are crossed through in the notebook as 'copied', three of which were never published ('Paul Jones', 'The Agricultural Show' and 'I'm Yorkshire though in London'). The 16 texts not copied out were converted into typescript and incorporated into the collection at the time of cataloguing in the 1960s. The inclusion of seven texts in the *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard* serialization of 1915-16 gives some clue to dating, the earliest being instalment xxxv (1 July 1916). Ten are original notations of texts later included in *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*.

In terms of the four (six) textual layers identified above (p. 510), the notebook texts enable three incremental categories of comparison: notebook-manuscript (AB); notebook-manuscript-serial (ABC); notebook-manuscript-serial-book (ABCD). (The 16 texts not copied by Williams from the notebook by definition offer no scope for comparison.) The first of these is confined to two texts, 'Paul Jones' and 'I'm Yorkshire though in London' (copied out into manuscript fair copy but never published). The two main groups for comparative analysis are:

ABCD : 7 TEXTS SURVIVING IN ALL FOUR FORMS

When Moggy by the Fire sat	notebook p. 2
The Downhill of Life	notebook pp. 40/57
Here's away to the Downs	notebook p. 47
John Peel	notebook pp. 63/67
Now so merry we have met	notebook p. 65
Froggy would a-woeing go	notebook p. 75
Good Brown Ale and Tobacco	notebook p. 81

ALFRED WILLIAMS'S FIELD NOTEBOOK : TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE	TITLE	PLACE	REF NO	WGS	FSUT	COPIED
1	'Ye Zepthers [sic] Gay'	—	Mi 752	—	—	X
2	'My own dear home' [extra verse]	Bampton	[Ox 212]	[XIII]	[240]	X
2	'When Moggy by the fire sat'	Bampton	Ox 223	XXXV	302	√
3	'Little Dickie Milburn'	?Alvescot	Ox 174	—	293	X
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7	'Paul Jones'*	Black Bourton	Ox 231	—	—	√
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12	'Lord Thomas and Fair Eleanor'	—	Mi 623	—	—	X
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33	'The Ale and Stout they'll give away'	—	Mi 525	—	—	?
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40	'The Downhill of Life'	Poulton	GI 122	XXXVIII	249	√
42	'The Cot where I was born'	Poulton	GI 121	—	—	X
43	'The Agricultural Show'	—	Mi 523	—	—	√
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44	'God Sent for us the Sunday'	Poulton	GI 124	XXXVIII	—	√
47	'Here's away to the Downs'	Ampney Crucis	GI 39	XXXIX	65	√
53	'There was a Little Bird'	—	Mi 721	—	—	X
54	'Betsy of the Moor'	Ampney Crucis	GI 40	XLI	—	√
57	'The Downhill of Life'	Kempsford	GI 96	—	—	√
58	'I'm Yorkshire though in London'	Kempsford	GI 95	—	—	X
63/7	'John Peel'	M Hampton	GI 118	XL	56	√
65	'Now so merry we have met'	M Hampton	GI 119	XLI	49	√
68	'When we were boys together'	—	Mi 742	—	—	X
71	'The Blackbird and the Thrush'	—	Mi 534	—	—	X
75	'Froggy would a-woeing go'	Ashton Keynes	Wt 310	XLII	133	√
79	'The First I'm determined to be'	—	Mi 572	—	—	X
81	'Good brown ale and tobacco'	Minety	Wt 426	XLIII	296	√
82	'Sweet'earting Pier'	—	Mi 715	—	—	X
86	'While the raging seas did roar'	Bampton	Ox 224	—	84	X

ABC : 7 TEXTS SURVIVING IN THREE FORMS

When I was a maid O then	notebook p. 5
The Gloucestershire Volunteers	notebook p. 9
The Lover's Ghost	notebook p. 13
Tetbury Mop	notebook p. 30
Billy and Nancy	notebook p. 34
God sent for us the Sunday	notebook p. 44
Betsy of the Moor	notebook p. 54

Discussion in this chapter will bear on the primary, self-delimiting importance of the notebook materials. Other combinatorial possibilities are either of restricted interest, as in the case of BD, or too extensive to look at here, as with BC (some 400 items, though the indications are that Williams made relatively few changes between these stages). The many changes to the manuscript versions (B-B*), picked up by previous commentators, offer less scope for analysis than would appear: Williams's erasures tend to be too rigorous to allow the original form of words to be established.

The logical combinations set out above are purely abstract, with no connection specified to the process of editing and its motivation. *Grosso modo*, the four textual conditions can be articulated in the following ways to foreground relative significance: A : BCD | AB : CD | ABC : D. The first and third of these divisions represent degrees of *recol*: between notation in the field and later reflection at leisure; and, chronologically, between the period of collecting and initial editing (1914-16), and a return to the subject after seven and eight years to prepare the book version of *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*. The second division is formal: between texts in Williams's own hand, and as converted into print. Thus the model represents a means of gauging relative changes between stages (when and potentially why), as opposed to absolute (quantitative) changes: is there a higher incidence of changes between, for example, notebook and manuscript forms than between manuscript and printed copy?

Starting from notebook text (A), each changed word is marked by an asterisk, with corresponding variants on the right. (All punctuation has been omitted.)



§ NOTEBOOK TEXTS SURVIVING IN ALL FOUR FORMS (ABCD)

'WHEN MOGGY BY THE FIRE SAT'

NB P. 2 | MS OX 223 | WGS XXXV (1 JULY 1916) | FSUT P. 302

Two verses of four lines each plus nonsense chorus. The text is unattributed in the notebook but is ascribed to Charles Tanner of Bampton, Oxon, in the manuscript. From the note 'begun May 19th 1916' the text was presumably collected around that time.

	NOTEBOOK TEXT	VARIANTS
I	When Moggy by the fire sat A-spinning of her linsey yarn When Jockey came along to love And sit* himself down to warm	BCD 'sat'
CH	With my loo ling ling* tiddle oo Folly doddy doddy doddy Doddy doddy doddy O	CD <i>not copied out</i>
II	And if I should gang* along with you O then my mammy she would scorn I must stay at home today All for to spin my linsey yarn	BCD 'go'

'THE DOWN HILL OF LIFE'

NB PP. 40-41, 57 | MS GL 122/GL 96 | WGS XXXVIII (22 JULY 1916) | FSUT P. 249

Three/four verses of ten lines each, in effect becoming a composite in Folk Songs of the Upper Thames. Three verses noted from George Herbert at Poulton, Glos (notebook pp. 40-41) form the MS Gl 122 and the newspaper text. (An additional textual layer occurs here in the form of the informant also writing out the song in his own hand.) One supplementary verse from 'Mr' Couling (notebook p. 57—could be either George or Lot) of Kempsford, Glos, forming the discrete MS Gl 96, is used as verse iii in the book text.

- I In* the down hill of life when I find I'm declining BCD 'On'
 May my fate no less fortunate be
 Than a snug elbow chair can afford for reclining
 And a cot that o'erlooks the wide sea
 With an ambling fat pony to pace o'er the lawn
 While I carol away idle sorrow
 And blithe as the lark that each day hails the dawn
 Look forward in hopes of tomorrow
 Tomorrow tomorrow
 Look forward in hopes of tomorrow
- This verse not in the notebook but from a text submitted by the informant*
- II From the bleak northern blast may my cot be completely
 Secured by a neighbouring hill
 But at night may repose steal on me more sweetly
 By the sound of a murmuring rill
 And while peace and plenty I find at my board
 With a heart free from sickness and sorrow
 With my friends will I share what today may afford
 And let them spread the table tomorrow
 Tomorrow tomorrow
 And let them spread the table tomorrow
- NB P. 57, MS GL 96, PUBLISHED IN *FOLK SONGS OF THE UPPER THAMES ONLY***
- III I've* a porch at my door both for shelter or* shade too D 'With'; B 'and'
 Or sunshine or rain may prevail
 I've* a small plot of ground for the use of my spade too* D *deleted*; BD *inserted*
 And a barn for the use of my flail
 A cow for my dairy a dog for my game
 A purse when a friend wants to borrow
 I'll not envy no nabob his riches or fame
 Or what honours may wait* him tomorrow D 'await'
 Tomorrow tomorrow
 Or what honours may wait him tomorrow
- IV But when I at last must throw off this frail covering
 Which I've worn for 3 score years and 10

On the brink of the grave I will cease to keep hovering
 And my thread wish to spin o'er again
 But my face in a glass I'll serenely survey
 And with a smile count each wrinkle & furrow
 And this old worn out stuff which is threadbare today
 May become everlasting tomorrow
 Tomorrow tomorrow
 May become everlasting tomorrow

'HERE'S AWAY TO THE DOWNS'

NB PP. 47-52 | MS GL 39 | WGS XXXIX (29 JULY 1916) | FSUT P. 65

Six verses of eight lines each. Noted from George Ash at Ampney Crucis, Glos.

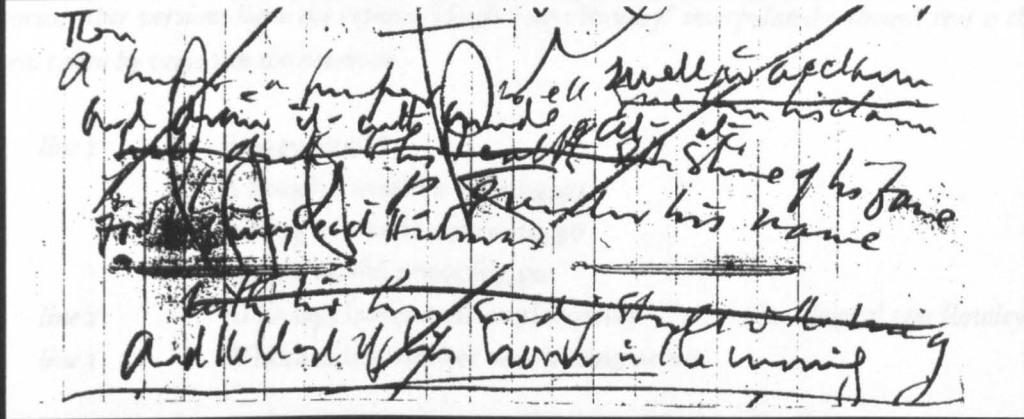
- I Now my brave boys here's away to the downs
 [The] huntsman says come, follow with* the hounds BCD *not copied out*
 He's right well pleased with his last night's nap
 Shaking his ears with a trite in his lap
 This is the sport we all* do excel D *'in which we do'*
 We never fear the hares nor the foxes
- CH Fol the rol etc B *crossed through*
 the riddle rol the day (*repeated*) CD *not copied out*
Notebook indicates that this chorus was attached to each verse, replaced by 'Fol the rol' in CD
- II See Diana with her comely face
 Her* bow & her* quiver & her unpinned dress BCD *neither copied out*
 She's up to the chase we very well do know
 To* exceed young cupid slow BCD *'For to'*
 Each lovely tune* playing the fool BCD *'swain'*
 Courting his lass with sighs and tears
 We hunt all the day, at night sport & play
 We'll have them all for many a long hour
 Fol the rol.
- III See how comely she [*?helped*] them along A *overwritten with 'leads'*
 The ploughman excels them all with his song
 Han dan Taddler see* how he* wings* A *'hear'*, BCD *'they wing'*

- Three little beauties winding []* a ring
 Canter away hey dovvy hey*
 That's good again Bring her in with a ralley*
 Round all* up* she's gone to the pit
 Yonder she runs and she's quite out of hearing Fol etc
- CD *insert 'in'*
 BCD *'dey'*
 BCD *'rally'*
 BCD *'up all'*
- IV Hark unto Flora she that is good
 Rather he hunts them into the wood
 Drunk and he doubled it
 [illegible] him a double ditch see where he's gone
 Yonder he scrapes it over the lawn
 Gone gone away Gone gone away
 That's good again look to Rackwood & Cornel
 Call back the hounds for they're gaining ground
 What the devil makes the footmen to hollow*
 Fol the rol
- BCD *add 'see where he's gone'*
 BCD *line suppressed*
 BCD *corrected to 'holloa'*
- v Don't hold her so hard or drive her so fast
 See the old lady we shall work her at last
 She's almost spent you may see that
 Call back your hounds she's sure for to quat
 Make good your hold quick be yr. speed
 Ride from your horses to keep her from tearing
 She's up ha ha! She's up ha ha!
 Faith & truth there's no pleasure in it
 Hello hello hello Hello hello hello
 Yonder she runs and is dead in a minute
 Fol etc
- A *overwritten with 'Alight'*
 BCD *'hallo!'*
- VI Now if that† a gunner shoots []* a hare
 And* if he don't kill him he's sure for to swear
 If it wasn't for the profit more than the fun
 There'd never be so many hares die with the gun
 To catch them by night is all our delight
 Whip cord & wire is all our desire
 We'll drink about until the glass is out
 We'll kiss the pretty girls boys [illegible]
 Fol the rol
- BCD *insert 'at'*
 BCD *not copied out*
 A *overwritten with
 ?'at our leisure'*

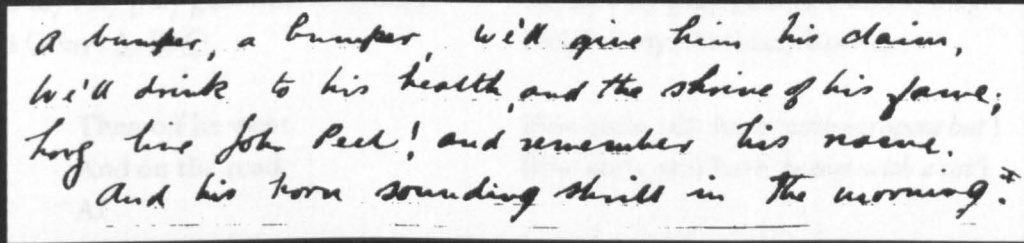
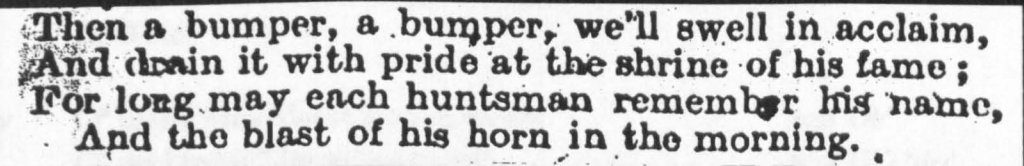
† *'that' appears to be a post hoc insertion in the notebook*

FIGURE A : THE FINAL VERSE OF 'JOHN PEEL' IN ITS THREE TEXTUAL VARIANTS

Text A: field notebook p. 64



Text B: manuscript fair copy (Gl 118)

Text CD: Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard, 5 August 1916
and Folk Songs of the Upper Thames, p. 56

'NOW SO MERRY WE HAVE MET'

NB PP. 65-66 | MS GL 119 | WGS XLI (12 AUGUST 1916) | FSUT P. 49

Five verses of two lines (plus repeats). Attributed to Charles Acot (sic) as above. Verses i - iv are unchanged between notebook and all other forms. The sole substantive change occurs in verse v.

v But unto my coffin some favourite song put on
 becomes in BCD 'But on to my coffin some inscription put on'.

'A FROG HE WOULD A-WOOING GO'

NB PP. 75-79 | MS WT 310 | WGS XLII (19 AUGUST 1916) | FSUT P. 133

Eleven verses plus a two-line chorus. Where the notebook seems to indicate couplets followed by chorus, other versions have the refrain 'Heigho! says Rowley!' interpolated—though this is the form taken by verse 1 in the notebook.

- I line 1 A Froggy would
 B A Frog he would a-wooing go
 C A Frog he would a-wooing go
 D Froggy would a-wooing go
 line 2 Ai O says [*caret* Anthony] Rowley BCD '*Heigho! says Rowley!*'
 line 3 Whether his mother was willing or no

CHORUS (A)

To my roly poly gammon & spinage
 Ai O says A. R. O

BCD

To my roly-poly, gammon and spinage,
 Heigho! says Anthony Rowley.

- II Then off he went [line ends: BCD have '*with his opera hat*']
 And on the road [line ends: BCD have '*he met with a rat*']
 Ai
- III And when they came to Miss Mouse's hole
 They gave a loud knock & gave a loud call
 Ai O etc
- IV O* please Miss Mouse are you within BCD '*Ob*'
 O* yes kind sir* Im sitting to spin BCD '*Ob*'; '*sirs*'
 Ai O etc
- v O* please Miss Mouse will you draw us some beer BCD '*Ob*'
 That we may sit down & have good cheer
 Ai O etc
- VI []* Please Miss Mouse []* sing us a song BCD *insert* '*Ob*'; '*will you*'
 One that is pretty but not very long
 Ai O etc gammon & spinage
- VII []* Just as they were merry making* BCD *insert* '*Now*'; '*a-merrymaking*'
 The cat & the kittens came tumbling in
 Ai O etc

- VIII The cat he seized the rat by the crown
The kitten* he* tumbled the little mouse down BCD 'kittens they'
Ai O etc
- IX This put the frog in a terrible fright
[]* He picked up his hat & wished them gd night BCD insert 'So'
Ai O etc
- X []* Just as the* frog* was crossing the brook BCD insert 'But'; 'be'
A lily-white duck came* and gobbled him up BCD 'ran'
Ai O etc
- XI So there is* an end to* 1 2 & 3 BCD 'was'; 'of'
The rat & the frog & the little mousee* CD 'mousie'
Ai O.

'GOOD BROWN ALE AND TOBACCO'

NB PP. 80-81 | MS WT 426 | WGS XLIII (26 AUGUST 1916) | FSUT P. 296

Two verses each of six lines plus chorus of four (six with repeats) lines. Noted from Mrs E Clark, Minety, Wiltshire.

Verse i remains unchanged throughout

- CH Fol the rol the riddle rol D nonsense lines not used
day
The riddle rol the ~~riddle~~
Ale ale good brown ale
Good brown ale & tobacco

The first two lines are marked 'repeat' to make up the six lines. The apparent overwriting of 'riddle' with 'day' is not adopted in any of the other versions.

- II Now this coat that I've got on
It's ragged & it's torn
And my boots they've been out in all weathers
And cursed are the soles
For they're all* full of holes BCD 'For they are full ...'
And so are the upper leathers

The principal interest here concerns changes made to the chorus, in several stages: notably, Folk Songs of the Upper Thames omits the first two (nonsense) lines.

§ NOTEBOOK TEXTS SURVIVING IN THREE FORMS (ABC)

'WHEN I WAS A MAID, O THEN'

NB PP. 5-6 | MS OX 286 | WGS XXXV (1 JULY 1916)

Four verses each of five lines. Noted from Ellen Trinder of Northmoor, Oxon. One change only.

	NOTEBOOK TEXT	VARIANTS
I	When I was a maid O then O then When I was a maid O then As many bt.* stars as there is* in the sky As many young fellows I killed with my eye Wasn't I such a beauty then	['bright'] c 'are'

'THE GLOUCESTER VOLUNTEERS'

NB PP. 9-11 | MS GL 91 | WGS XXXVI (8 JULY 1916)

Four verses of four lines. Unattributed in notebook. (Noted from W Sims of Fairford, Glos.) In notebook verse ii, original lines 3 and 4 are dropped, and replaced by two floating lines from the next page; verses ii and iii in A are then transposed in BC; finally, two floating lines at the end of the notation are combined with two lines originally marked 'chorus' (p. 9) to make up verse iv.

- I Come all you brisk young fellows that love yr native land
In honour of yr. country's cause come join with heart & hand
In forming the militia as plainly does appear
No county can I'm sure surpass the Glos. Vol.

(CHORUS) So fill yr glasses to the brim & drown all care & fear
And drink a health to every man in the G. V.

This couplet is married with last two lines in the notebook to form a concluding verse.

- II You young & blooming females ⁱⁿ ~~the~~ number ^{may} ~~can~~ be seen
A viewing the M. exercising for the Queen
We trust they may go home quite safe & here after ~~to shed~~ no tears
And very likely they ?only face some little [*illegible*]

Last two lines deleted; first two married with couplet infra to form verse iii in BC

The marching was most X* as tho they'd marched for years {'excellent'}
 They knocked the brown beer about rt. well ?to* the G. V. *deleted*

This couplet floating in notebook—combines with above to form verse iii

III We'll* make no doubt shd honour call they'll come both bold & free
 And gladly [too]* they may protect their queen & country
 Should anyone insult the land I'll tell you without fear
 They'll be the 1st to fight their way, the G. V.

* 'We'll' reduced to 'We'; 'too' added in BC: this becomes verse ii in BC

IV So / For* to conclude & make an end, may we live long to see
 Our native land protected by the friends of liberty

* 'So' and 'For' are overwritten in the notebook without deletion. 'For' becomes 'now' in BC. This is married to the couplet supra marked 'Chorus' to form iv.

'THE LOVER'S GHOST'

NB PP. 13-18 | MS GL 90 | WGS XXXVI (8 JULY 1916)

Ten verses each of four lines, noted from Richard May of Fairford, Glos. (Child 272)

No changes to verses i and ii

III Soon as her f. came this to hear {'father'}
 He separated her from her dear
 For 4 score miles this fair maid was sent
 To her uncle's house* for her discontent BC 'home'

IV Nine days after this young man died
 And his ghost appeared at her bedside
 Arise* Rise my love & come with me BC 'Arise' excised
 And break these chains & set me free

No changes to verse v

VI She had a handkerchief of the Holland kind
 And around his head she did it* bind ABC 'him'

She kissed his pale lips & thus did say—
My dearest dear you're as cold as clay

Verses vii and viii exhibit some substantial remaking, as follows:

A : a ten-line sequence as recorded in the notebook, pp. 16-17:

- 1 He drove her straightway up to the hall
2 Twas there they rapped & loudly call
3 drove up down[?]
4 And saw her father stand on the floor
5 & 6 circled and linked to 9 and 10, to form verse viii as edited
5 He rung his hands & tore his hair
6 Much like a man in deep despair
7 Father dear did you send for me
8 By such a messenger kind sir? said she
Williams's note: '2 odd lines'
9 He tore his hair all off his head
10 ~~Why~~ Crying dtr dear the y. man is dead

These become, in versions BC:

- VII 1 He drove her up to her father's door,
4 And saw her father standing on the floor,
7 "O father dear, did you send for me
8 By such a messenger, kind sir?" said she.
- VIII 5 He wrung his hands and tore his hair,
6 Much like a man in deep despair;
9 He tore his hair all from his head,
10 Crying—"Daughter dear, the young man is dead."

Thus, in terms of the sequence as noted (leaving aside the tidying of details): in the first verse, 2 and 3 are suppressed; 4 moves up; 7 and 8 from second verse become the last two of the first verse; and the odd two (9 and 10) become last two of second verse.

- IX Early next morning* this maid arose BC 'morn'
 & straightway to the churchyard goes
 She rose the corpse that was nine days dead
 And found her handkerchief *bound* tied round his head.
- X O parents parents a warning take
 Don't chide your children, for heaven's sake
[a line of ditto marks in notebook]
 Or you'll repent when it is too late

'TETBURY MOP'

NB PP. 30-33 | MS GL 123 | WGS XXXVII (15 JULY 1916)

Seven verses each of four lines. Notebook uses the title: 'Michaelmas Song'. Noted from Joseph Iles (of Poulton, Glos). There is some complexity here: the first two lines of verse iv vary, the set in A differing from that in BC; and verse v occurs in C only. (In both cases, there is no indication of provenance for the text not recorded in the notebook.)

- I Come []* y. men & maidens come listen to me BC insert 'you', [young]
 I'll tell you a sight you never did see
 O* helter skelter off you trot BC *Ob*
 On the road to Tetbury (or Ciceter) Mob* BC *Mop*

No changes to verses ii and iii

This verse in notebook only

- IV Bad ones you know it is true
 But good ones you can find but few
 There's pigs upon crutches without any legs
 And 2 or 3 turkeys keep laying of eggs

This verse in BC only

- IV Now, when you come into the Mop,
 There's fine fat sheep in every spot;
 There's pigs upon crutches, without any legs,
 And two or three turkeys keep laying of eggs.

This verse in C only

- v There are soldiers and sailors, and boys from the plough,
A four-headed ox, and a two-headed cow;
I'll tell you the truth, and I don't care a pin,
There's a lot of old women get drunk with the gin.

No changes to verse vi

- vii There's a lot of old women get up for a spree
They all get as lushy as lushy could be
They met an old smudge & made him so drunk
That he went for to light his short pipe at the pump
line 1: BC has *The dames of the town get up for a spree*

'BILLY AND NANCY'

NB PP. 34-36 | MS GL 79 | WGS XXXIX (5 AUGUST 1916)

Ten verses each of four lines. Noted from Mrs Mary Wall of Drifffield, Glos.

No changes to verses i - v

- vi You went & courted Nancy
The girl with []* rolling eyes BC 'the'
[]* she alone you will* fancy, BC insert 'It's'; 'will' not copied out
How can you this deny
- vii I hear to what you say my love
I own & swear it's* true BC 'tis'
And as for mistress Nancy
She is no friend to you

No further changes in verses viii - x

- II The* watch fair / field flowers together BC 'To'; 'fair' adopted
 & the fruits among the heather
 The pretty little lambkins
 How they did sport & play
 Bright shining came Aurora
 Acc. by Flora [Accompanied]
 & / On the bright rays of Phoebus BC 'and' adopted
 Began to feed the day

This verse last in notebook but marked as '3'

- III High hills & lofty mountains
 Divided by small fountains
 Which run to join the ocean
 All round* that briny shore BC 'on'
 Thro grief & sad vexation [Through]
 I lost all consolation
 My rule & habitation
 Lies down this wintry moor

A line of dots at this point in BC seems to indicate a gap

- IV My parents they are aged
 & they* I will not leave BC 'them'
 For early they're repining
 & daily are declining
 And hourly they are bowing
 & bending to the grave

- V As nature here don't bind me
Since you are pleased to mind me BC *this line not in A*
 Most dutiful don't* find me BC 'you'll'
 Until they* [illegible] no more BC 'life is'
 If you wait till they expire
 I will grant what you desire
 What more can you require
 Of sweet Betsy of the Moor

This verse is marked 'a fragment' in notebook

§ ONE NOTEBOOK TEXT SURVIVING IN COMBINATION ABD

'WHILE THE RAGING SEAS DID ROAR'

NB PP. 86 | MS OX 224 | FSUT P. 84

The full text (BD) comprises five verses each of four lines, plus chorus. The notebook contains verse ii and chorus (largely) complete, plus the first two lines of verse iii.

II Then up speaks a man of our galt. ship {gallant}
 And a well speaking man was he
 I []* married a wife there* in fair L town BD insert 've'; 'there' deleted [London]
 And this night she a widow will be

CH While the stormy winds do blow
 And the raging seas do roar
 Whilst we poor sailors went up into the top
 And the land men a lying down below
 BD *line 1 becomes 'While the raging seas did roar'*
 line 2 becomes 'And the stormy winds did blow'
 end becomes 'And the land-men a-lying down below, below, below,
 And the land-men a-lying down below.'
 That is, the first two lines are transposed and put into the past.

III Then up speaks the boy of our galt. ship {gallant}
 And a well* speaking* boy was he BD 'fair-speaking'

The notebook text ends here. Two small changes occur on the manuscript copy (B-B): in verse iv, line 1 'weep' is replaced with 'look', in line 2 the reverse.*



Presentation of the notebook texts in this way offers a glimpse of the extent and character of changes Williams made in the course of recording and editing. Exhaustive discussion of these, and other, changes would require a study in its own right, but one or two instances are revealing. Alterations range from tidying up of small details to extensive reshufflings of lines and verses. Examples of texts undergoing minimal, unimportant editing are 'When I was a maid, O then' and 'Billy and Nancy'. Some small changes, however, can be seen as more significant. Of the three alterations to 'When Moggy by the fire sat': the first is designed to respect the sequence of tenses (*sat* for *sit*); the second removes a syllable (*ling*) in the chorus, thus creating a different rhythmic feel; and the third normalizes a hint of Scots (*go* for *gang*). These minor differences are emblematic of Williams's concerns: the grammatical, the metrical (he is unconstrained by the fit of a text against a tune), and the normative (grapholect).

The lengthy, quasi-poetic text 'Here's away to the downs' furnishes further exemplification of these concerns. In the first verse, the line 'This is the sport we all do excel' becomes 'in which we do excel' in *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*. Verse II has:

See Diana with her comely face
Her* bow & her* quiver & her unpinned dress
She's up to the chase, we very well do know
To* exceed young cupid slow
Each lovely tune* playing the fool

Metrical shifts result from dropping two of three 'hers', and adding a syllable with 'For to' at the start of line four; the poeticism 'swain' reduces the incongruity of 'tune'. Finally, an instance of recasting to impose sense occurs in verse IV, where '[*illegible*] him a double ditch' is overwritten in the notebook with 'Drunk, and he doubled it'. The hyperbolic case of this kind of primary revision remains the palimpsestic first and last verses of 'John Peel', set out above. Above the level of lineal changes of this type, there is some remaking of verses by shunting the sequence of lines, instances being 'The Gloucester Volunteers' and verses VII and VIII of 'The Lover's Ghost'. This order of editing is evidently motivated by reference to Williams's canons of (narrative) coherence. To lines and verses supplementary to the notebook texts, such as verse V of 'Tetbury Mop' and 'Betsy of the Moor' verse V line 2, it is impossible to ascribe confident provenance, given that no further clue as to Williams's methods survives, although in the latter case, the inserted line '*Since you are pleased to mind me*' (p. 533 *supra*) has the feel of a composition.

3 : TEXTS NOTED BY BOTH SHARP AND WILLIAMS

A rare—possibly unique—intersection of fieldwork by Cecil Sharp and Williams at Bampton in roughly the same period yields seven texts for comparison. (Sharp's noting of 'Lord Bateman' and 'The Whale Fishers', also collected by Williams, is confined to tune and first verse.) None of these texts is in the Williams notebook.

WILLIAMS'S TITLES	B (MSS)	C (WGS)	D (FSUT)	E (SHARP MSS)
TEXTS NOTED FROM SHADRACH HAYDON				
'The Draggel-tail Gipsies'	Ox 195	VI [6 xi 15]	p. 120	FW2103-04
'On Compton Downs'	Ox 197	XIII [8 i 16]	—	FW2139-40
TEXTS NOTED FROM CHARLES TANNER				
'At Seventeen Years I was young'	Ox 204	XVI [29 i 16]	—	FW2165
'The Chain of Gold'	Ox 206	XXII [11 iii 16]	—	FW2152
'The Maltman & the Highwayman'	Ox 211	XVII [5 ii 16]	p. 250	FW2148-49
'Poor Old Horse'	Ox 217	XXIII [18 iii 16]	p. 155	FW2146-47
'The Shepherd on the Mountain'	Ox 220	XVI [29 i 16]	—	FW2151
COMPOSITE TEXT NOTED FROM TANNER & HAYDON				
'The Copy (<i>sic</i>) Boy'	Ox 207	XIV [15 i 1916]	—	FW2106 (Haydon)

Surprisingly, scrutiny shows very few lines to be identical in Sharp and Williams. Among the minor differences are instances of more substantial divergence. If Sharp's notations are taken to be largely accurate (and they seem to preserve the singer's vernacularisms), then either the singer perpetrated singular variations or Williams's versions are the outcome of rewriting. An example of extensive reworking occurs in verse III of 'At Seventeen years I was young' (Williams (B) in *italic*):

Her cheeks were like the cherries
Her cheeks were like the roses so red,
 Growing on yonder tree,
That grew on yonder high tree;* [** c has 'grow'*]
 Her lips were like unto the violets so blue
Her lips were like unto cherries sweet —
 What a charming sweet creature was she.
What a charming creature was she!

The Sharp-Williams parallel texts are set out in full, along with the tunes from Sharp, in Appendix II. Lines emboldened indicate divergences.

CONCLUDING

TEXTUAL EXAMPLES SET OUT AT LENGTH IN THIS APPENDIX DEMONSTRATE THAT WILLIAMS routinely tampered with the words of the songs he recovered, although generally in minor ways. The elusive issue is why he was actuated to do so. Despite the pretensions of many practitioners, there is nothing neutral or 'objective' about editing: to edit is to choose, which means inescapably to judge, if only tacitly. Although for the most part Williams's editorial motivation must remain a matter of speculation, some clues occur in the headnotes he appended to each published text. In circling round the question of value, Williams betrays his concern with 'completion' and 'coherence', in a way which is sometimes instructively at odds with the perceptions of the informant (see section from p. 448 *supra*, and headnote comments cited on p. 475). These are statements which suggest he projected foreign canons onto the material.

COMPOSITES AND SELECTION

Briefly, it is worth sketching out further dimensions of the editing question. Williams commonly assembled composite texts, that is, presented as discrete but conflated from two or more sources, which he acknowledges as such without—alas—specifying the process of conflation. In distinction, he also frequently noted multiple versions of the same song. Thus, for example, the collection contains two versions of 'John Barleycorn' but one composite 'Lord Bateman' from two sources (Harvey and Haydon). This is a significant editorial decision the rationale for which remains, in the absence of documentation, opaque. A full list of composite texts in the Williams Collection is given on the next page. A further editorial dimension is represented by Williams's preparation in 1923 of *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, a matter over which he is known to have taken considerable care. Selection for inclusion of approximately one third of his collected texts cannot have been performed at random; nor, evidently, was the disposition of texts through the book. Any account of the effect he was seeking to achieve in this must proceed by inference, a task for further study.

Importantly, all this endeavour is judgemental: it is as much to do with assumptions and values Williams brings to the subject as with properties which inhere in it.



**COMPOSITE TEXTS IN THE
WILLIAMS COLLECTION**

*36 song texts collated from
more than one source*

**THE PRETTY PLOUGHING BOY
(BK 5)**

Jonas Wheeler, Buscot
Robert Carpenter, Cerney Field

THE ONE O (BK 20)

William Jefferies, Longcot
William Wise, Alvescot

WILL THE WEAVER (BK 27)

Alfred Smith, Watchfield
Charles Messenger,
Cerney Wick

ISLE OF BEAUTY (GL 62)

Charles Messenger,
Cerney Wick
J Minchin, Eynsham

ISLE OF WIGHT, THE (GL 133)

Mrs S Timbrell, Quenington
James Barnes, Quenington

**AN APE, LION, FOX AND ASS
(OX 180)**

David Ball, Aston
Henry Lockett, Aston
(‘Bishopstone’)

THE COPY (SIC) BOY (OX 207)

Charles Tanner, Bampton
Shadrach Haydon, Bampton

THE PRICKLY BRIER (OX 218)

Charles Tanner, Bampton
Tim Fox, Bampton
* *Tanner suppressed in book*

**TWO BABES IN THE WOOD
(OX 229)**

“Wassail” Harvey, Cricklade
Fred Falconer, Black Bourton

**BOLD GENERAL WOLFE
(OX 193)**

John Puffet, Lechlade
Shadrach Haydon, Hatford

**SHEPHERD ON THE MOUNTAIN
(OX 220)**

Charles Tanner, Bampton
Richard Gardner, Hardwick

THE GIPSY GIRL (OX 247)

“Wassail” Harvey, Cricklade
Frank Cook, Burford

THE FEMALE ROBBER (OX 293)

Thomas Smart, Blunsdon
Henry Potter, Standlake

**BUTTER AND CHEESE AND ALL
(OX 304)**

W Dawson, Sutton
W Oſtley, Southmoor

**THE MAID AND THE SAILOR
(OX 307)**

Mrs Rowles, Witney
Mrs Phillips, Purton

THE GAMEKEEPER (WT 317)

Mrs Hancock, Blunsdon
Mrs Dickson, Brinkworth

SPENCER THE ROVER (WT 327)

Daniel Morgan, Bradon
James Harris, Southleigh

**THE JOLLY RED HERRING
(WT 360)**

“Wassail” Harvey, Cricklade
Elijah Iles, Inglesham

LORD BATEMAN (WT 362)

“Wassail” Harvey, Cricklade
Shadrach Haydon, Hatford

THE ROSY MORN (WT 365)

“Wassail” Harvey, Cricklade
Phoenix Giles, Cricklade

**THAMES HEAD WASSAILERS’
SONG (WT 367)**

“Wassail” Harvey, Cricklade
E Smart, Oaksey

**THE BARLEY-MOW SONG (WT
389)**

David Sawyer, ‘Ogbourne’
Elijah Iles, Inglesham

**COME, LANDLORD, FILL THE
FLOWING BOWL (WT 394)**

Elijah Iles, Inglesham
Charles Bond, Shaw

THE GREEN BUSHES (WT 397)

Elijah Iles, Inglesham
William Jefferies, Longcot

**I COURTED A BONNY LASS
(WT 400)**

Elijah Iles, Inglesham
Sarah Calcott, Northmoor

THE ROVER (WT 411)

Elijah Iles, Inglesham
James Shilton, Lechlade

BOLD REYNOLDS (WT 435)

John Puffet, Lechlade
David Sawyer, ‘Ogbourne’

CANADA-I-O (WT 437)

David Sawyer, ‘Ogbourne’
Henry Leech, Eynsham

**COME, MY LADS, AND LET’S BE
JOLLY (WT 438)**

David Sawyer, ‘Ogbourne’
Henry Potter, Standlake

**THE DUKE OF MARLBOROUGH
(WT 442)**

David Sawyer, ‘Ogbourne’
John Pillinger, Lechlade

THE GAY PLOUGHBOY (WT 443)

David Sawyer, ‘Ogbourne’
Thomas Webb, Broadwell

**THE MANTLE OF GREEN
(WT 457)**

David Sawyer, ‘Ogbourne’
Mrs Rowles, Witney

**REMEMBER, LOVE, REMEMBER
(WT 464)**

David Sawyer, ‘Ogbourne’
Mrs Moss, Driffield

**THE OLD FARMER AND HIS
YOUNG WIFE (WT 461)**

David Sawyer, ‘Ogbourne’
Charles Messenger,
Cerney Wick

THE INDIAN LASS (WT 502)

Edwin Warren, South Marston
Thomas Webb, Broadwell

**THE HUSBANDMAN AND THE
SERVINGMAN (WT 512)**

Thomas Dunn, Stratton St
Margaret
Charles Messenger,
Cerney Wick

NOTES TO APPENDIX I

- 1 The notebook is preserved in the Alfred Williams Collection, WSRO 2598/36.
- 2 James Reeves, *The Idiom of the People* (London, 1958).
- 3 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, p. 24.
- 4 Ivor Clissold, 'Alfred Williams, Song Collector' in 'Alfred Williams: A Symposium', *Folk Music Journal* I, no 5 (1969), p. 296. On the evidence, 'myriad' is Clissoldian hyperbole: many manuscripts have no amendments, those which do tend to be of a minor order.
- 5 Symposium, p. 301. In his note to 'Dick Turpin', a song included in *Marrowbones* (1965, p. 105), Purslow acknowledges that he has supplemented the text from *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames* (p. 101), commenting: 'These verses show very definite [*sic*] signs of literary "touching up", and were probably rewritten by Williams himself.'
- 6 Symposium, p. 302.
- 7 *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Introduction, pp. 14-15. The passage is quoted in James Reeves, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14, and in Harker, *Fakesong*, pp. 219-220. Williams makes similar comments in a headnote to 'Preaching for Bacon' (Wt 410), a song of comeuppance: 'Unfortunately, the means adopted for shaming the offender were not always what we should consider laudable, and the songs were sometimes coarse or, at any rate, too indelicate to reproduce.' (Deletion made from *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, p. 278.)
- 8 Symposium, p. 296.
- 9 Symposium, p. 323.
- 10 Symposium, p. 301.
- 11 Symposium, p. 302.
- 12 Symposium, pp. 311-12.
- 13 Symposium, p. 302.
- 14 Text reproduced in Chapter XIII of *Round About the Upper Thames*, which originally appeared in the *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 12 June 1915.
- 15 Headnote to Wt 367.
- 16 See Anon, 'Mr Alfred O Williams, the Hammerman Poet,' *Pitman's Journal*, 74, no. 22 (29 May 1915), pp. 476-7.



APPENDIX II

SIXTEEN TUNES RESTORED

NOTORIOUSLY, THE MOST GLARING DEFICIENCY IN WILLIAMS'S COLLECTION IS THE ABSENCE of tunes. (Discussion of why he noted, or caused to be noted, no music is at p. 401 *supra*.) Given the nature of the musical beast in question—texts routinely sung to different tunes—this deficiency cannot be made good by simply adopting tunes from other collections. In a handful of cases, however, there is a sufficiently close association between Williams's source and that of another collector to render marrying up at least a possibility. The bulk of these concern notations made at Bampton, dividing as early interest in the morris there, and, principally, Cecil Sharp's notations from Charles Tanner and Shadrach Haydon, a small but extremely important intersection which also permits a limited comparison of texts as suggested in Appendix I. The other source is the fieldwork carried out in the locality by John Baldwin the 1960s, which embraces direct descendants of Williams's informants. The instances listed tend to run from most to least plausible: songs noted from the same singer within a few years (as at Bampton) are likely to employ the same tune; a song common to uncle and nephew (as Dawes) is clearly open to greater doubt.

A: THIRTEEN TUNES NOTED AT BAMPTON, OXON, 1840-1909

I - THREE MORRIS TUNES, FOR WHICH WILLIAMS SUBSEQUENTLY NOTED TEXTS

The sources here are William Giles manuscripts at the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, and Percy Manning, 'Some Oxfordshire Seasonal Festivals: with Notes on Morris-Dancing in Oxfordshire', *Folk-Lore* VIII (1897), pp. 307-324. Manning's source was 'Blind' Charlie Tanner, father of Williams's singer Charles 'Cocky' Tanner.

WILLIAMS COLLECTION	TUNE SOURCE
'The Old Woman Tossed up in a Blanket' (OX 214) <i>Folk Songs of the Upper Thames</i> , p. 228	Giles (1840)
'The Willow Tree' (OX 215) <i>Folk Songs of the Upper Thames</i> , p. 302	Manning, p. 321
'The Maid of the Mill' (OX 209) <i>Folk Songs of the Upper Thames</i> , p. 184	Manning, p. 322

II – TEN TUNES NOTED AT BAMPTON BY CECIL SHARP

Alongside the salient interest of the morris, Sharp visited Bampton in search of singers in 1909, a few years before Williams entered the field. Both collected from Charles ‘Cocky’ Tanner and Shadrach ‘Shepherd’ Haydon, yielding an overlap of ten songs:

WILLIAMS COLLECTION	TUNE SOURCE
FIVE SONGS NOTED FROM CHARLES TANNER	
‘At Seventeen Years I was Young’ (OX 204)	Sharp Collection FT 2392
‘The Chain of Gold’ (OX 206)	Sharp Collection FT 2376
‘The Maltman and the Highwayman’ (OX 211) <i>Folk Songs of the Upper Thames</i> , p. 250	Sharp Collection FT 2373
‘Poor Old Horse’ (OX 217) <i>Folk Songs of the Upper Thames</i> , p. 155	Sharp Collection FT 2372
‘The Shepherd on the Mountain’ (OX 220)	Sharp Collection FT 2374
FOUR SONGS NOTED FROM SHADRACH HAYDON	
‘Lord Bateman’ (WT 362) <i>(This is a composite with “Wassail” Harvey)</i> <i>Folk Songs of the Upper Thames</i> , p. 147	Sharp Collection FT 2371
‘The Draggie-tailed Gipsies’ (OX 195) <i>Folk Songs of the Upper Thames</i> , p. 120	Sharp Collection FT 2308
‘On Compton Downs’ (OX 197)	Sharp Collection FT 2367
‘The Whale Fishers’ (OX 200)	Sharp Collection FT 2368
ONE COMPOSITE TEXT NOTED FROM TANNER & HAYDON	
‘The Copy (<i>sic</i>) Boy’ (OX 207)	Sharp Collection FT 2310 (Haydon)

NB: The presentation of texts accompanying the tunes shows the extent of divergence between Sharp’s (on left) and Williams’s (on right) sets by highlighting in bold non-identical lines.

B : THREE TUNES RECORDED BY JOHN BALDWIN, 1969

In the late 1960s, John Baldwin followed in the cycletracks of Williams in the Upper Thames, seeking survivals of song (see Chapter IV.3). The resultant sound recordings are now housed in the Leeds Archive of Vernacular Culture (University of Leeds), having been recently catalogued. Though his final tally was substantial, Baldwin disappointingly located only three direct singing descendants of Williams's informants: John Morgan at South Marston (Wilts), youngest son of Daniel Morgan; R G Cook at Charlton (Wilts), son of Mrs Phillips (not included here); and 'Dusty' Dawes at Meysey Hampton (Glos), nephew of Eli Dawes.

WILLIAMS COLLECTION**TUNE SOURCE****TWO SONGS FROM JOHN MORGAN AT SOUTH MARSTON**

'Bold Sir Rylas' (WT 322) <i>Folk Songs of the Upper Thames</i> , p. 118	Baldwin Collection, LAVC/A487R
'The Parson and Sucking Pig' (WT 325) <i>Folk Songs of the Upper Thames</i> , p. 197	Baldwin Collection, LAVC/A487R

The full tally from Morgan was nine songs.

ONE SONG FROM 'DUSTY' DAWES AT MEYSEY HAMPTON

'Three Maids a-milking would go' (GL 154) <i>Folk Songs of the Upper Thames</i> , p. 229	Baldwin Collection, LAVC/A490R
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The full tally from Dawes was 14 songs.

The working tally of tunes that can reasonably be restored is thus 16. A further potential seam is represented by identifiable compositions (see table in Chapter II), although, here too, there is no guarantee that country singers employed the tune originally composed to accompany the words.



THE OLD WOMAN TOSSED UP IN A BLANKET

TUNE William Giles MSS, 1840 (Vaughan Williams Memorial Library)
WORDS Alfred Williams Collection, OX 214 (Charles Tanner, Bampton)
Folk Songs of the Upper Thames, p. 228



There was an old woman tossed up in a blanket,
 Ninety times as high as the moon,
 Where she was going I then did ask her,
 For in her arms she carried a broom.

“Old woman, old woman, old woman,” said I,
 “Where are you going with your broom so high?”
 “Sweeping the cobwebs out of the sky,
 And I shall be jogging with you by and by.”

Williams’s note reads: ‘A favourite old morris piece. It was also popular at the pastime of step-dancing, when the tune was played by the fiddlers. Obtained at Bampton.’

THE MAID OF THE MILL

TUNE Percy Manning, *Folk-Lore* VIII (1897), p. 322
WORDS Alfred Williams Collection, OX 209 (Charles Tanner, Bampton)
Folk Songs of the Upper Thames, p. 184



The maid of the mill is a sweet pretty girl,
 The maid of the mill for me!
 The maid of the mill is a sweet pretty girl,
 The maid of the mill for me!

She's as straight and as tall as a poplar tree,
 And her cheeks are as red as a rose;
 She's one of the fairest young girls that you see,
 When she's dressed in her Sunday clothes.

THE WILLOW TREE

TUNE Percy Manning, *Folk-Lore* VIII (1897), p. 321
WORDS Alfred Williams Collection, OX 215 (Charles Tanner, Bampton)
Folk Songs of the Upper Thames, p. 302



Oh, once they said my lip was red,
 But now is the scarlet pale,
 And I myself a poor silly girl
 To notice their flattering tale.

But he swore he'd never deceive me,
 And so fondly I believed thee,
 While the stars and the moon so sweetly,
 Shone over the willow tree.

AT SEVENTEEN YEARS I WAS YOUNG (Charles Tanner, Bampton)

TUNE Cecil Sharp Collection, FT 2392
WORDS Cecil Sharp Collection, FW 2165
 Alfred Williams Collection, OX 204



AT SEVENTEEN YEARS OF AGE
(11 SEPTEMBER 1909)

At seventeen years of age I was young
 I fixed my mind all on a pretty maid,
There's no one does know and what I
did undergo
 When my poor silly heart she betrayed.

Unto her father's home I did go
 Thinking to gain her as a prize.
Her hair more like the velvet so soft;
She had diamonds in each of her eyes.

Her cheeks were like the cherries
 Growing on yonder tree,
Her lips were like unto the violets so blue
What a charming sweet creature was she.

I'll set myself down and I'll cry
To think of the sorrows I had done
To think I was deluded when I had a
deluded tongue
When I was but a boy and so young.

AT SEVENTEEN YEARS I WAS YOUNG

At seventeen years of age I was young,
 I fixed my mind all on a pretty maid,
There's no one does know what I
did undergo
 When my poor silly heart she betrayed.

Home to her father's house I did go,
 Thinking to gain her as a prize;
Her hair it was like the velvet so soft;
She had [a] diamonds in each of her eyes.

Her cheeks were like the roses so red,
That grew* on yonder high tree;
Her lips were like unto cherries sweet –
What a charming creature was she!
C has grow

Now I'll sit myself down and I'll cry,
To think of the sorrows I've done,
To think I was deluded and had a deluding
tongue
When I was but a boy so young.

THE CHAIN OF GOLD (Charles Tanner, Bampton)

TUNE Cecil Sharp Collection, FT 2376
WORDS Cecil Sharp Collection, FW 2152
 Alfred Williams Collection, OX 206

**THE CHAIN OF GOLD (7 AUGUST 1909)**

Abroad as I was walking in the fields all alone
**I heard two lovers talking, telling tales
 of love.**
**They proved to be constant and ever
 to behold**
 Before this couple parted they broke a chain
 of gold.

**As soon as the chain was broken all
 round her neck it twined**
 Up stepped her aged father who oftentimes
 walked behind.
**He flew in such a passion with his
 daughter and her man**
**He swear by all who made them they
 should never meet again.**

**O I'll send them to some Turkey seas
 where he shall end his days**
**He shall never come a-courting there in
 old England to a-roam.**
**And madam I'll confine thee to a closet
 in this room**
**I'll keep thee on bread and water once a
 day and that at noon.**

**I don't want none of your bread and water
 nor nothing will I take**
**Since my true love has gone from me I'll
 go down to yonder grave.**
 Friends and neighbours fell a-weeping but her
 life they could not save
**And now she lies a-weeping in the dark
 and shady grave.**

THE CHAIN OF GOLD

Abroad as I was walking in the fields all alone,
**I heard two lovers talking, telling
 tender tales of love.**
**They proved to be constant, and,
 forever to behold,**
 Before this couple parted they broke a chain
 of gold.

**And when this chain was broken, all
 round her neck it twined;**
 Up stepped her aged father, who oftentimes
 walked behind;
**And he flew in such a passion with his
 daughter and her swain,**
**And he swore by all who made them they
 never meet again.**

**"For I'll send him to some Turkey seas
 there for to roam,**
**He shall never come a-courting thee, nor to
 old England return;**
**And it's madam, I'll confine thee to a closet
 in thy room,**
**I'll feed thee on bread and water once a day,
 and that's at noon."**

**I want none of thy bread and water nor
 nothing will I take;**
**Since my true love has died for me, I'll
 perish for his sake."**
 Friends and neighbours fell a-weeping, but her
 life they could not save,
**And now she lies a-sleeping in yonder
 shady grave.**

THE MALTMAN AND THE HIGHWAYMAN (Charles Tanner, Bampton)

TUNE Cecil Sharp Collection, FT 2373
WORDS Cecil Sharp Collection, FW 2148-9
 Alfred Williams Collection, OX 211
Folk Songs of the Upper Thames, p. 250



THE MALTMAN AND THE MILLER
 (7 SEPTEMBER 1909)

I would tell you a story of large
When the maltman were riding along
 He had in his pocket great charge
Not thinking no man would him wrong.

He was met by a gentleman thief
 That bid him a civil salute
That bid him deliver [*] in peace
For he had no time to dispute.

* *bim*

Then in silver he gave him three pounds
And that little sum would not do
 Till he did oblige him with wounds
 And his broadsword he presently drew.

He cut him without more delay
Till twenty bright guineas he got
 And he left him to bleed on the spot
While the rogue he went laughing away.

THE MALTMAN AND THE HIGHWAYMAN

I will tell you a story at large,
When a maltman was riding along,
 He had in his pocket great charge,
Not thinking any man would him wrong.

He was met by a gentleman thief,
 Who bid him a civil salute,
Who bid him deliver in brief,
For there was no time for dispute.

Then in silver he gave him three pounds,
But that little sum would not do,
 Till he did oblige him with wounds,
 And his broadsword he presently drew.

He cut him without more delay,
Till twenty bright guineas he'd got,
 And he left him to bleed on the spot,*
Then the rogue he went laughing away.*

* *these lines reversed in C (as indicated on MS)*

(SHARP CONT.)

A Salisbury miller came by
A man of wonderful size
Seeing his neighbour lie there
 Dismounted and bleeding likewise.

O what is the matter, quoth he.
 Kind sir I am robbed of my store
 My silver and guineas to boot
 And the rogue is gone jogging before.

O lend me but thy nimble nag
 More swifter than my heavy ball
If I don't recover thy loss
 Aszooks it shall cause me a fall.

Then he mounted on his nimble nag
 away he did ride
Through wet and through dry
The highwayman at him let fly
 But a miss was as good as a mile.

Then he slipped* up with all speed
 And lent him a knock on his crown
 His club was so heavy and great
 Which it made him come tumbling down.

* *stepped*

Now we'll hang thee on yonder side tree
 For fear of some sudden uproar
For now he's stone-dead you may see
 He will never rob gentlemen more.

At Salisbury there he was tried
 For hanging the highwayman there
The maltman went in of his side
 So poor Joseph the miller got clear.

(WILLIAMS CONT.)

A Salisbury miller came by,
A man of a wonderful size,
Seeing his neighbour lying there,
 Dismounted and bleeding likewise.

"Oh, what is the matter?" calls he.
 "Kind sir! I am robbed of my store,
 My silver and guineas to boot,
 And the rogue is gone jogging before."

"Oh, lend me but thy nimble nag,
 More swifter than my heavy Ball,
And if I don't recover thy loss,
 Odzooks! it shall cause me a fall."

Then he mounted on his nimble nag,
And he rode through the night and the day,
And the highwayman at him let fly,
 But a miss was as good as a mile.

Then he stepped up with all speed,
 And lent him a knock on his crown,
 His club was so heavy and great,
 Which it made him come tumbling down.

"Now we'll hang him on yonder high tree,
 For fear of some sudden uproar;
But now he's stone dead you may see
 He will never rob gentlemen more."

Then at Salisbury the miller was tried,
 For hanging the highwayman there,
But the maltman went in at his side,
 So poor Joseph the miller got clear.

POOR OLD HORSE (Charles Tanner, Bampton)

TUNE Cecil Sharp Collection, FT 2372
WORDS Cecil Sharp Collection, FW 2146-7
 Alfred Williams Collection, OX 217
Folk Songs of the Upper Thames, p. 155



Sharp typescript sets these as half lines, Williams sets them full out.

POOR OLD HORSE
 (7 SEPTEMBER 1909)

- 1 **O once I was clothèd**
In a linsey 'oolsey fine,
- 2 **My mane it hung down**
And my coat it used to shine,
- 3 But now I'm growing old
To dust I must decay.
- 4 **My master oft times frowns**
[*] One day I heard him say
 Poor old horse, you must die.

(Verse not in Sharp)

POOR OLD HORSE

- O once I was dressed** D 'Ob'
in linsey woolsey fine,
- My mane it did hang down,**
and my coat it did shine;
- But now I'm growing old,
and nature does decay.
- My master oft times frowns on me,**
and one day I heard him say -
 "Poor old horse! you must die!"

O once I was kept all in the stable warm,
 To keep my poor flesh and my bones from all harm,
 But now I am turned out all in the streets to go,
 To face the winter's weather in hail, rain, frost,
 and snow.
 Poor old horse! You must die!

(SHARP CONT.)

- 5 **You are old and you are cold,**
Your pace it is but slow,
6 **You eats all my hay**
And you breaks all my straw
7 **And neither are you fitten**
All in my team to draw.
8 **We will whip him, cut him, skin him,**
Till the hounds will let him go
Poor old horse you must die.

- 9 **Now my flesh to the hounds**
So freely I will* give
10 **My body to the huntsman**
As long as I'm to live,
11 **Beside those active legs of mine**
That have run so many a mile
12 **Over hedges and ditches,**
Over fancy gates and stiles.
Poor old horse you must die.

* will I

- 13 **Now nature's all over,**
I've done my best and worst
14 **And all that they can do**
Is to turn me into dust
(If I could see my time again)
15 **And don't you think it's hard**
To had to no disgrace [sic]
16 **If I could pay myself again**
I would win the Derby race.
Poor old horse! You must die!

verses i and ii reversed, as indicated on MS

(WILLIAMS CONT.)

- You're old and you're cold,**
your pace it is but slow,
You eat all my hay
and you break all my straw,
Nor neither are you fitting
all in my team to draw.
So we'll whip him, cut him, skin him,
to the hounds we'll let him go –
Poor old horse! You must die!

- My hide unto the huntsman**
so freely I will give,
My body to the hounds,
for I'd rather die than live,
Besides these active legs of mine,
that have run so many miles,
Over hedges, over ditches,
over fences, gates, and stiles.
Poor old horse! You must die!
D ends here (that is, omits final verse)

- Now nature is all over,**
I've done my best and worst,
And all that they can do
is to turn me into dust;
(line not in Williams)
But don't you think it hard,
nor think it no disgrace,
For if I could pay myself again
I'd win the Derby race.

THE SHEPHERD ON THE MOUNTAIN (Charles Tanner, Bampton)

TUNE Cecil Sharp Collection, FT 2374
WORDS Cecil Sharp Collection, FW 2151
 Alfred Williams Collection, OX 220



WILLIAM THE SHEPHERD
 (7 SEPTEMBER 1909)

Young William the shepherd kept sheep
on a mountain
And his equal in voice made the valleys
to ring
 With his bag-pipes so neatly
 He played them so sweetly
And his equalling voice made the valleys
to ring.

Says William to Sally: Let us go a-walking
Down in the low meadow to take the
fresh air
Where the lambs they're a-playing
Where we were a-straying.
(line not in Sharp)

THE SHEPHERD ON THE MOUNTAIN

Young William the shepherd kept sheep
on the mountain,
And his echoing voice made the valleys
to ring;
 With his bagpipes so neatly, he played them
 so sweetly,
And his echoing voice made pretty Sally
to sing.

Says William to Sally: "My dear, let us go
walking
Down in yonder gay meadows to take the
fresh air,"
Where the lambkins were playing Sally and
I went a-straying,
So sweetly the nightingale sang to my dear.

(SHARP CONT.)

Says Sally to William: I must leave you

For the night is approaching and I must
go home

For my friends they'll chastise me

.....

If me and my William should tarry too long.

(WILLIAMS CONT.)

**Says Sally to William – “My dear I must
leave you,**

For the night is approaching and I must
go home;

**All my friends will chastise me and unto me
will prove cruel,**

If I and my William should tarry too long.”

**Says William to Sally: Let's join and get
married.**

**Replies the young shepherd with his voice
all on**

Let us join and be married

Replied the young shepherd.

**Says William to Sally – “Let's join and be
married.”**

**We'll live in a cottage, contented with
home,**

**Let's join and be married,” replies* the
young shepherd,**

**“Let's join and be married, with our sheep
all on.”**

** 'replied' in C*

(Verse not in Sharp)

Now this couple are married and are united,
They live in a cottage down by the sea,
Where they're never dejected, but always
respected,
And always a-striving each other to please.

LORD BATEMAN (Shadrach Haydon, Bampton)

TUNE Cecil Sharp Collection, FT 2371
WORDS Alfred Williams Collection, WT 362 (with 'Wassail' Harvey)
Folk Songs of the Upper Thames, p. 147



Lord Bateman was a noble lord,
 A noble lord of high degree,
 He set his foot on board a ship,
 And said strange countries he'd go and see.

He sailèd east and he sailèd west,
 Until he came to proud Turkey,
 The Turks they took him and put him to prison,
 Until his life it was quite weary.

And in that prison there stood a tree,
 That grew so very stout and strong,
 Where he was chained all by the middle,
 Until his life it was almost gone.

This Turk he had one only daughter,
 The fairest creature ever eye did see,
 She stole the keys of her father's prison,
 And swore Lord Bateman she would set free.

"Have you got houses? Have you got land?
 Have you got estates at your command?
 What would you give to the Turkish lady,
 If out of prison you could get free?"

"Yes, I have got houses. Yes! I have got lands,
 And half Northumberland belongs to me;
 I'd give it all to the Turkish lady,
 If out of prison I could get free."

Then she took him to her father's hall,
 And gave to him the best of wine,
 And every health she drank unto him—
 "I wish, Lord Bateman, that you were mine."

“Seven long years I’ve made a vow,
And seven more I’ll keep it strong,
And if you’ll not wed with another woman,
I’ll never wed with another man.”

She took him to her father’s harbour,
And gave to him a ship of fame,
“Farewell, farewell to you, Lord Bateman,
I fear we shall never meet again.”

Now seven long years were gone and past,
And fourteen days, well known to me,
She dressed herself in her gay clothing,
And said Lord Bateman she would go and see.

When she came to Lord Bateman’s castle,
So boldly then the bell rang she—
“Who’s there? Who’s there?” cried the young,
proud porter.
“Who’s there? Who’s there?” Come tell to me.

“O, is this Lord Bateman’s castle?
And is his Lordship now within?”
“O, yes! O, yes!” cried the young, proud porter,
“He is just now taking his new bride in.”

“Go, tell him to send me a slice of bread,
And a bottle of the best of wine,
And not to forget the Turkish lady
That released him when he was close confined.”

Away, away went the young, proud porter,
Away, away, and away went he,
Until he came to Lord Bateman’s chamber,
Where down on his bended knees fell he.

“What news, what news, my young, proud porter?
What news, what news hast thou brought to me?”
“Here is one of the fairest of all young ladies
That ever my two eyes did see.

“She has got rings on every finger,
And round one of them she has got three,
And as much gay clothing hangs round her middle
As would buy all Northumberly.

“She bids you send her a slice of bread,
And a bottle of the best of wine,
And not to forget the fair young lady
Who released you when you were close confined.”

Lord Bateman then flew in a passion,
And broke his sword in splinters three,
Saying—“I will give all my father’s riches,
If Sophia has crossed the sea.”

Then up spoke this young bride’s mother—
She was never heard to speak so free—
“O, do not forget my only daughter,
If Sophia has come across the sea.”

“I’ll own I made a bride of your daughter,
She’s none the better nor the worse for me,
She came to me with her horse and saddle,
And she may go back in her coach and three.”

Then he prepared another marriage,
With both their hearts so full of glee—
“I’ll roam no more in a foreign country,
Now since Sophia has crossed the sea.”[“]

*In place of the third stanza the following was
occasionally sung around Marlborough.*

They bored a hole in his right shoulder,
And in that hole they planted a tree,
They bound him down with irons strong,
Till he could neither hear nor see.

THE DRAGGLE-TAILED GIPSIES (Shadrach Haydon, Bampton)TUNE Cecil Sharp Collection, FT 2308[©]

WORDS Cecil Sharp Collection, FW 2103-4

Alfred Williams Collection, OX 195

Folk Songs of the Upper Thames, p. 120**WRAGGLE-TAGGLE GIPSIES**

(21 AUGUST 1909)

There were three gipsies came to the door
 And they sang brisk and bonny O
 And they sang high and they sang low
 And downstairs ran the lady O.

Then she pulled off her new silk gown
 And round her shoulders a blanket thrown

And round her shoulders a blanket thrown
 For to toddle with he draggles tail* gipsies O.

* *taggle*

When the old lord he came home
 Inquiring for his lady O
The housemaid made him this reply:
 She's gone with the draggles tail gipsies O.

Bridle me my milk-white steed
 And saddle him so bonny O
 That I may ride and seek for my dear
Who is gone with the draggles tail
gipsies O.

THE DRAGGLE-TAILED GIPSIES

There came three gipsies to the gate,
 They sang brisk and bonny O,
 They sang so neat and so complete,
 Downstairs came the lady O.

Then she put off her silken gown,
 And with a blanket around her shoulders
 thrown,

Said she'd leave her new-wedded lord
 And follow the draggles-tailed gipsies O.

When the old lord he came home
 Inquiring for his lady O,
The housemaid thus made him reply -
 "She's gone with the draggles-tailed gipsies O."

"Come, bridle me my milk-white steed
 And saddle him so bonny O,
 That I may ride and seek for my dear
That is gone with the draggles-tailed
gipsies O."

[©] The final note in bar one (a) Sharp has, mistakenly, as a crochet.

(SHARP CONT.)

Then he rode all that night long
 And part of the next morning O
 And there he saw his own true love
A-setting with the draggle tail
gipsies O.

How could you leave your house and land?
 How could you leave your money O?
 How could you leave your new wedded lord
To toddle with the draggle tail gipsies O?

What care I for house or land?
What care I for money O
 I don't care a fig for my new wedded lord.
I'll toddle with the draggle tail gipsies O.

Last night I lied on a warm feather bed
 And my new wedded lord by my side O.
And to-night I'll lie in the cold open field
 Along with the draggle tail gipsies O.

(WILLIAMS CONT.)

Then he went riding all that night
 And part of the next morning O,
 And there he saw his own true love
Sitting with the draggle-tailed
gipsies O.

"How could you leave good house and land?
 How could you leave your money O?
 Or how could you leave your new wedded lord
To follow the draggle-tailed gipsies O?"

"What care I for my house and land!
Or what care I for my money O!
 I don't care a fig for my new wedded lord.
I'll follow the draggle-tailed gipsies O.

"Last night I lay on a new feather bed
 With my new wedded lord by my side O.
But to-night I will lie in the cold open fields
 Along with the draggle-tailed gipsies O."
C as B

ON COMPTON DOWNS (Shadrach Haydon, Bampton)

TUNE Cecil Sharp Collection, FT 2367
 WORDS Cecil Sharp Collection, FW 2139-40
 Alfred Williams Collection, OX 197



Sharp typescript sets these as half lines, Williams sets them full out.

SHEPHERD'S SONG
 (6 SEPTEMBER 1909)

1 O once I was a shepherd boy,
 Kept sheep on Compton Down,
 2 'Twas about two miles from Illesley,
 It was called a market town.

Chorus added by hand

3 **And in the morn when we do rise**
When daylight do appear
 4 Our breakfast we do get,
 To our fold we all do steer.
 5 **And when we gets to our sheep fold**
We merrily pitched him round
 6 **And all the rest part of the day**
We sailed the downs all round.
 7 **When we gets up on the down**
 Gazing ourselves all round
 8 We see the storm is rising
 And coming on all round.

ON COMPTON DOWNS

Once I was a shepherd boy,
 Kept sheep on Compton downs,
 'Twas about two miles from Ilsley,
 'Twas called a market town.

No chorus in Williams

When we rise all in the morn,
When daylight does appear,
 Our breakfast we do get,
 To our fold we all do steer.
When we come to our sheep fold
We merrily pitch them round
 And all the rest part of the day
We sail the downs all round.
When we get upon the downs,
 Gazing ourselves all round,
 We see the storm is rising
 And coming on all round.

(SHARP CONT.)

9 And the storm is coming on,
 The rain fast down do fall,
 10 Neither limb nor tree to shelter me,
 I must stand and take it all.

11 **And there we stood* in our wet clothes**
 A-shining* and shaking with cold
 12 **We dare not go to shift ourselves**
 Till we drive our sheep to fold.
 * *stand; a-shivering*

13 **And when the storm is over**
 And that you may plainly see,
 14 I'll never keep sheep on the downs
 any more,

For there's neither a limb nor a tree.

(WILLIAMS CONT.)

(Verse not in Williams)

There we stand in our wet clothes,
Shivering with the cold,
We dare not change our garments
Till we've drove our sheep to fold.

Now the storm is over,
 And that you may plainly see,
 I'll never keep sheep on the downs
 any more,

For there's neither bush nor tree.

C as B

THE WHALE FISHERS (Shadrach Haydon, Bampton)

TUNE Cecil Sharp Collection, FT 2368
WORDS Alfred Williams Collection, OX 200



Text shows changes made on Williams's manuscript

In eighteen hundred and twenty-one,
 On ~~March~~ the twenty-third {of May},
 We hoisted our colours to our topmast head,
 And for Greenland bore away.

When we came unto Greenland,
 Our ship we were forced to mend,
 For the heavy waves fell on the deck her side
 And stripped it from end to end.

Our captain stood on the quarter deck –
 A very good man was he:
 “Overhaul, overhaul. Let your heavy tackle fall,
 And launch your boat for sea.”

The boat was launched, and the hands jumped in,
 And ~~the~~ The whale fish appeared in view,
 And it was resolved by the whole of us
 To steer where the whale fish blew.

The ~~boat~~ [spear] being launched, and the line paid out,
 She gave a lash with her tail,
 She capsized the boat and we lost five men,
 And we did not catch that whale.

Now Greenland is ~~in~~ a barren place,
 Neither night nor day to be seen,
 But cold ice and snow, and the whale fish to blow,
 And daylight seldom seen.

THE COPY (sic) BOY (Charles Tanner and Shadrach Haydon, Bampton)

TUNE Cecil Sharp Collection, FT 2310
WORDS Cecil Sharp Collection, FW 2106
 Alfred Williams Collection, OX 207



THE CROPPY BOY
 (7 SEPTEMBER 1909: FROM HAYDON)

It was early in the spring
 The birds did whistle and sweetly sing
 Changing their notes from tree to tree
 And the song they sung was old Ireland free

It was early in the night
This human calvary gave me a fright
This human calvary was my downfall
 And taken was I by Lord Cornwall

Twas in the guard house where I was laid
 And in the parlour where I was tried
 My sentence passed and my courage low
When to Dungaw I was forced to go

As I was mounted on the platford eye
My brother William was standing by
My aged father he stand at the door
My tender mother her hair she tore

My sister she heard they express
She runned downstairs in her morning
dress
Five hundred guineas they could pay down
To see my brother marched through
Wexford Town

THE COPY BOY
 (COMPOSITE FROM TANNER AND HAYDON)

It was early, early in the spring,
 The birds did whistle and sweetly sing
 Changing their notes from tree to tree,
 And the song they sung was "Old Ireland Free."

It was early, early in the night,
The Yeoman Cavalry gave me a fright;
The Yeoman Cavalry was my downfall,
 And taken was I by Lord Cornwall.

When I was standing at my father's door,
My brother William stood on the floor
My sister Mary did grieve full sore,
My tender mother her grey locks tore.

'Twas in the guard house where I was laid,
 And in the parlour where I was tried;
 My sentence passed, and my courage low,
And to Dungara I was forced to go.

My sister Mary she heard the express,
And ran downstairs in her morning dress:
"Five hundred guineas I would pay down
To see my brother march through
Wexford town."

(SHARP CONT.)

(No verse in Sharp)

**As I was marched down Wexford Street
My own first cousin I chanced to meet
My own first cousin did me array
And for one burgala threw my life away**

(No verse in Sharp)

**O you good Christians as you pass by
Pray drop one tear for my Croppy Boy**

(WILLIAMS CONT.)

As I was going up Wexford Hill,
Which did induce me to cry my fill;
I looked behind, and I looked before,
But my tender mother I could see no more.

**As I was walking down Wexford Street,
My own first cousin I chanced to meet;
My own first cousin did me annoy,
And for one burgala swore my life away.**

When I was on the gallows high,
My aged father was standing by;
My aged father did me deny,
And the name he gave me was the Copy Boy.

**All you good Christians that do pass by,
Pray drop one tear for the Copy Boy.**

BOLD SIR RYLAS

TUNE John Baldwin Collection, LAVC/A487R (John Morgan, South Marston)
WORDS Alfred Williams Collection, WT 322 (Daniel Morgan, Braydon Wood)
Folk Songs of the Upper Thames, p. 118



Transcription by Julia C Bishop

Bold Sir Rylas a-hunting went—
 I an dan dilly dan,
 Bold Sir Rylas a-hunting went—
 Killy koko an,
 Bold Sir Rylas a-hunting went,
 To kill some game was his intent—
 I an dan dilly dan killy koko an.

He saw a wild woman sat in a tree,
 Good lord what brings thee here? said she.
 I an dan dilly dan killy koko an.

There is a wild boar all in this wood,
 He'll eat thy flesh and drink thy blood,
 As thee beeſt a jovial hunter.

What shall I do this wild boar to see?
 Why wind thy horn and he'll come to thee,
 As thee beeſt a jovial hunter.

He put his horn unto his mouth,
 And blew it east, north, west and south —
 I an dan dilly dan killy koko an.

The wild boar he heard him in his den,
 And out came with young ones nine or ten —
 I an dan dilly dan killy koko an.

Then bold Sir Rylas this wild boar fell on —
 I an dan dilly dan,
 He fought him three hours by the day,
 Till the wild boar fain would have run away —
 I an dan dilly dan killy koko an.

Now, since thou has killed my spotted pig —
 I an dan dilly dan,
 There are three things I will have of thee:
 That's thy horse, thy hounds and thy fair lady,
 As thee bist a jovial hunter.

Now since I have killed thy spotted pig —
 I an dan dilly dan,
 There's nothing thou shalt have of me,
 Neither my horse, hounds, nor fair lady,
 As I am a jovial hunter.

Then bold Sir Rylas this wild woman fell on —
 I an dan dilly dan,
 Then bold Sir Rylas this wild woman fell on —
 Killy koko an,
 He split her head down to her chin,
 You ought to have seen her kick and grin —
 I an dan dilly dan killy koko an.

THE PARSON AND THE SUCKING PIG

TUNE John Baldwin Collection, LAVC/A487R (John Morgan, South Marston)
WORDS Alfred Williams Collection, WT 325 (Daniel Morgan, Braydon Wood)
Folk Songs of the Upper Thames, p. 197



Transcription by Julia C Bishop

Come, men and maids, and listen awhile,
 I'll tell you of a rig,
 About the farmer and the parson,
 And a little sucking pig.

CHORUS

So Good-morning, sir, the parson said,
 And Good morning, sir, to you.
 I'm come to claim the sucking pig,
 For you know it is my due.

You choose me one that's plump and fat,
 For it is my design,
 This day I've asked a friend or two
 To come with me and dine.

The farmer jumped into the sty,
 And the little pigs did squall,
 The farmer picked the parson out
 The smallest of them all.

But when the parson saw the same,
 How he did stamp and roar,
 He stamped his foot and shook his wig
 And almost cursed and swore.

“Well, now, then,” says the farmer,
“Since my offer you refuse,
You’re welcome in,” the farmer says,
“Yourself to pick and choose.”

Then the parson jumped into the sty,
Without any more ado;
The old sow she ran open-mouthed,
And at the parson flew.

The little pigs his stockings tore,
And his breech they split in two,
The old sow pushed her nose between his legs
And in the mud him threw.

The parson jumped out of the sty
And off home he did run,
And you’d have split your sides a-laughing
To see how he was gone.

His wife was waiting at the door,
All for to let him in,
Get out, you bitch, the parson cried,
I’m almost dead with pain.

I met with such sad, cruel usage
In that erratic sty;
I’ll never relish a sucking pig
Until the day I die.

THREE MAIDENS A-MILKING WOULD GO

TUNE John Baldwin Collection, LAVC/A487R (Dusty Dawes, Meysey Hampton)
WORDS Alfred Williams Collection, GL 154 (Eli Dawes, Southrop)
Folk Songs of the Upper Thames, p. 229



Transcription by Julia C Bishop

Three maidens a-milking would go,
 Three maidens a-milking would go,
 The wind it blew high, the wind it blew low,
 It tossed their milking-pails to and fro.

They met with a man that they knew,
 They met with a man that they knew,
 They boldly asked him if he had any skill
 That would catch a small bird or two.

Oh yes! I've a very good skill,
 Oh yes! I've a very good skill,
 If you'll go with me to yonder green grove
 I will catch you a small bird or two.

*This verse (4) not in Williams—restored from Baldwin's recording
 see p. 507 supra*

On through the green meadows they went
 On through the green meadows they went
 And there they marched along oh the pretty birds they sung
 For they knew very well what it meant.

They courted all day in the shade,
 These maidens, as I have heard now,
 But no small birds they caught, for love was their thought,
 And they cared not for milking their cow.

Here's a health to the bird in the bush,
 Let him be a blackbird or thrush!
 For birds of a feather will all flock together,
 Though the people say little or much.

APPENDIX III

MANUSCRIPT LETTER FROM FRANK KIDSON TO ALFRED WILLIAMS (WILLIAMS COLLECTION, WSRO 2598/60)

5 Hamilton Avenue
Leeds
Sunday[□]

Dear Mr Williams

Excuse delay in replying to your letter. I have much sympathy with your task in noting the folk songs of your district and would help when I could; but I fear we are very much astray in our elemental ideas on this subject & that some of my notes might appear as criticisms rather than as lights. You head your compositions Folk Songs of the Upper Thames but you include certain Victorian drawing room, or parlour lyrics by known writers and composers which may be found in contemporary sheet music. I don't know whether you rank these as "folk-songs" but I certainly do not, nor does any folk-song expert I have come across.

The folk song or ballad of which you have given so many examples are as distinct from this class of song as possible. It never appeared on the ordinary sheet music save on a very few special occasions, until the recent folk song movement. The words are found printed on the ballad sheet and the tune remained purely traditional. As a matter of fact, I have (with few exceptions) all the songs you have given in ballad sheet form & the tunes of many have been noted by members of the Folk Song Society. It is interesting to compare these versions.

With regard to Gay's song "Molly Mog" I cannot understand your position. It has been accredited to Gay ever since its publication nearly 200 years ago & you can bring forth no evidence save your own belief to the contrary. The song in its entirety is found in all reputable editions of Gay's poems & this fact has never been disputed.† If you have read through the whole poem I cannot conceive you not seeing that it was written by an 18th century poet of Gay's standing. In regard to the line you object to, Gay might not have employed it in an elegant poem, but he puts it as a colloquialism in the mouth of one of his characters in the poem. Molly Mogg was an innkeeper's daughter who died in March 1766, apparently well known to Gay & his friends & there is no reason why Gay should not write a playful poem in her honour. All this I might have said in print to vindicate my original contention but I prefer to drop out of the whole affair & leave you a clear field unhampered by any of my notes & comments.

I am
yours truly
Frank Kidson

□ The envelope in which this undated letter is preserved is clearly postmarked 31 March 1924, suggesting to the unwary its date of composition. It is also, however, postmarked 'London' and addressed in a hand which is certainly not Kidson's. Even if Kidson were staying in London at the time, it seems implausible that he would have arranged for someone else to inscribe the envelope. On internal grounds also, 1924 seems an unlikely date. When Kidson refers to a 'delay' in replying, this is surely not a matter of nine years—the implication of taking the letter to be a continuation of the exchanges in the *Standard* in October and November 1915. Nor does it fit with the putative approach to Williams by the Folk Song Society in 1923. (This is Clissold's assumption in *Folk Music Journal* 1 no 5, p. 297.) It seems more plausible that Williams had written to Kidson in the autumn of 1915 while the contact was still warm, and that Kidson's 'delay' puts his letter at around the very end of 1915 or beginning of 1916. So the letter is in the wrong envelope.

† Some have suggested that the verses are the outcome of an alcohol-fuelled contest in versification by a sodality of poets, involving Pope *entre autres*. See *Notes & Queries*, Second Series VIII (1859): July 30, pp. 84-5; August 18, p. 129; August 27, pp. 172-5. This possibility does not, of course, alter the essential point Kidson is seeking to make.

APPENDIX IV

SONGS KNOWN TO HAVE BEEN SUNG BY ELIJAH ILES OF INGLESHAM

WT 387-416, with additions

The 31 songs attributed to Elijah Iles in the Index to the Alfred Williams Song Collection (WSRO) is based on surviving manuscripts. To this may be added 14 more from other sources: the headnote to WT 379, 11 mentions in *Round About the Upper Thames*, one in Williams's obituary of Iles (see Chapter II), and one in the *Oxford Times* article of 20 January 1928 ('Upper Thames Folk Songs'), although only the political squib has a text. The ascertainable total is thus 45 (Iles almost certainly knew many more). WGS numbers refer to newspaper instalments (see Appendix V), RUT (*Round About the Upper Thames*) references are to chapters.

REF	TITLE	FSUT	WGS	OTHER
1	Wt 387 The Banks of Sweet Primroses	—	XXIV	—
2	Wt 388 Barbara Allen	264	VII	—
3	Wt 389 The Barley Mow Song (with Sawyer)	289	XXVI	—
4	Wt 390 Bold Robin Hood	237	—	—
5	Wt 391 The Bonny Bunch of Roses O	—	—	RUT V & XVII
	Blow the Candle Out	—	—	RUT XVII
	Butter and Cheese and All	—	—	RUT V & XVII
	Caroline of Edinburgh Town	—	—	RUT V
6	Wt 392 Caroline and her Young Sailor Bold	—	XVIII	—
7	Wt 393 The Carrion Crow and the Tailor	227	III	—
8	Wt 394 Come, Landlord Fill the Flowing Bowl (with Bond)	50	XVI	—
9	Wt 395 The Cuckoo	165	—	—
10	Wt 396 Down in the Lowlands	182	XI	—
	The Four and Nine	—	—	RUT XVII
	The Gallant Poacher	—	—	RUT V
	Green Grow the Rushes O	—	—	<i>Oxford Times</i>
11	Wt 397 The Green Bushes (with Jefferies)	—	XXVIII	—
12	Wt 398 The Grumbling Farmers [□]	—	—	RUT XVII
13	Wt 399 How Sweet is the Horn	48	XLI	—
14	Wt 400 I Courted a Bonny Lass (with Calcott)	—	XV	—
15	Wt 401 If You Will Walk With Me	—	XXII	—
16	Wt 402 In the Days we went a-Gipsying	69	XXXIII	—
17	Wt 403 It was of Three Jolly Welshmen	179	XXIII	—
18	Wt 404 John Barleycorn	—	VII	—
19	Wt 360 The Jolly Red Herring (with Harvey)	167	XXII	—
20	Wt 405 The Jolly Shilling (with Keen)	90	XI	—
21	Wt 406 Little Brown Jug	212	XXXIII	—
	Lord Bateman	—	—	RUT XVII

	[Wt 407]	Mummers' Play]			
22	Wt 407	Rolling in the Dew	—	—	—
23	Wt 408	Old Woman Drinking her Tea	251	X	—
		On the Banks of Sweet Dundee	—	—	RUT XVII
		The Oyster Girl	—	—	RUT XVII
		Paddle Your Own Canoe	—	—	RUT XVII
24	Wt 409	Phoebe and her Dark-Eyed Sailor	—	XVI	—
	(Wt 379)	The Poor Wounded Soldier	239	XIII	—
		(attrib Barrett) †			
25	Wt 410	Preaching for Bacon (The Jolly Tinker)	278	IX	RUT V
		Pretty Susan, the Pride of Kildare ‡	—	—	Obituary Lectures
26	Wt 411	The Rover	—	XVIII	—
27	Wt 412	The Shepherd and the Hermit	—	XXVII	—
28	Wt 413	The Spotted Cow	71	IV	—
29	Wt 414	Sweet Peggy O	—	XXVII	—
30	Wt 415	Ye Banks and Braes	—	—	<i>Oxford Times</i>
31	Wt 416	You asked me to Sing	—	XXIV	—
		Woodman spare that tree	—	—	RUT XVII
		Political quib (has text)	—	—	RUT XVII

At least three of this number are specifiable compositions:

'WOODMAN SPARE THAT TREE' (originally 'The Old Oak Tree'): words by George Pope Morris, music by Henry Russell, 1837.

'IN THE DAYS WE WENT A-GIPSYING' (WT 402): music by Nathan James Sporle, words by 'Mr Ransford', c. 1840.

'PADDLE YOUR OWN CANOE': music by Harry Clifton, words by Fred French, 1866.

○ This survives in the song collection, one verse only, in the form of a cutting from *Round About the Upper Thames*, Chapter XVII (part 1), *Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard*, 7 August 1915, p. 2 (1922, p. 298): 'He [Iles] only sang one verse of the ditty just to see that his vocal machinery was in order.'

† This is not cross-referenced in the Index. It is unclear from Williams's note whether his text is a composite: 'Probably of eighteenth century date: I am sure it is old. A part of the song I obtained of Elijah Iles, of Inglesham, and had given up all hopes of securing the remainder, when I at length discovered it at Highworth. Communicated by "Tibby" Barrett, the old mat-maker.' ('The Poor Wounded Soldier', *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, p. 239.)

‡ Two forms of this song survive, one from Thomas King (WT 343), the other unattributed (MI 681), which could well be from Iles.



APPENDIX V

44 SONG INSTALMENTS IN THE WILTS & GLOUCESTERSHIRE STANDARD, 1915-16

PART	DATE	TOTAL	FSUT	BK	GL	OX	WT	OTHER
I & II	2 & 9 October 1915 p. 2	Introduction in two parts						
III	16 October 1915 p. 2	15	12	2	2	1	9	1 (lost)
IV	23 October 1915 p. 2	14	7	0	4	2	8	—
V	30 October 1915 p. 2	12	9	1	4	1	6	—
VI	6 November 1915 p. 2	9	7	0	1	4	4	—
VII	13 November 1915 p. 2	11	6	0	3	2	6	—
VIII	20 November 1915 p. 2	11	7	1	2	2	6	—
IX	27 November 1915 p. 2	12	5	0	1	2	9	—
X	4 December 1915 p. 2	13	7	0	2	1	7	3 (lost)
XI	25 December 1915 p. 2	12	6	0	2	4	6	—
XII	1 January 1916 p. 2	11	6	1	2	4	4	—
XIII	8 January 1916 p. 2	15	8	1	0	7	6	1 (lost)
XIV	15 January 1916 p. 2	12	5	1	2	5	4	—
XV	22 January 1916 p. 2	13	7	0	3	4	6	—
XVI	29 January 1916 p. 3	13	8	2	3	4	4	—
XVII	5 February 1916 p. 3	13	5	2	1	4	5	1 (lost)
XVIII	12 February 1916 p. 3	13	5	1	1	1	10	—
XIX	19 February 1916 p. 3	11	5	2	2	4	3	—
XX	26 February 1916 p. 3	12	2	0	5	2	5	—
XXI	4 March 1916 p. 3	8	4	2	0	2	4	—
XXII	11 March 1916 p. 3	16	9	1	3	6	6	—
XXIII	18 March 1916 p. 3	15	8	0	2	4	9	—
XXIV	25 March 1916 p. 3	13	5	0	1	5	7	—
XXV	1 April 1916 p. 3	13	7	1	1	8	3	—
XXVI	8 April 1916 p. 3	12	3	2	3	2	5	—
XXVII	15 April 1916 p. 3	8	1	0	1	1	6	—
XXVIII	22 April 1916 p. 3	12	8	0	2	2	7	1 (Mi)
XXIX	29 April 1916 p. 3	12	6	0	3	4	5	—
XXX	13 May 1916 p. 3	8	4	0	8	0	0	—
XXXI	20 May 1916 p. 3	11	5	0	11	0	0	—
XXXII	3 June 1916 p. 3	7	4	0	6	1	0	—
XXXIII	17 June 1916 p. 3	10	7	1	4	3	2	—
XXXIV	24 June 1916 p. 3	5	4	0	3	2	0	—
XXXV	1 July 1916 p. 3	8	5	0	2	6	0	—
XXXVI	8 July 1916 p. 3	7	3	0	4	3	0	—
XXXVII	15 July 1916 p. 3	8	6	1	4	2	1	—
XXXVIII	22 July 1916 p. 3	5	1	0	5	0	0	—
XXXIX	29 July 1916 p. 3	7	2	0	4	1	2	—
XL	5 August 1916 p. 3	7	6	2	2	0	3	—
XLI	12 August 1916 p. 3	11	8	0	4	0	4	3 (Mi)
XLII	19 August 1916 p. 3	7	5	0	2	0	4	1 (Mi)
XLIII	26 August 1916 p. 3	8	6	1	3	1	3	—
TOTALS		440	234	25	118	107	179	11
XLIV	2 September 1916 p. 3	Conclusion						

KEY — 'FSUT': selected for book publication (1923); 'Lost': no manuscript extant; 'Mi': catalogued as Miscellaneous.

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In that the capital contribution to bibliographical knowledge to be made by this study concerns writings by and about Alfred Williams, listing is focused on that restricted but far from nugatory corpus. The remainder of the bibliography is no more than a working selection from several vast literatures. What follows is, accordingly, divided into two parts, on differing principle. Part One (Alfred Williams) is classified-chronological, in four sections, made from the four combinations of primary | secondary, folk song | other:

- §1 PRIMARY SOURCES I : WRITINGS BY
ALFRED WILLIAMS ON SONG AND CUSTOM
- §2 PRIMARY SOURCES II : OTHER WRITINGS BY
ALFRED WILLIAMS
- §3 SECONDARY SOUTCES I : WRITINGS ABOUT
ALFRED WILLIAMS AS SONG COLLECTOR
- §4 SECONDARY SOUTCES II : WRITINGS ABOUT
ALFRED WILLIAMS GENERALLY

Inclusion in the list of secondary works is determined by special attention to Williams, however summary, excluding passing mentions.

Part Two is in the form of an alphabetical listing by author, without distinction of subject area. Some general works, such as Harker's *Fakesong*, are already cited in Part One §3.



WILLIAMS PRIMARY SOURCES I

WRITINGS BY ALFRED WILLIAMS ON SONG AND CUSTOM

Principally: Instalments of Williams's song collecting first appeared between October 1915 and August 1916 in the *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard* (Cirencester, Saturday), serialised in 43 parts as 'Folk Songs of the Upper Thames'. A selection of this material was subsequently published by Duckworth, as *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, 1923.

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Round About the Upper Thames,† 1922
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Tales from the East (Oxford), 1931

* Volumes of poetry, the title of the first of which is potentially misleading in the light of Williams's subsequent song collecting activities.

† Originally serialized in the *Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard*, January–August 1915

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Sardanapalus [a play in verse]
Dudley Sansum: A Poem
By the Fireside: A Poem
Boys of the Battery
Round the Cape to India
The Steam Hammer Shop: A Novel
Round About the Middle Thames, or The Banks of Isis

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