



Bold, Valentina (2012) Review of: M.E. Brown, Child's Unfinished Masterpiece: P. Buchan and M. Shoolbraid, The High-Kilted Muse: P. Buchan and I. Spring, Secret Songs of Silence. Folk Music Journal, 10 (2). ISSN 0531-9684

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Deposited on: 5 March 2014

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**Mary Ellen Brown *Child's Unfinished Masterpiece. The English and Scottish Popular Ballads.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010; Peter Buchan and Murray Shoolbraid *The High-Kilted Muse. Peter Buchan and his Secret Songs of Silence* Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010; Peter Buchan and Ian Spring *Secret Songs of Silence.* Edinburgh: Hog's Back, 2010.**

These three books form an intriguing set. The first is a detailed treatment of the path to publication of one of the best known collections of a nationally-focussed genre. The others contain the work of a regional collector focussed on clandestine songs which he was unable to sell. Taken together, they offer insights into the historiography of song, and the psychology of its collectors.

*Child's Unfinished Masterpiece* sheds new light on the man and his dream of the 'valorization of the ballad, as coeval with received canonical poetry' (79). Brown presents Child with empathy and understanding: the relatively humble beginnings of the sailmaker's son, in Boston's North End; the rapid rise of the clever boy through academia; the polishing of intellectual *patina* provided by a lengthy European tour—with fascinating asides such as the week he spent having daily philological instruction with Jacob Grimm (20); the demands of marriage to a beloved invalid and the happiness of family life with children who might "'love Scotch songs nearly as much as he does'" (37). As Professor, first of Rhetoric and Oratory, then of Literature, at Harvard, Child worked hard, conducted charitable work and served on various committees (library service, helpfully, facilitated ballad-related purchases). Child's on the whole was a quiet life, filled with ballads, roses, good cigars and light operetta; ballads, arguably, supplied the drama.

Brown goes far beyond literary biography, or indeed the 'text' of Child's life, though, to present a contextualised account of his international circle: 'a virtual community, epistemologically constituted'; 'a kind of social authorship' (5). The *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1882-1898) was a joint—albeit unacknowledged—enterprise, where *amanuenses* worked for the greater good, not personal acclaim. His work was at the cutting edge of then-modern scholarship, using proto 'social media' through his infamous *Notes and Queries* appeal (given here, in full, as an appendix, along with his fascinating appeal to College Students for texts); taking time to consider what texts were 'authentic', according to his own, somewhat narrow, criteria. For his time, too, Child worked in a radical way, aiming to present 'authentic texts, unedited, as they were presumed to exist in oral tradition' (91). With an unusual awareness of the importance of context, Child's *magnum opus* drew

on the massed knowledge of song enthusiasts prepared to translate, copy, seek out manuscripts and even, in his right-hand man William Macmath's case, to forego summer holidays and forgive what, most charitably, can be seen as appallingly bad manners on at least one occasion.

In scholarship, as in life, Child picked his agenda, and his *coterie*, and stuck with them, to the exclusion of others. Even after his death, the network remained: there is a wonderful anecdote of a potential reviewer of the *ESPB* for *The Nation* whose (admittedly irritating) letter to Child's widow was simply passed over to Kittredge, who was able to have him replaced by Francis B. Gummere (218). As Brown calmly observes, 'Child's special students were determined to ensure that reviews were positive and appropriate' (219). Testimonies from friends show a man capable of generating great loyalty. Henry James remembered Child as "'vivid [...] I have not a memory of him that is not some intensely characteristic savour and colour'". Francis Gummere recalled a "'glorious humanity and kindness and manliness'" (9).

The link to Peter Buchan (who Child reviled as a collector) is, admittedly, tenuous. However, just as Brown mixes material from Scotland (particularly Broughton House, Kirkcudbright) with American sources, the other two books are anchored in the manuscript collections at Harvard, standing testimony to Brown's claim that Child and his followers made this, 'the central headquarters for the study of the ballad and folksong' (227). It is unfortunate both Buchan editions should be published simultaneously. It is impossible to privilege one. The Shoolbraid will appeal to the pedantic (of which I count myself). It includes a great deal of textual paraphernalia: contextual considerations of the bawdy, Buchan as editor, the manuscript and songs; related material, such as a commentary, glossary, table of tale types and motifs, and detailed bibliography. The manuscript is presented as it stands, with Buchan's page numbering, and detailed notes. Spring's edition is scholarly but different. It is prefaced with a useful introduction, covering similar ground to Shoolbraid but, arguably, more accessibly. The songs are categorised thematically—'Strange Tales'; 'Alarms and Excursions', 'Metaphorical & Love Songs'—and through their medium of generation: 'Broad-sides &c'. Useful notes follow each item, tracing its provenance, alerting readers to parallel and similar items, and cross-referencing; there is, too, a helpful bibliography. Spring's strength is in looking at the texts as a group; he is alert, too, to shifting perspectives on Buchan, from the criticisms of contemporaries to the twentieth century, when allowances were made for period-specific editorial

practices; as David Buchan observed, while ‘“his ekes and splicing were probably not of very high quality”’ he was no worse than others (qtd Spring 9).

Both volumes, in short, are strong, well presented, and illuminating. The material, as a whole, bears similarities (including specific items, like ‘Daintie Davie’) to the *Merry Muses of Caledonia*, associated with Burns and republished in 2009 by Luath (I edited this, with the 1959 edition by Smith, Barke and Ferguson at its heart). My one reservation is the soberness in relation to a genre which, from its inception, is meant to be taken (no pun intended) as tongue in cheek. I hope Shoolbraid is in the spirit of the genre in his remark,, ‘it is a great pity that Buchan chose to swell out his thin volume with erotica and near-erotica of a blatantly English cast, when he might well have made a desirable anthology of native bawdry—which was at that time all around him’ (21). Yet even when the songs have a local cast they are about (often comic) types, and rooted in *double-entendre*, rather than, I would suggest, locatable individual. ‘The Soutter o’ New Deer’, for instance celebrates, ‘How the jolly soutter did behave / Wi’ his brave turnin’ tree’. (Shoolbraid 57-59). Some of the strongest pieces, too, are humorous rather than bawdy, like ‘The Haggis o’ Dunbar’: ‘For to mak’t he haggis fou’, / [...] They pat in a pund o’ woo’; ‘And for to mak the haggis fat, / [...] They pat in a scabbit cat’ (Shoolbraid 74). Many are not erotic at all, such as ‘The Farto-Turdoniad: A Ballad’ by James Tytler.

While Brown’s is undoubtedly the most important of these three, the two Buchan volumes will allow the appreciation of a rather underknown collector and still underappreciated types of song. For these reasons, they are to be recommended, and would make extremely useful purchases both for individual enthusiasts of song and (to come back to Child) academic libraries.

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