CHILD AND DGF AS SOURCES FOR THE BALLAD GENRE

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Scholars agree in defining the folk ballad as a short, dramatic poem building, though with omissions in the action, to a final catastrophe, which is concentrated upon one crucial scene and concerned with family and love affairs. In compiling collections, nevertheless, they do not insist on these features. The two representative ballad collections, Danmarks gamle Folkeviser and Child's The English and Scottish Popular Ballads, which exert the greatest influence upon ideas of scholars, contain an immense quantity of texts having nothing in common with the above definition. Some critics were even surprised at the rigor with which in my Researches I sifted out a number of ballads from the Child collection in a tentative attempt to arrive at a more exact concept of the traditional folk ballad.

At this point I can appeal for assistance to such distinguished English scholars as the two Chadwicks. Though their conception can be criticised in many aspects, it cannot be denied that they have contributed importantly to our knowledge of epic genres. Casting a cursory glance at their work in the English ballads, one sees that they distinguish "international" ballads from "native" English ones. By "native" they mean the ballads dealing with themes concerning the feud between the English and the Scots. Of these, and particularly of two famous specimens of the class, "Chevy Chase" (Child 162) and "The Battle of Otterburn" (Child 161), they say the following:

"Both in interest and in milieu these poems differ as much as possible from international ballads. Indeed they seem to us to have nothing in common with the latter except metre; and one cannot but think that the practice of including them under the same term is misleading." In contrast, they apply the term "international" to poems dealing with universal human problems--the so-called "timeless-nameless category"--which are indeed international in their distribution. Of the native British ballads, on the other hand, they state: "Native ballads...belong as a rule to the heroic and 'postheroic' categories." "The term heroic may also be applied to ballads which are concerned with outlaws, such as 'Adam Bell' (Child 116) and a large group of poems relating to Robin Hood (Child 117-154)." Of the minor epics termed "postheroic" of the late feudal times, they write the following: "The native ballads depict a very rough society and many brutal deeds; but they do not give the impression that one has left the world of reality. That is to say, they do not tell about stylized events of the "timeless-nameless category" but always about some detail of reality presented in an unstylized manner, together with its personal implications and local interests. The Chadwicks go even further than that, stating: "The poems of this period as a whole bear a rather striking resemblance to Yugoslav heroic poems of the time of the hajduci of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, after the Turkish conquest... The resemblance is doubtless due to the prevalence of similar political conditions along a border which was not effectively controlled." The Child numbers that they omitted from consideration largely coincide with those I too have deemed beyond the scope of balladry. (See the two lists in "Appendix A.") It is to be noted that they also hold what I have taken up as a criterion of traditional folk ballads--they are international in character, to be found in identical or similar form in the ballad traditions of several nations. But, as is to be seen in the two lists in "Appendix A," the Chadwicks' omissions are less numerous than mine. This is because they omitted only warlike and postheroic or mythic-heroic
themes; I have stricken, on the other hand, all romancelike and
märchenlike themes, as well as those presented in a swollen, de-
tailed epic style.

At this point, however, we have to ask to what extent this
method of selection and omission is justified. Recent collections,
reflecting modern views of ballad tradition, confirm that our pro-
cedure has been correct: in general, it appears from the large-
scale collection of folk traditions that the "international" or
traditional ballads are represented by the largest numbers of var-
ants which are based on conventional ballad themes or whose for-
matulation agrees with ballad style. On the other hand, the "myste-
rious" märchen themes, more particularly the texts reaching back to
the courtly epic and romance poetry--that is, poems of the "post
heroic" trend--occur only very sporadically and in widely varying
forms. Those very few variants in which Scottish stories of fair-
ies, witches, and bewitched heroines survive do not alter the gen-
eral picture. Their presence may well be attributed to the in-
fluence of broadsides and of Scots who migrated to the United
States.

Let us take a closer look at the English material from this
point of view. (In "Appendix C" I compiled four groups of Child
ballads arranged according to the quantity of their variants in the
living tradition.7) In the four groups, the numbers underlined are
those I do not regard as traditional ballads. In the first group,
comprised by ballads most widely found in oral tradition, there
are only two un-balladlike pieces: "The Farmer's Curst Wife" (Child
278) is a folk text and not a ballad, while "James Harris" (Child
243) is a thrilling broadside story about the return of a dead
lover. In the latter case we cannot speak of the survival of a
former ballad, but rather of the extensive influence of more recent
broadsides. (Such stories have come in the same way to be sung by
Eastern European peasants as well.) To be sure, most of the best
ballads appear in the above group--almost all the international
themes and all but one of those which are paralleled by Hungarian
types. In the second group comprised of ballads less known in oral
tradition, there are five which are un-balladlike. "The Broomfield
Hill" (Child 43) tells how the heroine lulls the young man into an
enchanted sleep, remaining a virgin even after the night they spent
together: in point of fact, this story belongs to the circle of
French "occasion manque" (such as "The Baffled Knight" [Child 112])
transformed according to Scottish taste. Thus it is not altogether
alien to balladry. "The Grey Cock" or "Saw you My Father" (Child
248) is of folklore origin, although the poem is, in my opinion,
a Scottish version of the morning song (aubade, Tagelied) rather
than a ballad.8 "Get up and Bar the Door" (Child 275) is an anec-
dote in verse, and "The Suffolk Miracle" (Child 272) and "Archie O
Cawfield" (Child 188) owe their popularity, in all likelihood, to
recent broadsides.

In the third group the questionable poems include some fairy
stories whose traces survive sporadically in Scottish tradition:
"Willie's Lady" (Child 6) and "King Orfeo" (Child 19) (the latter
is one single fragment of a few lines about Orpheus from the Shet-
lands). "King Henry" (Child 32) and "Kempy Kay" (Child 33) (solit-
ary pieces), "Sir Lionel" (Child 18) a radically abridged, realistic
survival of an old miraculous-phantastic romance, "Robin Hood's
Progress to Nottingham" (Child 139) and "Robin Hood Rescuing Three
Squires" (Child 140) (texts of the best Robin Hood adventures col-
lected in America, where they had been spread by broadsides).
Nonetheless, the numerical distribution speaks for itself: what I
have excluded from the category of traditional ballad has also been
excluded by the folk from its memory. If ballads are listed ac-
ording to their popularity (--that is, how many variants are col-
lected from living tradition--), then it can be seen very easily
that the least popular are the un-balladlike songs. Indeed, they
dominate in the category of recently collected texts with no evi-
dence of oral tradition behind them.

I must note here, that not all I have included in "Appendix A"
as bona fide ballads are indeed typical representatives of the genre.
It has to be on the basis of unequivocal criteria that we state
that one or another song is not a traditional ballad--that is, when
traits of a different genre prevail in it. There are many songs, especially among the higher-numbered Child items, which can be neither safely excluded nor safely included in the class of traditional ballads--indeed, tradition relegated most of these to oblivion. And it goes without saying that a large number of traditional ballads, as well, have been forgotten since the time of their first recording. It is therefore the ratio of traditional to non-traditional ballads in a given corpus that is of importance. The ratios of the component parts of a corpus should inform us about the relative significance of the two kinds of material within it. The two extreme groups--the most and least popular--are especially decisive: these coincide with what I regard as typical and least typical ballads.

The same discrimination has to be made when dealing with the material in DgF. Experts on the Danish collection will certainly accept the preliminary remark that not all texts passed down in the courtly collections from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are ballads: extreme differences in content, conception, style, and length exclude the possibility of their belonging to one single genre. In "Appendix B" I distinguished so-called ballads in DgF belonging to different genres or containing a preponderance of elements of a given genre in either content or style. To mention only some extreme cases, may I refer to "Tord af Havsgaard" (DgF 1) or "Germand Gladensvend" (DgF 33) in which the hero dresses himself in a feathered skin (a common feature of myths about shamanistic figures) and to such extended romances as "Ismar og Benedict" (DgF 474) and "Aslag Tordsen og skon Valborg" (DgF 475), the lengths of which vary considerably--as 105, 135, 183, and 200 stanzas. Can these be considered as short, dramatic ballads concentrated upon one crucial scene?

It is interesting to cast a glance at the content of "Terkel Trundesøn" (DgF 480): the hero is in love with the king's daughter; and the king, knowing this, sends the hero to Iceland, where the king there, having been robbed of nine tons of silver by the hero's father, bears a grudge; casts the hero into prison; and demands eight tons of gold in compensation for the robbery. The hero's comrades inform his relatives about the developments. In the meantime the heroine has been asked in marriage by another man, and a wedding is to take place. The king's daughter sends a maid instead of herself to the wedding bed. When the king offers gold to the bridegroom to compensate him for his daughter's forfeited virginity, the bridegroom refuses the offer, since he found the servant maid virgin. During the wedding the hero returns. The princess tells her lover that the wedding has been against her will but advises him to marry another girl, who resembles her. The hero agrees. In the end, the princess becomes a widow and the hero's wife dies in child birth; thus, the two loving hearts are finally united. It is easy to recognize the difference between this lengthy romance with its feudal spirit and the traditional folk ballad, which always treats universal human problems in the tragic light of social controversies (controversies, for instance, between the will of parents, reflecting material interests, and the will of young people, reflecting a wish for freedom in the choice of a love-partner).

Even though the different genres in DgF can be distinguished with a higher degree of certainty than in Child because the differences are more marked, we must nevertheless apply the same objective criteria here as we have done with the English ballads. The Danish collection itself gives us the necessary data. In "Appendix B" I have placed two figures in parentheses after each DgF number telling how many variants of that DgF number are known from oral tradition and how many from manuscripts of olden times. It cannot be by chance that, in the first subgroups of the DgF collection that I consider to be un-balladlike, only a few of the pieces there are paralleled by oral variants. At the same time, the bona fide traditional ballads--comprising mainly the international types--are represented by a vast number of oral variants, and few written ones (e.g., "Appendix B, 2d," DgF 241, 263, 271, 305, 306, 311, 369, 370, and 466).

The two criteria, namely, that of international dissemination
on the one hand and survival in oral tradition on the other, offer a reliable means of making genre distinctions within a corpus of folksongs. For example, in la-le of "Appendix B" no really international theme can be found. As regards the three underlined types (i.e., those I know in variants from more than one nation) to be seen there, "Kong Gørels Datter" (DGF 430) is a transformation of the theme of "Hagbard og Signe" (DGF 20) into an extensively long text with a different solution, known only from manuscript—its "international character" is due to the mediation of DGF 20 only. The other two underlined DGF numbers, "Engelens Budskab" (DGF 104) and "Synd og Bod" (DGF 533) derive from oral tradition, which is to say from the periphery of the ballad genre.

International ballad themes are encountered here and there in the transitional groups of both the balladlike and non-balladlike songs (mainly among the legends). But the bulk of the international themes in this collection is to be found in the last group comprised of traditional ballads. The proportion of oral variants and international types again supports our categories in "Appendix B" which were determined on the basis of content and style. A consideration of the oral variants in this collection, thus, offers a more reliable point of departure for the study of balladry than considering those texts preserved only in the written sources of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Naturally, this statement must not be rigidly interpreted. Even in the group best marked by the characteristic features of the ballad genre (i.e., "Appendix B, 2d"), we come across types which we know exclusively from manuscripts. Oral tradition does not preserve everything that once existed in it. Early records provide evidence of what every scholar is aware of—namely, that many ballads were forgotten during the course of time. It is the oral tradition, however, which preserved traditional folk ballads in greater quantity and truer style than the old manuscripts. And if we want to proceed in ballad research, we must use a stricter concept of this traditional genre; and, in doing so, we have to take into consideration the evidence given by the tradition itself.

### Appendix B

Danish ballads grouped according to their generic features

| DGF numbers followed in parentheses (first) by numbers of variants known from oral tradition, and (second) by those known from written sources or broadsides. Figures underlined indicate ballads extant in other national collections, and "f" means "recorded in the Faroe Islands."

1. **Un-balladlike pieces**

   a. Mythical epic-song features: DGF 1(33), 5(0,3), 7(2f,9), 8(0,2), 9(0,8), 10(2,8), 11(3,6), 12(1f,6), 14(0,2), 16(0,4), 17(0,3), 24(0,1), 25(0,1), 33(0,6), 34(0,2), 93(0,1), 259(0,21), 289(6,12), 297(9,9), 298(1,25), 478(0,1) Total 21 (14 exclusively from MS)

   b. Courtly epic ("postheroic"): DGF 6(0,5), 15(0,5), 21(0,5), 32(0,4), 69(0,13), 71(0,9), 72(0,10), 77(0,6), 78(0,13), 80(0,2), 115(0,4), 116(0,2), 118(0,1), 119(2f,0), 120(0,1), 122(0,1), 127(0,7), 128(1f,15), 131(0,6), 132(1,3), 133(0,2), 134(0,1), 135(0,3), 136(0,3), 137(0,2), 138(0,22), 139(0,2), 141(0,5), 142(0,2), 145(0,14), 147(0,4), 150(0,1), 151(0,2), 153(0,3), 154(0,7), 156(0,10), 157(0,3), 158(0,5), 159(0,8), 161(0,3), 163(0,2), 164(0,1), 165(0,2), 166(0,10), 167(0,8), 168(0,2), 169(0,1), 170(0,1), 171(0,5), 172(0,2), 173(0,3), 174(0,1), 176(0,4), 177(0,11), 179(0,1), 181(0,12), 188(0,1), 190(0,2), 191(0,2), 192(1,1), 194(0,12), 198(0,16), 205(0,15), 206(0,1), 207(0,1), 220(3,12), 221(0,13), 222(0,2), 225(0,20), 227(0,107), 228(0,11), 233(1 detail,13), 235(0,1), 236(0,1), 240(0,7), 246(1f,1), 261(0,1), 262(2f,12), 266(3,11), 268(0,11), 307(0,16), 309(0,1), 314(0,8), 315(0,2), 316(0,4), 317(0,2), 318(0,9), 325(4,12), 326(0,1), 327(0,1), 331(0,4), 332(0,16), 350(0,2), 351(0,2), 353(0,8), 360(7,107), 362(1,15), 374(0,11), 377(0,13), 383(0,25), 394(0,other,11), 398(0,9), 398(0,9), 398(0,6), 399(0,1), 400(0,2), 401(0,1), 409(0,1), 407(0,19), 408(0,1), 409(0,14), 417(0,8), 419(0,12), 420(0,1), 425(0,5), 428(0,19), 430(0,14), 432(0,21), 434(0,1), 452(0,13), 465(0,2), 469(0,2), 527(0,1), Total 130 (114 exclusively from MS)
c. Romance, novella: DfG 27(0.3), 28(0.1), 30(0.4), 31(0.3), 35(0.2), 36(0.4), 49G(0.10), 62(0.5), 63(0.1), 70(0.1), 86(0.15), 87(0.14), 88(0.3), 91(0.1), 92(0.1), 114(0.4), 116(0.8), 114(0.4), 155(0.8), 248(0.6), 251(0.1), 257(0.1), 259H(0.1), 290(0.6), 467(0.11), 468(1.11), 470(0.8), 471(0.14), 472(0.6), 474(0.6), 475(4.37), 476(0.15), 477(3.15), 479(0.10), 480(0.17), 485(0.11), 519(0.1).

Total 36 (31 exclusively from MS or broadside).

d. Märchen: DfG 22(0.2), 23(0.12), 41(0.5), 43(0.1), 44(0.12), 46(0.5), 57(0.12), 59(0.8), 60(0.9), 61(0.1), 64(0.2), 65(2.2), 66(0.4), 68(0.9), 285(0.1). Total 15 (14 exclusively from MS or broadside).

e. Saga, legend: DfG 50(0.3), 51(0.1), 96(1.2), 97(1.2), 98(1.1), 99(0.1), 100(2.7), 101(0.8), 102(3.6), 103(1.1), 104(8.2), 105(0.1), 106(0.1), 113(0.1), 158(0.1), 531(0.1), 532(11.1), 533(1.0), 534(2.0), 536(5.0), 537(11.1), 538(2.0). Total 22 (6 exclusively from MS, 5 from oral tradition).

f. Other un-ballad-like content: DfG 286(19.2), 385(3.0), 403(0.1), 440(0.2), 465(0.6), 454(1.1), 456(0.6), 460(3.4), 461(0.6), 462(0.1), 482(0.2), 484(11.1), 488(0.1), 498(0.15), 491(0.1), 492(0.1), 493(0.4), 494(0.2), 495(0.2), 497(0.8), 498(0.11), 499(0.8), 500(0.14), 501(0.3), 502(0.1), 513(0.9), 504(3.3), 505(0.1), 506(0.2), 507(0.3), 508(0.1), 509(0.4), 510(0.3), 512(0.1), 513(21.7), 514(6.0), 515(5.4), 516(0.1), 517(1.0), 520(0.1), 527 Tilling 11(1.0), 535(0.5). Total 42 (31 exclusively from MS or broadside, 6 from oral tradition).

g. Formally ballad-like with atypical content: DfG 21(2.4), 18(0.6), 26(1.6), 29(4.7), 38(18.2), 42(0.2), 45(0.1), 48(3.1), 52(0.7), 79(0.6), 84(3.10), 88(0.12), 90(1.3), 152(1.5), 162(0.27), 175(30.1), 184(4.12 Tragic only the traditional ones), 185(0.1), 186(25.3), 187(0.1), 189(5.6), 192(0.1), 223(1.7), 230(0.7), 244(0.6), 245(6.0), 264(0.2), 300(0.1), 319(0.10), 324(0.4), 329(0.10), 330(0.2), 336(0.0), 352(0.1), 373(0.1), 386(7.0), 429(0.12).

Total 37 (20 exclusively from MS or broadside).

h. Ballad-like content presented in un-ballad-like style: DfG 4(0.4), 19(0.4), 35(0.6), 40(0.7), 67(0.0), 73(0.10), 74(0.11), 257(0.12), 76(5.1), 116(2.10), 180(0.2), 180(0.16), 182(1.13), 187(0.2), 202(0.1), 203(0.4), 204(0.2), 212(0.7), 219(0.1), 269(0.3), 322(1.0), 363(0.11), 364(0.3), 365(4+12), 366(0.8), 388(0.2), 392(1.6), 395(0.5), 413(0.9), 447(0.7), 453(0.10), 466(4.11), 457(9.4), 463(0.5), 464(1+10), 481(24+32), 483(0.13), 487(0.6), 496(3.17), 511(2.6). Total 40 (27 exclusively from MS, 2 from oral tradition).

Grand Total: 343 (259 from MS exclusively, 71 from MS and oral tradition as well, 13 from oral tradition only).

2. Pieces with more or less ballad character

a. Ballads with fairy, Märchen and legend elements: DfG 37(6.6), 42(6.2), 58(1.0), 91(2.0), 93(23.8), 94(1.1), 95(10.0), 107(3.3), 108(0.14), 109(4.0), 110(1.0), 361(1.0), 383(0.7), 522(1.0), 525(2.0), 526(3.0), 527(63.0), 528(2.0), 529(6.0), 530(1.0).

Total 20 (2 exclusively from MS, 11 from oral tradition).
Appendix C

Child-numbers in recent tradition

Underlined numbers are considered by the author to be un-balladlike pieces.


NOTES


3. Ibid., p. 684.

4. Ibid., p. 686.

5. Ibid., p. 604.

6. Ibid., p. 687.


8. Coffin, British Traditional Ballad, p. 140, expresses the opposite view.