Oral Cultures and Traditions of Social Conflict: An Introduction to Sources and Approaches

Historians have thought and written a lot about 'memory' in recent decades. With the exception of oral historians, their focus has been less on the mental processes through which individual experiences are processed in the brain than on 'social' or 'collective memory'.[1] Social memory may affect individuals but, in order to be available to scholars, it must be actualized in rites and ceremonies, recorded in books and on monuments, stored in museums and theme parks. There is a dialogue between what we, as individuals remember and these representations of the past, even when the latter reenacts or commemorates events that we ourselves have experienced. However, 'social memory' encompasses also those things which we have not experienced, so it is quite legitimate to talk about the 'social memory' of the First World War despite the fact that, except for a handful of centenarians, it now lies beyond the reach of individual memory. Of course readers of this chapter, like its authors, may have known people who fought in the Great War; they may have, like us, heard their personal reminiscences, and they may, like us, attempt to pass on what they have learned from these testaments. Scholars increasingly use the term 'post-memory' for these second or third hand accounts which are nonetheless highly influential on subsequent generations.[2] However, post-memory primarily occurs within families: we tell these stories because they involve people we knew or to whom we had a connection. What term should we use when the story continues to be passed on, but no one remembers where it came from and where no personal connection is involved?

We want to make the case for the word 'tradition'; indeed we prefer it to terms such as 'social memory' and 'collective memory'. In many cases the terms are interchangeable. Like 'social memory', tradition is malleable, adaptive to circumstances and responsive to external pressures. Like memory, tradition is functional, it serves a purpose for those who maintain and promulgate it. But tradition necessarily implies something that is handed on, and in that process it has to be externalized. What was in one mind has to be rendered into a form that is simultaneously both communicable to another, and is rememberable by that other. The metaphorical use of the word 'memory' for practices of commemoration, we observe, creates confusion between mental processes that are intrinsically individual and social processes that by definition are not.

We also prefer the word tradition because we want to question one of the founding principles of memory scholarship. Pierre Nora stated in the introduction to his monumental *Lieux de mémoire* that he turned to the 'sites' of memory, the locations where memory was institutionalized, 'because there are no longer any *milieux de memoire*, settings in which memory is a real part of everyday experience'.[3] However, the editors' researches have brought them into contact with communities in which memory of sometimes very distant events does appear to remain part of everyday experience, maintained through oral tradition. Oral traditions are often buttressed by something external: a physical mark in the landscape, a preserved relic, a recurring moment in the ritual year… but they are not reliant on the institutional framework of Nora's 'lieux de

[1] James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford, 1992).
[2] Marianne Hirsch, 'Family Pictures: Maus, Mourning, and Post-Memory', *Discourse* 15 (1992/3), pp. 3-29.
[3] Pierre Nora (ed.), *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past (Vol. I: Conflicts and Divisions)* (New York, 1996), p. 1.

mémoire'. This observation may simply reflect a difference of method: the fieldworker (anthropologist, ethnomusicologist, folklorist…) versus the library scholar. But Nora's statement was also informed by a cultural and political pessimism which we do not share.

Historians may be reluctant to embrace the word 'tradition' because in recent years it has so frequently appeared in historiographical literature prefaced by the word 'invented'. The antiquarians and folklorists, who collected the traditions on which several of the chapters in this volume rely, stand accused of shaping (in some cases making up) their material to further their own ideological projects in exactly the same way as the churches, political parties and statesmen who loom larger in Hobsbawm's and Ranger's original survey of 'the invention of tradition'.[4] And it is undeniable that all these agents have influenced the circulation and redeployment of oral traditions. Hobsbawm drew a distinction between real and 'invented' traditions, and while he did not explain the difference, he implied that the latter had grown alongside the reach of duplicable media such as print. Oral traditions, then, would seem to be more authentic. However, while oral traditions may be more important to subaltern groups, they must also be created, nurtured, propagated and put to use in exactly the same way that 'invented traditions' are deployed. The distinction is not really useful, and the stigma generated by the term 'invented' obscures more than it reveals.

However, we also observe that attempts to direct tradition usually depend on the existence of a prepared ground. There are, in the words of Carolyn Hamilton, 'limits to invention'.[5] It is a lot easier to reanimate the reputations of heroes if there are already traditions in circulation concerning them, and if the 'invented' acts are concordant with what is already told and believed about their lives and acts. And even in those cases where an imposed, external model becomes the best known version of the hero's story, extensive fieldwork may reveal that, in private, alternative traditions continue to be passed on. It is a characteristic of oral traditions that they exist in diverse forms: usually no one variant dominates and all reveal something either about the events and persons they invoke or the communities in which they circulate.

Let us take as an example the case of Louis Mandrin, a bandit and smuggler who travelled between Switzerland, Savoy and Dauphiné before being captured in 1755. The hunt for Mandrin, his arrest and execution, were matters of public interest and excitement at the time. His reputation was bolstered by any number of newspaper accounts, almanacs, popular prints and broadside ballads that were spread not only across France but much of Europe.[6] His notoriety survived his decease and continues to this day, not least thanks to many films and a song recorded by several stars of the French music scene and which is still popular with youth organisations. Local authorities have

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[4] Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983).

[5] Carolyn Hamilton in *Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention* (Cambridge MA, 1998).

[6] Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, 'Images et représentations sociales de la criminalité au XVIIIe siècle: l'exemple de Mandrin', *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine* 26 (1979): 345-64; Sylvie Mouysset, 'Mandrin au miroir des écrits de son temps: intrépide contrebandier ou brigand scélérat?', in Valérie Sottocasa (ed.), *Les brigands: Criminalité et protestation politique (1750-1850)* (Rennes, 2013), pp. 19-34; Anne-Marie Mercier-Faivre, 'Le feuilleton Mandrin dans la Gazette d'Amsterdam', in Lise Andriès (ed.), *Cartouche, Mandrin et autres brigands du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 2010), pp. 293-315.

tried to cash in on tourists' interests in the places associated with Mandrin's exploits and one can readily purchase Mandrin souvenirs and popular retellings of his life.[7] If we thought the phrase useful we might term all this 'invented tradition'. But in addition to these ubiquitous memorials one can also discover traces of oral traditions that were maintained over centuries and which were only recorded in the twentieth century. Some are local to Mandrin's main zones of activity, such as Savoy, but others have travelled much more widely, through oral tradition. For instance, a sung dialogue between Mandrin and another infamous bandit Cartouche, which probably originated in a broadside printed in France in 1755, has been recorded dozens of times in the twentieth century from singers in Québec, Ontario and New-Brunswick.[8] In the process of diffusion and repetition, generations of singers have reshaped the material so that it makes sense in its new context, while simultaneously maintaining fidelity to the tradition. This example appears to us to fit the description of 'milieux de mémoire', whose continuing force is often underestimated by historians absorbed by the approved, institutionalized and endlessly reproduced media representations that dominate the public space. But even in this case one cannot really divide material into 'invented' and 'authentic' traditions. The cult surrounding Mandrin draws on, and in turn reinvigorates, those orally performed traditions, even when they offer an alternative vision of their 'hero'. It is just that the latter are much harder to find, and therefore receive less notice.

The purpose of this book is to draw attention to oral traditions concerning early modern rebellions. We acknowledge that they can be difficult to work with, but they are not unimportant both as historical documents and as cultural models influencing the behaviour of the communities in which they continue to circulate.

Recovering Orality in Revolt: The Problem of Sources

Historians of early modern revolts face a conundrum: they want to investigate rebels' motivations, their practices and organisation, but are confronted by the fact that the insurgents' culture was primarily an oral one, which found expression in a repertoire of prophecies, ballads, oaths, jokes and curses... uttered in the moment and too seldom recorded at the time. The written was often the appanage of the forces of order, and so rebellion took the form of burning written documents such as feudal titles and tax rolls. 'Away, burn all the records of the realm: my mouth shall be the parliament of England', said Jack Cade, the leader of the Kentish rebellion of 1450, at least according to Shakespeare.[9] This may have been meant to caricature plebeian rebels as illiterate and brutish, and it would be an exaggeration to interpret all such destruction as motivated by a superstitious distrust of literacy itself.[10] Nonetheless insurgent crowds understood that, as a tool, writing did not necessarily serve them as well as their opponents. Subaltern and repressed social groups nurtured the arts of oral communication because they had unequal

[7] Valérie Huss (ed.), *Louis Mandrin: Malfaiteur ou bandit au grand cœur?* (Grenoble, 2005).
[8] 36 recordings are listed in Conrad Laforte, *Catalogue de la chanson folklorique française, III. Chansons en forme de dialogue* (Québec, 1982), 91-92.
[9] William Shakespeare, *Henry VI*, *Part 2*, Act 4, Scene 7 (written c. 1592).
[10] Roger Chartier, 'Jack Cade, The Skin of a Dead Lamb, and the Hatred for Writing', *Shakespeare Studies* 34 (2006): 77-90.

access to other forms of expression.[11] Orality was of practical benefit to the subordinate; for example it came with built-in deniability (who can prove what was said? in an English court of law such evidence would be dismissed as 'hearsay'). Preference for a largely oral language over one with a recognized written from could even become a badge of social identity, most obviously the case in the cants, argots, backslangs and other languages of dissemblance.[12]

Of all oral traditional genres, song is perhaps the most important to the creation and maintenance of social groups that wish to contest the powers that be. As the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* put it in 1773, 'seditious and designing men never fail to spread ballads among the people, with a view to gain them over to their side.'[13] No doubt Israeli, Sri Lankan and Turkish authorities would say something similar today about the role of song in the expression of insurgent identities in occupied Palestine, Tamil Eelam and Northern Kurdistan.[14] Song is one of the most declamatory of oral traditional genres, with the power to stir strong emotions. Collective and public singing is associated with moments of political unrest, both now and in the past. The first person voice used in many songs collapses the distinction between the individual and crowd, and between the present performers, the persons from whom they learnt the text, and the characters presented. This makes song an ideal vehicle for the declaration of a social identity continuous from the past to the present. It is not surprising, therefore, that the majority of the chapters in this volume take songs as their prime source.

The seditious power of song is confirmed by the authorities' attempts to restrict what was being sung on the streets, in the bars and in the marketplaces. In December 1815 the French Minister of Police, Élie-Louis Decazes, wrote to all French prefects urging them to use their authority against the army of pedlars that criss-crossed the country, and specifying in particular the 'sellers of chapbooks, almanacs and songs: these little works have always had a great influence on the people and the collection of all popular songs would be a fairly accurate representation of the changing state of public opinion.'[15] The related notions that songs exercised a hold on the popular classes and that therefore they had to be controlled, can be found repeated by municipal, clerical and national authorities

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[11] Ajay Skaria, 'Writing, Orality and Power in the Dangs, Western India, 1800s-1920s', in Dipesh Chakrabarty and Shahid Amin (eds), *Subaltern Studies IX* (New Delhi, 1996), pp. 13-58.

[12] Lee Beier, 'Anti-language or Jargon? Canting in the English Underworld in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', in Peter Burke and Roy Porter (eds), *Language and Jargons: Contributions to a Social History of Language* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 67-75.

[13] William Smellie, 'Ballad', *Encyclopaedia Britannica, or, A Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* (London, 1773), vol. 1, p. 153.

[14] See, for example: Moshe Bensimon, 'The Sociological Role of Collective Singing during Intense Moments of Protest: The Disengagement from the Gaza Strip', *Sociology* 46 (2012): 241-57; Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam, 'And Heroes Die: Poetry of the Tamil Liberation Movement in Northern Sri Lanka', *Journal of South Asian Studies* 28 (2005): 112-53; Stephen Blum and Amir Hassanpour, '"The Morning of Freedom Rose Up": Kurdish Popular Song and the Exigencies of Cultural Survival', *Popular Music* 15(1996): 327-43; and Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 1998).

[15] Circulaire, Ministre de la police générale, 15 décembre, 1815: 'Surveillance des colporteurs', cited in Jacqueline Lesueur, 'La chanson populaire et les marchands de chansons dans les Vosges au siècle dernier', *Bulletin de la Société Philomatique Vosgienne* 73 (1970): 101.

in many parts of Europe from the sixteenth century onwards.[16] Such legislation might be aimed at the object of commerce – a printed sheet – but just as often it was directed at the performance, because governments were frightened by the reach and effect of such oral flows of opinion.[17] Rather less well known are governments' attempts to reshape oral culture, such as the not altogether successful Loyalist ballad campaign in Britain during the Napoleonic Wars.[18]

More or less hysterical official denunciations of songs are a backhanded acknowledgement of the inflammatory effect of oral genres. However, exercising control did not necessarily require recording precisely what was sung or said. Oral communications may have been vital to the practice of revolt, but for the historian they are often out of reach. Historians of early modern rebellion are obliged to rely on written testimonies, frequently the testimonies generated through processes of repression. These may record rebels' words, albeit mediated, but because in this context speech could kill, one is as likely to encounter silences and evasions, not to mention cultural mistranslations. And just as governments attempted to repress seditious speech, so they acted to prevent seditious traditions growing up around rebellions, or at least they encouraged populations to remember exemplary punishments but not the causes and justifications of revolt. In Italy and the Holy Roman Empire, it was a fairly common practice to pull down the houses of executed rebels so that they could not become the centre of a memory cult.[19] Words and acts that might serve as carriers of rebellious memories were changed or forbidden: 'highland garb' was proscribed after the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, while the Yaik Cossacks who had followed Pugachev in 1773-4 were renamed the Ural Cossacks by Imperial decree in 1775. A decisive break with the past was intended. Imposed silences surround much more recent events: the king of Romania ordered the destruction of all relevant documents after the bloody suppression of the Peasants' Revolt of 1907, though this seems less like an example of *damnatio memoriae* than an attempt to protect politicians from the repercussions if there were to be a change of government.[20]

Faced with these voids in the sources, historians have become adept at 'oblique approaches', in Peter Burke's phrase.[21] They have learnt to 'read against the grain' of the official records. If they do not have the words, then they may be able to decode the repertoire of symbols, or 'clues' to use the term current in microhistory, revealed by rebels' ritual actions.[22] Historians have teased out meanings from such opaque gestures

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[16] See, for example, Rosa Salzberg and Massimo Rospocher, 'Street Singers in Italian Renaissance Urban Culture and Communication', *Cultural and Social History* 9 (2012): 9-26; and Jean-François Botrel, 'Les aveugles colporteurs d'imprimés en Espagne', *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez* 9 (1973): 417-82.
[17] Hence the repeated attempts of the authorities in eighteenth-century Paris and Madrid to restrict street singers to the recitation of an approved, published text, rather than extempore performances.
[18] Oskar Cox Jensen, *Napoleon and British Song, 1797-1822* (Basingstoke, 2015).
[19] Daniel Bellingradt, 'Organizing Public Opinion in a Resonating Box: The Gülich Rebellion in Early Modern Cologne, 1680-1686', *Urban History* 39 (2012): 553-570.
[20] Marin Badea and Ion Ilinciociu (eds), *The Great Romanian Peasant Revolt of 1907* (Bucharest, 1991).
[21] Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot: 1994, 1srt éd. 1978), p. 77.
[22] Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, 1965); E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (London, 1991).

as the women's clothing worn by the Irish Whiteboys,[23] the followers of Ned Ludd,[24] the 'Hosts of Rebecca'[25] and the 'Demoiselles' of the Ariège[26] when effecting their attacks. If what people said has been lost, the record of what they did, their choice of targets, their rites of ridicule and hurt, implicitly conveyed their aims and purposes, perhaps even an ideology.

What historians have not done, at least not so frequently and with many more caveats, is to cite the words of rebels preserved in oral tradition. This is not an oversight; it is a conscious rejection of the truth-value of such sources. Early nineteenth-century historians such as Augustin Thierry and Jules Michelet followed the philosopher Johann Herder in arguing that 'songs are the archive of the people'. However, the academic discipline of history in France was founded on a repudiation of its romantic forerunners' methods and enthusiasms.[27] In their *Introduction aux études historiques*, a manifesto for 'methodological history' and a guide to generations of French research students, Charles Seignobos and Charles-Victor Langlois argued that 'writing fixes a statement and assures its faithful transmission: whereas an oral statement is prone to deformation, even in the memory of a contemporary observer, by mixing with other impressions. When passed orally via intermediaries, the statement is further deformed with each transmission, and as these changes occur for a variety of different reasons, it is impossible either to measure or correct such distortions. Oral tradition is, by its very nature, a process of alteration, and therefore fully-fledged sciences can only accept written transmission'.[28]

The same disapproval of oral traditions held for a long time in Anglophone historiography: Leopold von Ranke's statement that the art of writing is the basis of historical knowledge became an accepted shibboleth in the professionalization of the historical discipline.[29] Academics trained in a Rankean school were taught to value contemporary archives above all later records, especially over elusive and malleable oral records. In a book dealing with the oral traditions surrounding rebellions, we cannot resist pointing out that Ranke was not himself dogmatic on the subject of oral sources: one of his earliest works, a history of the Serbian Revolt of 1804-15 against the Ottomans, was partly based on the songs supplied by his then neighbour in Vienna, the Serbian

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[23] Michael Beames, *Peasants and Power: The Whiteboy Movements and their Control in Pre-Famine Ireland* (Brighton, 1983).

[24] Norman Simms, 'Ned Ludd's Mummers Play', *Folklore* 89 (1978): 166-78.

[25] D.J.V Jones, *Rebecca's Children: A Study of Rural Society, Crime and Protest* (Oxford, 1989).

[26] Peter Sahlins, *Forest Rites: The War of the Demoiselles in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge MA, 1994).

[27] Johann Gottfried Herder, 'Von Aehnlichkeit der mittlern englischen und deutschen Dichtkunst, nebst Verschiedem, das daraus folget', *Deutsches Museum* 2 (1777), p. 430. The full quote is 'Alle unpolizirte Völker singen und handeln; was sie handeln, singen sie und singen Abhandlung. Ihre Gesänge sind das Archiv des Volks, der Schaz ihrer Wissenschaft und Religion, ihrer Theogonie und Kosmogonien der Thaten ihrer Väter und der Begebenheiten ihrer Geschichte, Abdruck ihres Herzens, Bild ihres häuslichen Lebens in Freude und Leid, beym Brautbett und Grabe.' For romantic historians' enthusiasm for oral tradition see Charles Rearick, *Beyond the Enlightenment: Historians and Folklore in Nineteenth-Century France* (Bloomington, 1974).

[28] Charles Langlois et Charles-Victor Seignobos, *Introduction aux études historiques* (Paris, 1898), p. 151.

[29] Joseph Mali, *Mythistory: The Making of a Modern Historiography* (Chicago, 2003), p. 97. Ranke was making a comparison with prehistoric periods when he made this statement.

philologist, folklorist and ballad collector Vuk Karadžić.[30] We acknowledge that, in the words of Peter Burke, Ranke was 'more complicated than the symbol he became': nonetheless that symbol exerted, and continues to exert, a considerable hold over the historical profession.[31]

The project on which this volume is based aims to re-evaluate oral traditions as sources for early modern rebellions. Oral culture may be protean by the standards of the documentary historian, but it is neither completely vaporous nor, in terms of archives, insubstantial. Oral cultures rely on traditions: aesthetic traditions which shape genre expectations; traditions of practice that determine who can speak to whom, and where and when; and traditions in terms of the embodiment of historical knowledge. These traditions may permit mutation but within limits, which means that as vehicles of information over long periods they have their value. Events that happened generations in the past were recapitulated through oral performance in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and fortunately antiquarians, folklorists, musicologists and ethnologists were then on hand to record them. Scholars have compared these oral traditions with contemporary written records and found that they corroborate each other. Sometimes oral traditions have provided the only detailed account for events that are unexplained in the written record, while for other better-known events they can offer alternative interpretations.[32]

When we planned this volume we speculated that this might be especially true for moments of violent social confrontation, not least because in the early, Romantic, phase of folklore collecting ballads about rebels and bandits, klephts and haiduks, were particularly prized. Claude Fauriel's 1824 *Chants populaires de la Grèce moderne* was an inspiration and model for other collectors for whom oral traditions were, in effect, the basis for the cultural revival of oppressed peoples.[33] Without endorsing such nationalist projects, it seemed at least plausible that such collections might contain examples of historical memories and traditions concerning rebellions, relayed through oral culture, and that these could help to resolve the source conundrum outlined above.

This ambition was encouraged by the experience of anthropologists and historians working in extra-European environments. From New Caledonia[34] in the east to Alaska[35] in the west, they have found communities that maintained a historical memory of conflict

[30] Leopold Ranke, *Die serbische Revolution. Aus serbischen Papieren und Mittheilungen* (Hamburg, 1829). On Vuk's contribution to Ranke's work, and the role of oral sources, see Duncan Wilson, *The Life and Times of Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, 1787-1864: Literacy, Literature and National Independence in Serbia* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 277-9.
[31] Peter Burke, 'Ranke the Reactionary', *Syracuse Scholar* 9 (1988): 29.
[32] For some particularly well documented cases see Éva Guillorel, *La complainte et la plainte. Chanson, justice, cultures en Bretagne (XVIe-XVIIIe siècles)* (Rennes, 2010), and Edward D. Ives, *The Bonny Earl of Murray: The Man, The Murder, The Ballad* (Urbana, 1997).
[33] See Michael Herzfeld, *Ours Once More: Folklore, Ideology, and the Making of Modern Greece* (Austin TX, 1982) and Tim Baycroft and David Hopkin (eds) *Folklore and Nationalism in Europe in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Leiden, 2012).
[34] Alban Bensa, Kacué Yvon Goromoedo and Adrian Muckle, *Les sanglots de l'aigle pêcheur: Nouvelle-Calédonie, la guerre kanak de 1917* (Toulouse, 2015).
[35] Nora Marks Dauenhauer, Richard Dauenhauer and Lydia T. Black (eds) *Anóoshi Lingít Aaní Ká: Russians in Tlingit America. The Battles of Sitka, 1802 and 1804* (Seattle, 2008)

with colonizers, expressed through oral traditions as well as other non-literary practices such as dance.[36] In some cases these amounted to nothing less than a subaltern history of invasion and resistance. One might argue not just a subaltern history but a subaltern historiography, with different schools of interpretation, apprenticeships in the acquisition of historical knowledge, and practices of comparison between different narrations of the same events in order that they could be tested and corrected.[37] The very existence of the field of ethno-history demonstrates that neither written texts nor literacy as a skill were necessary to perpetuate a historical sensibility. As historians have construed the behaviour of insurgents with help from folklore and anthropology, we planned to apply expertise from these disciplines to oral traditions concerning revolts.

We do not, of course, propose to reify the distinctions between oral and written forms of communication. Even in the case of those extra-European peoples whose languages, and therefore their historical traditions, had no written form until the arrival of missionaries and colonial administrators, knowledge of those traditions beyond the original audiences has usually relied on interaction with literate outsiders — outsiders in a position of power and an ability to communicate, if not impose, their own version of historical events. The relationship of indigenous oral traditions to imported forms of knowledge, and their relative epistemological value, is at the heart of ongoing acrimonious debates such as the Australian History Wars.[38] And comparisons between Aboriginal Australia and early modern Europe can only go so far. In most of the cases discussed in the chapters that follow, the authors have not heard the traditions narrated directly; rather they are reliant on a written transcription of an oral performance that occurred decades or even centuries ago; such is the case with the political songs of Flemish towns studied by Jan Dumolyn and Jelle Haemers, or the Swiss traditions surrounding William Tell discussed by Marc Lerner. That transcription may have been only one of many interactions between written, spoken and other communicative mechanisms in the shaping of that tradition, as Erika Kuijpers and Judith Pollmann demonstrate in their chapter on Dutch narratives concerning iconoclastic assaults. Early modern Europeans often spoke a different language from the official language of the state or the vernacular of their lords, perhaps a language that had no generally accepted written form, but they lived in a society where written communication was a part of their existence.

Romantics of the nineteenth century conceived of oral tradition as a pristine source of new facts, uncontaminated by other forms of historical knowledge. Thus it might provide the material for an alternative, democratic history imagined by Jules Michelet.[39] Our less grandiose expectation was to find some hitherto neglected sources which could supply, if not an alternative history, then at least a supplementary history, or a corrective to existing narratives, and one which might bring to the fore those social groups who have less ability to shape official accounts. This hope seemed justified not only by the

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[36] For example the 'Dances of Conquest' discussed by Nathan Wachtel, *The Vision of the Vanquished: The Spanish Conquest of Peru through Indian Eyes, 1530-1570* (New York 1977)

[37] Guy Beiner elaborates the concept of 'folk historiography' alongside 'folk history' in *Remembering the Year of the French. Irish Folk History and Social Memory* (Madison WI, 2006).

[38] Bain Attwood, *Telling the Truth about Aboriginal History* (London, 2005).

[39] Jules Michelet, 'De la méthode et de l'esprit de ce livre', *Histoire de la Révolution française* II (Paris, 1847), pp. 526-75.

experience of ethnohistorians in the postcolonial world, but also by the experience of the handful of European early modernists who had engaged directly with oral historical traditions. In particular, the example of Philippe Joutard's encounter in the 1960s with oral traditions concerning the Camisards of the early eighteenth century in the Protestant villages of the Cévennes, led us to believe that one only had to seek to find.[40]

Keeping Quiet about Sedition: Silences in the Oral Archive

In practice, the pursuit has been harder than we anticipated. Partly no doubt, this difficulty arises from the processes of repression and enforced silence described above. Even when compliance is not achieved, such policies might drive seditious talk and rebel traditions into concealed channels and disguised speech. They may only be performed privately and in elliptical forms. In Turkey today it is very difficult to openly discuss the Armenian genocide, but one can find this history evoked in the lullabies sung to children by mothers descended from the Armenians of eastern Anatolia. Historical knowledge is being transmitted, albeit in forms that are opaque to outsiders.[41] Traditions of revolt might be similarly elusive, but not extinct.

Nonetheless it appears that some rebellions have left a very powerful legacy of traditions while others do not appear to have done so. In addition to the Camisards one might cite the Jacobite Rebellions in the British Isles,[42] or the great Cossack uprisings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[43] However, other events which, by their body-count or historical significance, might lead one to expect a similar degree of memorialization, have generated no sustained, public and documented tradition. The priorities of memorialization in oral culture may strike some historians as strange. Where are the oral traditions concerning the Va-nu-pieds, the Croquants, or even the Swing rioters? It may simply be that these events have yet to find their Joutard. On the other hand there may have been social processes of forgetting, of silencing at work. Meanwhile, relatively small events, which at the time made almost no impact on the written record, can spawn enduring oral traditions, as will be demonstrated in the chapter below by Donatien Laurent and Michel Nassiet.

Because of these difficulties, the chapters that follow are quite heterogeneous, and while some consider events that fall squarely into the category 'early modern revolts' others stretch the bounds of the term revolt (riot, mutiny, contestation...) while also testing the limits of what counts as early modern. We will return to both these questions of definition and periodization below. Here, however we wish to examine why there are voids in the oral archives, just as there are in the written archives. Answering this

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[40] Philippe Joutard, *La légende des Camisards: Une sensibilité au passé* (Paris, 1977).
[41] Melissa Bilal, 'The Lost Lullaby and Other Stories about Being an Armenian in Turkey', *New Perspectives on Turkey* 34 (2006): 67-92.
[42] Murray Pittock, 'Scottish Song and the Jacobite Cause', in Ian Brown, Thomas Clancy, Susan Manning (eds), *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature: Enlightenment, Britain and Empire (1707-1918)* (Edinburgh, 2007), pp. 105-9.
[43] Carl Stief, *Studies in Russian Historical Song* (Copenhagen, 1953).

question will take us deep into the methodological issues raised by engagement with this kind of source.

To explore the question we will start with a well-known problem, one discussed in detail later in this book by Gerald Porter: why are there so few surviving songs of social protest against enclosure in England? Acts of enclosure regularly generated anger and violence across the early modern and into the modern period, and the discontents caused by enclosure also fuelled much larger rebellious events, such as the Luddite movement. Yet it is difficult to find much trace of this in the most documented genre of English oral culture, folk song. A potential answer might be that, although enclosure generated a lot of momentary heat, once the battle for the commons was lost, the communities concerned gave up any desire to remember what was once theirs and what they had done to defend them. In an oral culture when knowledge becomes irrelevant, or counter-productive, it can be easily forgotten by the simple expedient of not being repeated. However, judicial records show us that early modern communities had a tenacious memory for wrangles over boundaries, access and matters pertaining to common land and common right, and they invested effort in practices to ensure the maintenance of this knowledge; so this argument seems implausible.[44] A more probable hypothesis, then, is that song, as a genre, is simply the wrong place to look. Enclosure riots were too local and particular to generate a widely shared corpus of songs. Songs were more concerned more with affairs of the heart than with social contestation, with individual rather than collective emotions on display. There is something to both these points but, compared with France at least, English folk song displayed a historicist sensitivity, with a taste for ballads citing dateable actions and agents.[45] And, as a genre, it did not shy away from social conflict. Plenty of individual rebels – smugglers, highwaymen, female soldiers, and a surprisingly large number of Irish revolutionaries – found their place in the English song repertoire.[46] Singers were clearly not unwilling to countenance the idea of revolt in song.

Acquaintance with the scholarship of English folk song raises at least three other possibilities. Herder may have called songs 'the archive of the people', but he did specify of 'unpoliced peoples'. However, the British government, like its European peers, went to great lengths to repress some songs and encourage others. The social reformer Frances Place recalled that during the Revolutionary Wars, 'if anyone was found singing any but loyal songs, he or she was carried before a magistrate'.[47] This belief seems to have been widespread though actual cases are hard to document: Roy Palmer's study of songs

[44] Andy Wood, *The Memory of the People: Custom and Popular Senses of the Past in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2013). See also Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500-1700* (Oxford, 2002), chap. 5.
[45] Roy Palmer, *The Sound of History: Songs and Social Comment* (Oxford, 1988).
[46] Graham Seal, *The Outlaw Legend: A Cultural Tradition in Britain, America and Australia* (Cambridge, 1996); Dianne Dugaw, *Warrior Women and Popular Balladry, 1650-1850* (Cambridge, 1989). Irish rebel songs were quite a popular genre: the song collector Roy Palmer, a contributor to this volume, recorded Harold Wirdnam and his wife singing 'We're off to join the IRA' in 1989, even though neither had any connection to Ireland and he was a professional soldier in the British army! Roy Palmer English Folk Music Collection, British Library, 1989: http://sounds.bl.uk/World-and-traditional-music/Roy-Palmer-collection/025M-C1023X0108XX-1300V0.
[47] Quoted by Vic Gammon in 'The Grand Conversation: Napoleon and British Popular Balladry', *RSA Journal* 137 (1989): 665-74.

concerning the Nore Mutiny in this volume offers an example of a song that people believed to be proscribed, and whose performance risked retribution, though he found no evidence that this was actually so. Similar fears may have inhibited the public performance of Jacobite and Irish rebel songs.[48] Without a culture of public performance, one might reason that oral historical traditions are doomed. However, as the Nore Mutiny example makes clear, fear of repression may actually encourage practices of subaltern remembrance: Jacobites, Fenians and others could find enough 'sequestered social sites', to borrow the phrase of the anthropologist James Scott, where traditions could be maintained; why not anti-enclosure protestors?[49]

It may be that the sites where subversive discourses were allowed full sway were out-of-bounds to folksong collectors, and this accounts for the underrepresentation of songs of protest in the archive. Most nineteenth-century song collectors were social tourists in the milieus in which they collected their material. A vicar and squire such as Sabine Baring-Gould, a daughter of a general such as Janet Blunt, or a bicycling Oxford student like George Butterworth, these were not necessarily the kind of people to whom villagers could open up and reveal their secret words of class antagonism, nor the kind of people to invite into places of social détente where villagers could perform for their own kind.[50] The same is true in other parts of Europe such as Brittany, where the pioneers of folk-song collecting were almost all conservative landed proprietors and aristocrats, and who took their texts from their employees and the beggars who came to their door for charity.[51] Singers, in England and Brittany, censored themselves in front of their 'betters', and the latter further censored their words as they transcribed them for print. As collectors often had a political or musicological axe to grind, the songs they sought reflected their own tastes rather than what was most popular among singers and their everyday audiences. Numerous variants might be blended to form a homogenous, single text, thus ironing out the nuances of the singers' intentions. Sexual and other references judged inappropriate for the imagined audience for the folksong collection as it gathered round the parlour piano could be bowdlerized.[52] Some scholars have not hedged their judgements of English folk song collectors, their ideological motivations, their cultural misunderstandings, and their appropriations of the material they accumulated, all of which tended to obscure the social message of the songs which they collected, and discouraged other songs from even being heard.[53]

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[48] William Donaldson, *The Jacobite Song: Political Myth and National Identity* (Edinburgh, 1988); Julie Henigan, *Literacy and Orality in Eighteenth-Century Irish Song* (London, 2012).
[49] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven CT, 1992).
[50] Brief biographies of these three and many more folk song collectors can be found on the online site 'The Full English', hosted by The Vaughan Williams Memorial Library: http://www.vwml.org/vwml-projects/vwml-the-full-english/vwml-full-english-collectors.
[51] Fañch Postic (ed.), *La Bretagne et la littérature orale en Europe* (Mellac and Brest, 1999).
[52] For a detailed consideration of the effects of the collector and collecting methods on the shape and contents of a song collection, see Éva Guillorel, *Barzaz Bro-Leon: Une expérience inédite de collecte en Bretagne* (Rennes and Brest, 2012) 75-107.
[53] Dave Harker, *Fakesong: The Manufacture of British 'Folksong', 1700 to the Present Day* (Milton Keynes, 1985); Georgina Boyes, *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology and the English Folk Revival* (Manchester, 1993).

The central importance of the interaction between informant and collector explains why, in the chapters that follow, a good deal of attention is paid to the latter. But we do not believe that these considerations rule such sources out of court. One can, for example, exaggerate the social distance operating on these occasions. The relationship of the singer to song-collector was not exactly like that between landowner and agricultural labourer, even when the collector was the singer's employer: the labourer might have had to tug his forelock when collecting his wages, but outside particular social situations, such as harvest suppers, he could not be forced to sing. That required a certain intimacy and acceptance. Undoubtedly some singers self-censored songs expressing overt political sentiments for fear of offending patrons, but others were quite happy to shock, mock and otherwise discomfort their interlocutors. It seems plausible that collectors did not always understand such messages, just as the authorities did not necessarily understand the symbolism of rioters' cross-dressing, but nonetheless they wrote the words down. And not all folksong collectors were social tourists: the term does not seem appropriate for the labourer and railway worker Alfred Williams, or for the Breton schoolteacher François-Marie Luzel, whose father was farmer.[54]

A third possibility goes to the heart of the topic set out in our title, calling into question the very existence of a distinctive oral tradition, at least for those regions in which literacy was advanced and plebeians and patricians shared the same language, if not the same register, as was the case in England.[55] This argument maintains that it would have been impossible for folksong collectors to discover evidence of an independent oral tradition because the songs they recorded were in reality the product of an urban print culture, distributed from central nodes of production by pedlars and market-place singers. In this scenario the prevalence of smugglers, highwaymen and female soldiers in the folk song repertoire had little to do with a rural cult of social banditry and other forms of rebellion, it was the backwash of urban melodrama.[56] These heroes had first appeared on stage and were converted into print by commercial merchants of culture. People may have learnt songs from oral performance, and repeated them too, but without the underpinning of print, nothing that resembled a tradition could survive. Rather than a distinct, autonomous and subaltern oral culture, folk songs were the products of a homogenised mass culture. The countryside was dependent on the city, and the popular classes were dependent on cultural capitalists: in other words a vision of urban and, for want of a better term, 'bourgeois' hegemony.[57]

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[54] On Alfred Williams, see the website of the Alfred Williams Heritage Society: http://www.alfredwilliams.org.uk/folkhero.html. On Luzel, see François Morvan, *François-Marie Luzel: Enquête sur une expérience de collecte folklorique en Bretagne* (Rennes, 1999).

[55] Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture*; Adam Fox and Daniel Woolf (eds), *The Spoken Word: Oral Culture in Britain, 1500-1850* (Manchester, 2002).

[56] For an detailed case study, see Nathan Garvey, '"Folkalising" Convicts: A "Botany Bay" Ballad and its Cultural Contexts', *Journal of Australian Studies* 38 (2014): 32-51.

[57] One might argue that this was the problem with Eric Hobsbawm's over enthusiastic use of bandit ballads to illustrate his concept of 'social banditry' in *Bandits* (London, 1969). As he had not engaged in significant source criticism, the songs he quoted as the voice of rural communities that supported bandits were, in many cases, composed decades later and hundreds of miles away by urban writers for urban audiences. In the preface to fourth (2001) edition of *Bandits* Hobsbawm admitted his mistake, describing ballads as 'a very slippery source'. This we argue was an overreaction to the criticism his thesis had received.

In this scenario comparisons with post-colonial ethno-history of the kind outlined above cannot apply. The combination of commercial popular culture — which, even in those cases, such as marionette theatres, where it was orally performed, depended in the last instance on print and commerce — with the growth of assertive institutions of social and cultural disciplining in the nineteenth century such as schools, the army and the police, entailed the end of an autochthonous oral tradition. As the rural population migrated to the cities to become factory hands, practices of singing at work were banned by employers, fearful of song's power to agitate and mobilize.[58] According to this argument, whatever may have been the case in the early modern period, oral traditions of resistance could not survive into the mid nineteenth and twentieth centuries when the folklorists and ethnologists, on whom we mostly depend for our evidence, became active.

The case of England may not be typical. In many parts of Europe, including much of the Romanov, Habsburg and Ottoman empires (though a similar situation pertained in parts of France and the United Kingdom too), the official language of the state, of the elites and of the cities, was at odds with that of the rural masses, discouraging the development of a commercial print culture; meanwhile levels of literacy, particularly among speakers of languages that received no official sanction, were not high enough to sustain such an enterprise. Yet the oral cultural expressions of even those populations with limited exposure to written literature in their own tongue nonetheless demonstrate engagement with print culture. As Joutard himself demonstrates for the oral traditions of the Occitan-speaking Camisards he documented, they were intertwined with the circulation of print.[59] Print networks could spread far and deep among communities where the bulk of the population was illiterate, and their influence is demonstrable even before we consider the role of intermediate institutions such as the Churches.

However, acknowledging this influence is not the same as asserting its dominance. It is a contingent fact of survival that early modern historians have devoted most of their attention to the printed expressions of European popular culture – chapbooks, almanacs, cheap woodcut prints and broadside ballads.[60] These are the documents that are known to have circulated in the period that they are studying: they can be assumed to be relevant. Historians have become adept at reading 'between the lines' of these sources too, examining the processes of appropriation and reuse through which elements of a dominant culture, diffused through print, might be refashioned to subaltern ends.[61] This material sits in archives and libraries, it is quantifiable and comparable, and in every way

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[58] Marek Korczynski, Michael Pickering and Emma Robertson, *Rhythms of Labour: Music at Work in Britain* (Cambridge, 2013), chap.7: 'Silenced'.

[59] See also Patrick Cabanel, 'La Guerre des Camisards entre histoire et mémoire: la perpétuelle réinvention du témoignage', *Dix-huitième siècle* 39 (2007): 211-27.

[60] To cite only some of the earliest and best known studies: Robert Mandrou, *De la culture populaire aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles: la Bibliothèque bleue de Troyes* (Paris, 1964); Geneviève Bollème, *Les almanachs populaires aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles; essai d'histoire sociale* (Paris, 1969); Rudolf Schenda, *Volk ohne Buch: Studien zur Sozialgeschichte der populären Lesestoffe, 1770-1910* (Frankfurt-a-M, 1970); William A. Coupe, *The German Illustrated Broadsheet in the Seventeenth Century: Historical and Iconographical Studies* (Baden-Baden, 1967); Leslie Shepard, *The Broadside Ballad: A Study in Origins and Meaning* (London, 1962).

See, for example, Roger Chartier, 'Culture as Appropriation: Popular Cultural Uses in Early Modern France', in Steven L. Kaplan (ed.), *Understanding Popular Culture* (Berlin, 1984), pp. 229-53.

amenable to the types of analysis that historians are taught to apply. But only a minority of historians are trained in fieldwork, that is in the collection of and interpretation of oral material. Unfamiliarity with the methodology is compounded, in the case of historically multilingual territories where the languages of oral traditions differ from those of scholarship, by lack of competence in regional languages. Éamonn Ó Ciardha argues in this volume that Gaelic sources are under-represented in historical research, even though they could enable a complimentary analysis to that proposed in the existing Anglocentric literature.

But such considerations do not resolve the problem posed above: where are the oral traditions of resistance to enclosure in England? One possibility is that they are in the archive, but in forms that have so far escaped attention, because they are presented in ways that are too different to the kinds of texts with which historians are familiar. The characteristics of oral traditions, the elements that make them receptive to memorisation and verbal performance, may disguise their qualities as historical sources. We need to grapple with these characteristics if we are to uncover rebel voices.

Interpreting Oral Traditions

Oral cultural texts feel strange to historians trained to decipher written records. They often appear fragmentary or unfinished, and, unlike print runs, their popularity is difficult to quantify. If historians are to make sense of them, then they will need the help of those scholars, folklorists and anthropologists, who have worked *sur le terrain* with live-and-kicking oral traditions and have developed the methodological tools to interpret them. We need their guidance because songs, and other oral traditional genres, can be opaque. We have already invoked 'indirect' methods, but obliquity is not just a methodology when dealing with oral culture, it is a characteristic in the texts themselves. A spade is not necessarily called a spade; a metaphor, a circumlocution, a kenning is often preferred. Some things were not said openly, they were only ever alluded to.[62] Youngsters might overhear a reference to an event, which implied a much larger narrative, but the narrative was not delivered as a whole, like a school lesson; it had to be reassembled in each generation from odd inferences. Peasant and lower-class autobiographers mention these types of 'accidental' encounters with the history of rebellions and their suppression, and acknowledge the powerful effect it had on them, such as the 'obscure but deeply rooted memories' of the 'Bonnets Rouges' of 1675 that shaped the landscape for Pierre Jakez Hélias in 1920s Brittany.[63] They knew this was dangerous stuff, and so even being given a chink of knowledge was a form of initiation. Not narrating a story might seem to guarantee its disappearance, but we suspect that many readers will recognize from their own families that the secrets surrounded by meaningful looks and the odd knowing word are the ones best remembered.

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[62] Barre Toelken, *Morning Dew and Roses. Nuance, Metaphor and Meaning in Folksongs* (Urbana IL, 1995).
[63] Pierre Jakez Hélias, *Le cheval d'orgueil: mémoires d'un Breton du pays bigouden* (Paris, 1975), p. 479. Historical geographers have argued that the political map of Brittany from the Revolution to the late twentieth century is partly explained by memories of this revolt: Jean Meyer and R. Dupuy, 'Bonnets rouges et blancs bonnets', *Annales de Bretagne* 82 (1975): 405-26.

It feels almost as if taboos surrounded the discussion of certain subjects, such as revolts. And if we turn to the anthropological literature we can find examples where the term is applicable. The Maroons of Surinam, for example, maintain histories of the slave rebellions that emancipated them from the coastal plantations and enabled them to form separate tribal identities in the forested interior. However, when the anthropologist Richard Price attempted to write these histories, he had to assemble them from fragments, snippets of conversation usually held in secret and on liminal occasions. The Maroons whom he interviewed treated the stories with enormous caution – the words themselves were dangerous, they evoked powerful ancestors.[64] Even if we cannot point to similar rituals of circumspection in Europe – not even in the case of memories which lay under a formal interdiction – there are parallels. On occasions where the extirpation of rebel memories seems, at least to the enquiring authorities, to have been completely successful, they suddenly resurface in odd phrases, a personal or collective nickname, or a toponym.[65]

Early collectors frequently drew analogies between oral traditions and the monumental vestiges of the past: 'fragments' in the words of James MacPherson, famed for his discovery of Ossianic poetry in Highland oral song; 'reliques' in the words of Thomas Percy, his English rival.[66] From the surviving relics one could infer a lost whole, just as the archaeologist could reconstruct lost buildings from their buried remnants.[67] But what was considered fragmentary by collectors was not necessarily perceived as incomplete by narrators and singers, for the allusions were sufficient to convey meaning, whereas a full statement might be dangerous.[68] In communities where the descendants of winners and losers, the beneficiaries and victims of enclosure or forfeiture of property, not only had to see each every day but continued in an unequal social relationship of lord and tenant or employer and employee, stories of rebellion and lost entitlements would raise very powerful emotions. Being presented with an incontrovertible narrative of injustice in the past would all but force one to seek justice in the present. Anger, jealousy, guilt, reverence for one's forebears, these feelings are difficult to control once invoked. To survive in such a society, one cannot live in a constant state of rage and hope; better then only to speak of these things at demarcated times and in demarcated settings.

Alternatively one might convert them into genre forms like jokes or songs, which invited different reactions but which also facilitated their memorisation and transmission.[69] Take for example the joke, which has regularly turned up in newspapers, stand-up routines, novels, memoirs and economic treatises on private property since the late nineteenth century. An English lord discovers a poacher snaring game on his land:

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[64] Richard Price, *First-Time: The Historical Vision of an Afro-American People* (Baltimore, 1983).
[65] Vincent Challet, 'Peasants' Revolts Memories: *Damnatio Memoriae* or Hidden Memories?' in Lucie Doležalová (ed.), *The Making of Memory in the Middle Ages* (Leyden, 2010), pp. 397-410.
[66] James MacPherson, *Fragments of Ancient Poetry, Collected in the Highlands of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1760); Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (London, 1765).
[67] Nelly Blanchard, *Barzaz-Breiz: une fiction pour s'inventer* (Rennes, 2006), pp. 59-79.
[68] Mary-Ann Constantine and Gerald Porter, *Fragments and Meaning in Traditional Song: From the Blues to the Baltic* (Oxford, 2003).
[69] On the aesthetics of 'the art of memory' see Philippe Joutard, *Histoire et mémoires, conflits et alliance* (Paris, 2013), pp. 14-15.

Lord: How dare you come on my land, sir?
Poacher: Your land! How do you make that out?
Lord: Because I inherited it from my father.
Poacher: And pray how did he come by it?
Lord: It descended to him from his ancestors.
Poacher: But tell me how they came by it?
Lord: Why, they fought for it and won it of course.
Poacher (taking off his coat): Then by —— I'll fight you for it.[70]

This story is hardly a treatise on the concept of the Norman Yoke and the English Game Laws, and indeed one reason why this joke has endured is that its moral can be applied to all kinds of other situations (farmer and rambler, white settler and displaced indigene…); nor does invite the listener to do anything very serious about the outrageously unequal distribution of landownership in England. But a point has been made, and, because of its form, remembered.

Oral culture is allusive: traditions may not be about what they appear to be about. We do not here refer to the practice of encoding subversive messages in apparently innocuous form, like the chapattis (loaves of unleavened bread) that were past hand to hand and village to village over large stretches of India in the months preceding the Great Indian Rebellion of 1857, much to the puzzlement and alarm of British officials.[71] That such coded practices occurred we do not doubt, though we have our suspicions concerning some reinterpretations. There was a trend to see every Irish song, whatever the overt subject, as a cryptic rebel anthem. So all-embracing was this reappropriation that it even took up cod Irish imitations, satires aimed at perceived Irish characteristics of sentimentality and provincialism which had been performed on Victorian stage in Britain (but not disdained in Ireland either). The song 'Nell Flaherty's Drake', for example, the lament of a poor Irish widow for a beloved duck, which on the surface appears to be a comedic ballad, has been taken up by Irish nationalist singers as a disguised reference to the executed revolutionary Robert Emmet.[72] That it was originally intended to be so we think unlikely, but a song sung by a Nationalist singer to a Nationalist audience, effectively becomes a rebel anthem through its recontextualisation. The meaning of a song lies not in the words, but in the communicative intention of the singer and the reception of the audience. The song 'We'll Meet Again', originally a wartime song of lovers parting, takes on a very different meaning when sung in court to a supergrass by the men he has helped to convict (as in Stephen Frears's film *The Hit*).

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[70] There are many versions of this comic interaction: this one was taken from the *South Wales Daily News* for 1st November, 1897, p.3. Authorship is sometimes credited to Henry George (1839-1897), an American land reformer.
[71] Mike Dash, 'Pass it on: The Secret that Preceded the Indian Rebellion of 1857': http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/pass-it-on-the-secret-that-preceded-the-indian-rebellion-of-1857-105066360/?no-ist?.
[72] Julia Anne Stevens, 'Political Animals: Somerville and Ross and Percy French on Edwardian Ireland', in Brian Cliff and Nicholas Grene (eds), *Synge and Edwardian Ireland* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 110-115. The assumption that the song is a covert political protest is regularly repeated, for instance on the National Library of Scotland's *The Word on the Street* website: (http://digital.nls.uk/broadsides/broadside.cfm/id/15144). No evidence that the composer or original audiences in the 1850s and the 1860s understood it as such is ever provided.

Songs, and also other oral genres, have the power to evoke associations, engender emotions and mobilize crowds to actions that have little to do with their actual content. The song 'Els Segadors' (The Reapers), now the official national anthem of Catalonia, started life as a work song celebrating the strength and ardour (and not just in the field) of gangs of migrant reapers. It is not a specifically Catalan song; versions exist also in Spanish, Portuguese and Occitan. A more militant version was certainly popular during 'The Reapers War', the Catalan Revolt of 1640 to 1652, though the version banned through much of the twentieth century, an explicit call for Catalan freedom, only dates from the Catalan *Renaixença* of the late nineteenth century. Yet even this reworking still retains elements of the earlier, occupational song.[73]

The opposite is also true: the content of a song or a story may be unequivocally about rebellions, but that does not mean that the text itself conveys a rebel message. In 1938 the Auvergne lexicographer Albert Dauzat published some texts from his grandfather's manuscript songbook. They included one entitled 'Alleluia', which offered a detailed description, naming leaders and victims and locations, of the Parisian 'Journée de Barricades' (26 August 1648) during the Fronde. Dauzat could not offer an explanation for the continued popularity of this particular rebel song over two hundred years (and more than three hundred miles from the Palais Royal), but it was known in other parts of France as well. Presumably the singers were not partisans of the Parlement of Paris: perhaps it was the sense of involvement in national affairs, of knowledge of 'les grands' and where they lived in the capital that gave this song its appeal.[74] We suspect that many British readers could sing, or at least whistle 'The Skye Boat Song', 'Lillibullero', 'Men of Harlech' and perhaps even 'Trelawney' without having any Jacobite, Orangeist, Welsh or Cornish nationalist sympathies. Songs from divided pasts do not necessarily provoke divisions in the present; sometimes they become the foci of a shared nostalgia, of legitimate but unthreatening regional sentiment. Or they can be completely reappropriated: the ballad concerning the death of Jean Jan, originally a homage to a Breton Royalist hero killed by Republican soldiers and diligently spread through the region by clerical interests, was subsequently taken up by Socialists and sung during electoral campaigns with the aim of mocking the Catholic right.[75]

Oral cultures do use dissimulation and circumlocution, habits which may originate in fear of retribution, or of antagonizing one's interlocutors. However the allusive style is a marked feature of oral cultures even when no obvious threat pertains: hence, no doubt, the pleasure of the riddle – an oral genre that seldom makes the transition into written culture. It is worth noting that 'small' oral traditional genres — such as riddles, skipping rhymes, *blasons populaires,* traditional threats (such as bogeymen), lullabies, toasts and proverbs— which have often attracted less attention from antiquarians and folklorists,

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[73] Josep Massot i Muntaner, Salvador Pueyo and Oriol Martorell, *Els Segadors: Himne nacional de Catalunya* (Barcelona, 1983). We are grateful to our colleague Joana Fraga for explaining the history of this song to us.

[74] Albert Dauzat, 'Contribution à la littérature orale de la Basse-Auvergne', *L'Auvergne littéraire* 92 (1938): 41-2.

[75] Éva Guillorel, 'Folksongs, Conflicts and Social Protest in Early Modern France', in Dieuwke van der Poel, Louis Peter Grijp and Wim van Anrooij (eds), *Identity, Intertextuality, and Performance in Early Modern Song Culture* (Leyden, 2016), pp. 302-4.

nonetheless contain rebel traditions. On the Hebrides twentieth-century lullabies, reutilizing elements from the lament tradition, allude to the feud between clans Campbell and MacGregor in 1570.[76] Lullabies reference Oliver Cromwell's invasion as well as the 1798 Rebellion in twentieth century Ireland.[77] However, such indications can be so veiled and attenuated that only an insider, with knowledge of the persons and events referred to, can make sense of them. Who but a local could understand the traditional cry, addressed to inhabitants of Arbori in Corsica, of 'Arburi, Arburi, vintidui!', a reference to the twenty-two members of the family of the Corsican rebel knight Raffè de Leca executed after the Genoese captured the castle of Castaldu (near Arbori) in 1456?[78]

Historians of oral culture are, therefore, obliged to interpret metaphors and penetrate disguises. The message may lie less in the words of a song than in the tune: melodies such as 'Derry-Down', as Gerald Porter demonstrates in this volume, were often reutilized for songs of contestation.[79] The tune for Dauzat's song of the Fronde derived from a hymn 'O filii et filiae', was likewise regularly adopted for songs of political contestation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[80] A tune alone could issue a challenge, as observers in London felt in October 1887 when they watched a parade of fifty thousand unemployed whistling the 'Marseillaise'.[81] However, that does not mean that every occasion on which these tunes were heard carried an implicit threat. When Peter Houlihan was arrested in Dublin in 1844 for singing 'Who fears to speak of 98?' (a reference to the United Irishmen's Rebellion of 1798), the defendant claimed he merely intended the local constable, whose number happened to be 98B.[82] To understand what meaning was conveyed by a song on any particular occasion, or rather what meanings for there may have been more than one, one must pay as much attention to the context as to the text. Unfortunately, some historians have tended to pick on texts and derived

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[76] Martin MacGregor, '"Surely One of the Greatest Poems Ever Made in Britain": The Lament for Griogair Ruadh MacGregor of Glen Strae and its Historical Background', in Edward J. Cowan and Douglas Gifford (eds), *The Polar Twins: Scottish History and Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh, 1999), pp. 114–53.
[77] Beiner, *Remembering the Year of the Frenc*), 90-104; Seán Ó Súilleabháin, 'Oliver Cromwell in Irish Oral Tradition', in Linda Dégh, Henry Glassie and Felix J. Oinas (eds), *Folklore Today: A Festschrift for Richard M. Dorson* (Bloomington, 1976), pp. 473-83.
[78] Paul Arrighi, 'Esprit de clocher et surnoms collectifs en Corse', *Arts et Traditions Populaires* 4 (1956): 289-308.
[79] For a comparable example of meaning conveyed, or at least evoked, by reappropriation of a popular melody, see Paul Dennant, 'The "Barbarous Old English Jig": The "Black Joke" in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *Folk Music Journal* 10 (2013): 298-318.
[80] Claude Grasland, 'Chansons et vie politique à Paris sous la Régence', *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine* 37 (1990): 537-70.
[81] This element of the marches that culminated in the original 'Bloody Sunday' on 11 October 1887 was much commented on at the time in the newspapers. Whistling the 'Marseillaise' also turns up in novels as a means of introducing a seditious note in class relations, but for some real-life instances see Simon Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia PA, 1997), chap. 5. A French newspaper *Le Voleur illustré* reported on 23 July 1891 that an Alsatian farmer was prosecuted by the German authorities for whistling 'La Marseillaise', only to claim in court that he was whistling the 'March of the Brunswick Hussars' (effectively the same tune). However, we suspect this story is a *canard*.
[82] Katie Barclay, 'Singing, Performance, and Lower-Class Masculinity in the Dublin Magistrates' Court, 1820-1850', *Journal of Social History* 47 (2014): 746-68.

meaning from the words alone without consideration of the occasion and audience for whom they were intended. This can lead to unsatisfying interpretations.[83]

Mutability of meaning is an unsettling trait, and it goes some way to explaining why oral cultural sources have been neglected, even disdained, by historians. There are other reasons: even in the case of oral testimonies collected soon after the events concerned, historians worry about hearsay, uncorroborated claims, or the often overt attempt to twist the story towards some propagandistic end. A song about the execution of a rebel *feels* more tendentious than the judicial record or a newspaper account. Of course in this instance we are simply being manipulated by rhetorical practices that convey the impression of objectivity and discernment in the latter. There is no *a priori* reason to think that the song composed at the time is less accurate than other sources narrating the same event. Each type of source has its own genre rules, and while it is true that execution ballads resemble each other across time and country, the same is true of newspaper accounts too.[84] For example, the Flemish ballad sung by the Bruges lacemaker Catherine Beyaert in the 1860s describing the execution of the rebel Duke of Monmouth in 1685, tallies at almost every point with contemporary accounts.[85] The difference is that, as a genre, the appreciation of songs seldom relies on their accuracy. While they may have documentary value, that is not usually the reason why people perform songs. Songs are more often associated with pleasure than with knowledge exchange. Even in the twelfth century, after the chronicler Henry of Huntingdon had included the song of the 'The Battle of Brunanburh' in his *Historia Anglorum* he felt the need to add 'Having interposed these words for the sake of refreshment, let us return to history'.[86] Beyaert did not sing this song as a lesson in the history of the British Isles in the seventeenth-century; she sang it as a way of passing the time while making lace, having learnt it decades before in a lace school. Justifying the public death of this Protestant hero was, perhaps, a badge of her stalwart Catholic identity, but she also revelled in the gruesome details, the five blows of Jack Ketch's axe.[87] Our difficulty is that too often we have little information concerning both the performer and the performance, and without this contextual information one can only speculate on what was being communicated and to whom.

The Aesthetics of Memory: Conservation, Transmission, Circulation and Reinterpretation

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[83] See, for example, the remarks on French oral traditional songs in Jean-Louis Flandrin, *Les amours paysannes (XVIe-XIXe siècle)* (Paris, 1975), p. 15.

[84] Tom Cheesman, *The Shocking Ballad Picture Show: German Popular Literature and Cultural History* (Oxford, 1994); Una McIlvenna, 'The Power of Music: The Significance of Contrafactum in Execution Ballads', *Past and Present* 229 (2015): 47-89.

[85] Adolf Lootens and Jean-Marie-Eusèbe Feys, *Chants populaires flamands avec les airs notés et poésies populaires recueillies à Bruges* (Bruges, 1879), pp. 75-9. Lootens does not name his source, but it is almost certain that the singer of this song, and all the others, was his mother.

[86] Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum* (c. 1154), quoted in Karl Reichl, *Singing the Past: Turkic and Medieval Heroic Poetry* (Ithaca NY, 2000), p. 50

[87] Gruesomeness is a feature of lacemakers' songs: see David Hopkin, 'Lacemakers and Old Songs, in Olney and Elsewhere', *The Cowper and Newton Journal* 5 (2015).

One might readily accept that an oral text circulating at the time of the events to which it refers, and noted soon after, has evidential value for historians, but in this volume we are putting our faith on songs that, in order to survive into a period where they were judged worthy of recording, had to be repeated and repeated across generations. Yet we know that memory is fickle, and much may be forgotten, suppressed, misheard and misinterpreted.

Perhaps more pertinent are the very mechanisms through which experience and events are transformed, in oral cultures, into memorable texts, into literature in other words. These mechanisms are so regular, and so widely distributed, that they have even been termed by specialists 'laws': the law of 'two to a scene'; the law of 'tripling' (things come in threes – 'three ships come sailing by'…); – these threes invoke another law, that of 'repetition with progressive ascent'; the law of 'contrast' (the differences between protagonists will be massively inflated); the law of 'concentration on a leading character'... there are many others.[88] If such laws are universal, how can they represent the historically particular? Singers and narrators of oral traditions also draw on a learnt set of stock images, plot devices, familiar metaphors, to construct their songs. All heroines have slender waists, all lips are full, all cheeks are rosy, all candles are golden, all orphans are wretched, all seas are deep, and so on. [89]

Let us take, as an example, an oral epic poem; epics are a rare genre in Europe but because of their perceived aesthetic qualities they have drawn far more attention from scholars than the more common legends and anecdotes. Edigu was a late medieval rebel against the Khan of the Golden Horde, and the founder of the Nogai Horde which at one time laid claim to large stretches of southern Russia and central Asia. He is claimed as an ancestor by a number of contemporary ethnic groups. Edigu's rule is known to historians from Russian and other chronicles; he is also the subject of an oral epic, over 6000 lines in length, which has been recorded in the twentieth century (for the first time in 1903) from communities dispersed along a line between Bulgaria and the borders of China. According to the leading scholar of Turkic epic poetry, Karl Reichl, the texts are not uniform, but they do share some characteristics. Our summary comes from the version performed by Jumabay Bazarov, a Karalkalpak singer, in the 1980s and 90s, and recorded by Reichl. Although the epic is about Edigu (or in this case Edige), it starts not with the hero but with his great-great grandfather, a shepherd, who found a skull with an inscription written on it. He ground this up and hid it, but his daughter, thinking it was flour, tasted it, and became pregnant. Her son was Barkaya. When he was young the Khan of the region had a terrible dream in which he was torn to pieces by dogs, which neither he nor his viziers could interpret: word was sent out throughout the land to find a man who could discover the dream's meaning (implicitly it had to be a man with no father).

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[88] Axel Olrik, *Principles for Oral Narrative Research* (Bloomington IN, 1992), pp. 41-61. His 'Epische Gesetze der Volksdichtung' were first published in 1909.

[89] The classic account of how oral texts can be constructed from such regular patterning and commonplaces is Albert B. Lord's study of the Serbian heroic song tradition: *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, 1960). For an application (not uncriticized) of this oral-formulaic theory to Scottish balladry, see David Buchan, *The Ballad and the Folk* (London and Boston, 1972). For an examination of the use of clichéd motifs in French song see Jean-Michel Guilcher, *La chanson folklorique de langue française: La notion et son histoire* (Paris, 1989), pp. 108-37.

Barkaya told the Khan that the dream meant that his viziers were plotting with his wife to kill him. Barkaya then went hunting: he spied some swans alighting on a lake, but then removing their swan skins and becoming maidens to bathe. Barkaya fell in love with one of them and hid her swan pelt. As she could not fly away with her sisters she agrees to marry him, and the pair had a child. However, one time when Barkaya came home he found the boy crying on his own: his wife had rediscovered the swan pelt and flown away, for ever. The crying boy would prove to be Edigu's father, who in turn would marry a fairy. This is an example of the law of tripling: three generations of miraculous births: it is also an example of 'copia', or redundancy, another characteristic, if not a law, of oral traditions.[90] Anyone familiar with European medieval literature (or the Bible) will recognize several motifs in the story so far: Edigu's genealogy is similar to that related in Welsh medieval manuscripts for Myrddin Emrys (Merlin Ambrosius) and the bard Taliesin, both of whom also interpret dreams for their lords; swan maidens appear in the Norse Poetic Edda and in the ancestry of Godefroy de Bouillon, first ruler of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem, as well as in folk tales.[91]

As a source for the historical Edigu, this oral epic poses manifest problems. It is not just that historians are unlikely to admit the supernatural elements, but these supernatural elements themselves are part of a widely diffused imaginative repertoire of motifs which can be applied to almost any hero; and all heroes require some application of this repertoire to offer a narrative explanation of their exceptionalism. But simultaneously, in oral cultures heroes can accumulate stories that were originally attached to other champions: Robin Hood has not only eclipsed all other medieval and early modern English outlaws, the legendary feats of his rivals such as Gamelyn and Adam Bell have been incorporated into his biography.[92]

In the case of both Edigu and Robin Hood, it would seem that the original audiences' expectations of oral literature as a repository of historical knowledge and those of modern-day historians are at odds. The aesthetic values of oral traditions, which are aids to memorialization too, have deprived us of a narration of the bald historical facts. The very mnemonic elements which ensured that the text was repeated erode the text's documentary utility. While this criticism is not necessarily unfounded, we would like to make a few observations before accepting it entirely.

The first is that historicism, fidelity to tradition if not necessarily to fact, matters in oral cultures. However fantastic the genealogy of Edigu, singers performed his story as if true – and for both performers and their audiences that was important. Oral cultures know and relish fictional genres, but this epic was deliberately distinguished from such genres both in aesthetic terms and in terms of content. It could only be told about a real man, and one who had played a founding role in the singers' political identity.

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[90] Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London, 1982).

[91] Reichl, *Singing the Past*; Karl Reichl, *Edige: A Karalkalpak Heroic Epic as Performed by Jumabay Bazarov* (Helsinki, 2007).

[92] J. C. Holt, *Robin Hood* (London, 1982); Stephen Knight, *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography* (Ithaca NY, 2003); Stephen Knight, *Reading Robin Hood: Content, Form and Reception in the Outlaw Myth* (Manchester, 2015).

The second is that, even in this case, one should not be too quick to dismiss oral tradition as a source for historical facts. Edigu's ancestry may be fantastic, but the sections that deal with his rebellion against the Khan Tokhtamysh, and his alliances and quarrels with Timur (Tamerlaine), may be more trustworthy, or at least no less unreliable as contemporary written chronicles, which were mostly kept by the Nogai Horde's enemies. It is certainly true that the epics obscure much of the wider political context to concentrate on the personal tensions between the leading characters, an example of Olrik's laws such as 'two to a scene' and 'concentration on a leading person'. We will encounter other examples of this tendency in chapters in this volume. However, rather than dismissing this characteristic as simply poetic, it may be that poetics reflect how historical events were understood even at the time: more personal than structural.[93] And while historical facts may not matter too much in questions of ancestry for leaders of nomad hordes (indeed it might be very important to obscure the real details in order to establish a lineage to mythical characters), when it comes to questions of who won which battle and how, historical outcomes which determine the geographical distributions of peoples and the loci of power in the present, bards may feel more obliged to reckon with known realities.[94]

The evidence from certain oral cultures, what one might call historicist oral cultures, is that they can be quite good at remembering what happened, though often not as good at establishing precisely when. Fieldworkers active in Brittany during the second half of the twentieth century have noted that singers placed a very high value on the historical veracity of their songs, and therefore insisted on transmitting them exactly as they had heard them from previous generations. Donatien Laurent's exemplary study concerning the death of Louis Le Ravallec in 1732 demonstrates that an oral tradition, maintained over two centuries, can prove more trustworthy than contemporary written accounts of the event. The Breton ballad faithfully preserved a detailed record of the facts, including the names of the guilty parties, whereas the judicial procedure was deliberately sabotaged in order to save the reputation of a powerful landowning family which was implicated in the affair.[95]

Historicist oral cultures put a high value on accuracy of transmission and a low value on imaginative originality. They have often developed complex ritual mechanisms of apprenticeship to guard against faults of memory, and equally complex mechanisms of narration to guard against the idiosyncrasies of individual narrators. In Ukraine professional fairground singers instituted a sort of guild structure through which novice singers would be initiated into the tradition.[96] In Archangel Karelia when rune singers

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[93] We are writing this introduction in the midst of the British EU Referendum debate which even in the broadsheet papers is regularly portrayed as essentially a spat between two old schoolmates, David Cameron and Boris Johnson: perhaps this personal dimension should not be neglected by later historians.

[94] A point made by Andrew Shryock aboutArab tribal oral histories: *Nationalism and the Genealogical Imagination: Oral History and Textual Authority in Tribal Jordan* (Berkeley and Los Angeles CA, 1997).

[95] Donatien Laurent, 'La gwerz de Louis Le Ravallec', *Revue des Arts et Traditions Populaires* 15 (1967/1): 19-79. Vladimir Propp makes a similar argument in relation to Russian historic songs: *Theory and History of Folklore* (Minneapolis, 1997), chapter 1 'Folklore and Reality'. For a detailed consideration of a corpus of Russian historical song as a source for the early modern period, see Maureen Perrie, *The Image of Ivan the Terrible in Russian Folklore* (Cambridge, 1987).

[96] Natalie Kononenko, *Ukrainian Minstrels… And the Blind Shall Sing* (Armonk NY, 1998).

met at fairs or pilgrimages they would each sing their songs and the audiences would judge which was more truthful according to their very conservative aesthetic principles. These practices have not prevented alterations emerging, and there are numerous, slightly different versions of Karelian rune songs, but the culture in which they were performed explicitly rejected innovation and prized fidelity, not least because the texts were often incantatory. To change them might undermine their power.[97] Oral traditions are seldom as fluid as they have sometimes been described.

We argue that the historical content of oral traditions is worth investigating, and we make no presumptions about either its worth or its nullity. However we would add that even where the imaginative, even fantastical reconstruction of historical events is patent in oral genres, they still retain historical as well as literary interest. Niall Ó Ciosáin, investigating the oral traditions surrounding the Great Famine in Ireland, has posited a taxonomy of memory, dividing oral stories told about the Great Famine of the 1840s into three: 'global memory', 'local memory' and 'popular memory'. It is important to note that, when the Irish Folklore Commission started its work documenting local traditions about the Famine in the 1930s, these three types of memory coexisted in the same communities: none had squeezed out the other. 'Global memory' refers to the national or State space and chronology, and was originally imparted through national media and state institutions, and while it might be repeated locally it replicates a discourse emanating from hegemonic centres of cultural production, Nora's 'lieux de mémoire'. 'Local memory' is maintained only in particular communities or even families; it cites specific named individuals and places, and while narration might make use of oral conventions, it is, as far as one can ascertain, fairly accurate. The intermediate level, 'popular memory', consists of a stylized repertoire of images, motifs, short narratives and supernatural legends, many of them part of a wider international repertoire. Ó Ciosáin cites as an example of 'popular memory' the story of a woman who, to give her children some hope as she sends them to bed, pretends to put potatoes on to cook when in fact they are only stones. Miraculously, by the morning the stones had become potatoes. This same story has been heard in Norway and Finland in relation to other moments of famine, but we might have doubted whether the legend recorded an actual event before the discovery of these iterations. Yet Ó Ciosáin's argument is that this kind of memory (and as stated above, we prefer the word tradition), which was widely shared, offers real insight into the historic famine: how it was understood by those who experienced it, and how that experience, and perhaps the lessons derived from it, were encapsulated and transmitted to later generations.[98]

Oral historians have discovered, or rather we should say rediscovered because folklorists have long made the same argument, that historical inaccuracy is often as revealing as accuracy. Alessandro Portelli, drawing on his experience recording the oral history of working-class movements in Italy and the United States, observed that 'By including error, imagination, and desire, oral sources reveal not only the history of what happened,

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[97] Lotte Tarkka, *Songs of the Border People: Genre, Reflexivity, and Performance in Karelian Oral Poetry* (Helsinki, 2013).

[98] Niall Ó Ciosáin, 'Approaching a Folklore Archive: The Irish Folklore Commission and the Memory of the Great Famine', *Folklore* 115 (2004): 222-32. See also 'Famine Memory and the Popular Representation of Scarcity', in Ian McBride (ed.), *History and Memory in Modern Ireland* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 95-117.

but the history of what it meant.'[99] How an event is narrated reveals how it was interpreted – what cultural schemas were used to make sense of traumatic events such as famine, strikes or rebellion and its repression. Such narratives also offer insight into how that event was reinterpreted over subsequent generations: while this is difficult to recover in the case of oral traditions as normally one only has the last in a chain of retransmissions, as Guy Beiner has shown for narratives of the 1798 United Irishmen's Rebellion, it is not impossible to track how such traditions have been amended over time.[100] Such changes reveal the political and cultural transformations undergone by that society even while it maintained the tradition. (And of course if the tradition is abandoned completely, that suggests a further radical shift in that society.) Just as the wear and tear endured by an object in its lifetime reveals much to the archaeologist about the society in which it was employed, so the twists and slants endured by a text reveal much about the society in which it was told. Breton ballads collected in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries about Pontcallec's conspiracy against the French Regent in 1720 frequently include references to 'chouans' (counter-revolutionary rebels from the 1790s) and the guillotine. Although anachronistic, their presence vividly evokes the traumas inflicted during the civil conflicts of the revolutionary period. For historians such anachronisms collapse chronology in a disturbing manner, but for singers they convey the unity of historical experience as a repeating series of heroism, suffering and defeat.[101] History as a tragic 'eternal return' might be considered a characteristic of ballad cultures.

The Meanings and Uses of Oral Traditions in Performance

Narratives tend towards models: that is as true of oral traditions as it is of historical monographs. One cannot tell the story of Pugachev without invoking stories of Stenka Razin, as Malte Griesse's chapter in this volume demonstrates. One cannot discount the legendary history of Stenka Razin, not least because Pugachev knew it: the legends were a model for his actions as well as for his own later characterisation in oral tradition. Thus traditions create a succession of echoes in which each revolt narrative invokes others. The importance of oral rebel traditions in stoking the flames of rebellion is well documented in other cases, such as the Tuchin Rebellion in Languedoc at the end of the Middle Ages or the artisan uprisings in Ghent between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries.[102] Andy Wood has shown memories of previous English revolts were reinvigorated during the Western Rising of 1549, and that these events in turn created new narratives, albeit shaped by existing schema, which would be transmitted orally to future generations.[103] Similarly the memory of William Tell was revivified during the Swiss Peasants' War of

[99] Alessandro Portelli, 'Oral History in Italy', in David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum (eds), *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology* (Nashville, 1984), p. 399. See also Philippe Joutard, 'Les erreurs de la mémoire, nouvelle source de vérité?', in *Croire la mémoire? Approches critiques de la mémoire orale* (Aoste, 1988), pp. 61-7.
[100] Beiner, *Remembering the Year of the French*.
[101] Éva Guillorel, 'La complainte du marquis de Pontcallec, les *gwerziou̇* bretonnes et l'histoire', *in* Joël Cornette, *Le Marquis et le Régent. Une conspiration à l'aube des Lumières* (Paris, 2008), pp. 297-338.
[102] Challet, 'Peasants'Revolts Memories'; Jelle Haemers, 'Social Memory and Rebellion in Fifteenth-Century Ghent', *Social History* 36 (2011): 443-63.
[103] Andy Wood, *The 1549 Rebellions and the Making of Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2007), chapter 6.

1653, as Marc Lerner's article in this volume describes. The peasant leaders from the Entlebuch valley drew a parallel between their conflict with the patrician authorities and the struggles of the quasi-mythical hero of Swiss independence when they sang songs of his fame under the windows of the cantonal delegates who had come to the region to re-establish order.

Sometimes the fact that oral traditions conform to aesthetic models depoliticise their content. The Flemish ballads analysed in the chapter below by Jan Dumolyn and Jelle Haemers demonstrate how subversive songs can, over the course of repeated iterations removed from their original context, become reshaped along the lines of established narrative schemas which have the effect of robbing them of their dissident meanings. For instance, the song about 'Short Raisin' and his battles with the Count of Flanders at the beginning of the Hundred Years War became, when collected centuries later, a story about an amorous intrigue which could be located in almost any historical context. This motif was still relevant to the public long after the precise rationale behind Raisin's revolt was forgotten. The fourteenth-century ballad concerning the death of the rebel leader Artevelde became integrated into the repertoire of songs used to accompany dance. This utilitarian recycling helped ensure its survival in oral tradition, but at the cost, perhaps, of its radical message.

Oral traditions may even downplay or preclude the memory of revolt. In some ways it might seem disappointing to discover, in Kersti Lust's chapter in the present volume, that Estonian serfs-cum-peasants did not maintain among themselves rebellious oral traditions, especially when their predecessors had actually been willing to risk revolt. This was not quite the subaltern narrative of resistance one might have expected. Yet the fact that they, like their Russian counterparts, did relate legends of the 'Good Tsar', benevolent towards his people but misled by false advisers and whose intentions were counteracted by wicked lords, is a rather useful entry point into the mentalité of the Estonian population in the Russian Empire.[104]

The multiple meanings of any oral text need to be explored both synchronically, in the interaction between performer and audience, and diachronically, through its preceding iterations in other times and contexts. When dealing with a text taken from oral tradition we need to establish precisely when and where it was recorded and the nature of the occasion. Who was speaking, and to whom? What was the speaker's source, and what the audience's reaction? We need to establish the tradition's credentials and, to borrow the term used by the historian Patrick Cabanel, its 'traceability'.[105] This is not always an easy task. By the end of the nineteenth-century folklorists and song collectors had established some rules of practice which fulfilled some of these criteria, though they were not always followed, particularly by local enthusiasts unconnected to the scientific networks which established these norms. The preceding generations of antiquarians and romantics were more cavalier in their approach, usually providing no information on their sources. In some fortunate cases, such as La Villemarqué's *Barzaz-Breiz* (1838), which is discussed by Nassiet, Laurent and Le Prat in their chapters in this volume, we can

[104] Daniel Field, *Rebels in the Name of the Tsar* (Boston, 1976). See also Leonid Heretz, *Russia on the Eve of Modernity: Popular Religion and Traditional Culture under the Last Tsars* (Cambridge, 2008), chap. 5.
[105] Cabanel, 'La Guerre des Camisards', p. 222.

consult the author's 'field notes' alongside the published text.[106] However, if that is not the case then everything about the performance and its audience needs to be reconstructed. This requires a certain amount of what historian readers might judge 'antiquarianism'. We need to sift folklorists' factual statements from the surrounding theorizing, we need to locate our text within a corpus (including, where appropriate, the use of 'type' catalogues such as the 'Aarne-Thompson-Uther' folktale catalogue, the 'Roud' index of British folksongs in English, or the 'Coirault' catalogue of French folksongs).[107] Like literary historians, we need to compare variant texts, to establish filiations and because variations may be significant when contextualized.

The value of such careful treatment of the text is most obvious when dealing with material whose initial meaning has been forgotten. Words change their sense, names are deformed, and the text itself may be repeated for ritual reasons quite divorced from its original justification. In some well-documented cases, such as the African songs performed by slaves in the Americas, or the Hebrew prayers uttered by Marranos, the language even of these oral texts may be unintelligible to those who, nonetheless, perform them.[108] However, these radical recontextualisations caused by imprisonment, repression and exile help clarify a very important point: the historian: when trying to interpret this kind of source, one must consider their meaning not only to their first composers and audiences, but to all the intervening generations, including those from whom the texts were collected. It is important to try and reconstruct what was said in the past, but it is just as important to consider the significance of the text in the changing contexts in which it was performed. Evidently, part of that significance was to maintain, in the most hostile of circumstances, the unbroken chain of time and assert a continuity between the present and the past. A community could declare its persistence in the face of oppression, its distinct identity, through reverence to such shards of tradition.

For the antiquarians who began to record such material in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the presence of the past was what interested them most. Because early collectors thought of oral texts as akin to archaeological fragments from a more distant age, they showed such little interest in who performed these texts in the present or to what end: it was the text that was the treasure, passed down through generations of anonymous and sometimes, in the eyes of the collectors, undeserving and unappreciative guardians. The preservation of such texts into the present was likened to survival of a fossil in a geological stratum: they spoke for a lost time, not for the current epoch.[109]

[106] Donatien Laurent, *Aux sources du Barzaz-Breiz: La mémoire d'un peuple* (Douarnenez, 1989).
[107] Hans-Jörg Üther, *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography*, 3 vols (Helsinki, 2004). There are typologies of other narrative genres, such as the legend, though none have had quite the international success of the folktale classification. Song-type catalogues tend to be restricted to particular language regions: the 'Roud Index' of Anglophone folksong is available online via the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library. For French song see Patrice Coirault et al, *Répertoire des chansons françaises de tradition orale*, 3 vols (Paris, 1996-2007).
[108] Emma Christopher, 'Josefa Diago and the Origins of Cuba's Gangá Traditions', *Transition* 111 (2013): pp. 133-44; Nathan Wachtel, *Mémoires marranes: Itinéraires dans le sertão du Nordeste brésilien* (Paris, 2011).
[109] Gillian Bennett, 'Geologists and Folklorists: Cultural Evolution and "The Science of Folklore"', *Folklore* 105 (1994): 25-37.

Incautious application of this method can generate fascinating but occasionally far-fetched interpretations of oral traditional texts, such as the Euhemerist interpretations of the *Kalevala* as an account of Finnish Vikings, or numerous 'secret meanings' to be found in nursery rhymes.[110] But whatever the origins of such rhymes as 'Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary', the function in today's playschools and nurseries, and children's pleasure in its performance, have little to do with any supposed concealed historical meaning.

This may be an extreme example: in most of the cases considered in this volume a deliberate attempt has been made to maintain a specific historical memory. Nonetheless, the sometimes radically altered uses to which such traditions are relevant. The aesthetic conservatism of oral traditions needs to be considered alongside another supposed trait of oral cultures – structural amnesia, as Guy Beiner demonstrates in the final chapter of this volume.[111] Those traditions that are not in constant use – which do not serve some purpose for their performers and audiences – are simply dropped from the repertoire. Purpose is perhaps too strong a word for the myriad redeployments of oral historical traditions; and of course entertainment is itself a value. But unlike books on a library shelf, pregnant with knowledge even when no reader comes near for decades, oral knowledge normally has to have some reason to be spoken, some occasion for which it is appropriate. In this way oral tradition can be likened to personal memory, whose function has less to do with recall of the past than guiding behaviour in the present and planning for action in the future.

In some of the cases considered in this volume, it is difficult to be sure about the role such traditions played at the time they were recorded. We have the texts of the 'Chant de Rosemont' and of 'Ar Falc'hun', discussed in this volume by Georges Bischoff, Michel Nassiet and Donatien Laurent, but very little information about their singers and almost none about what occasioned their performance. In these instances, given the localism and the insults proffered to neighbouring towns in both songs, we speculate that they survived because they formed part of the repertoire of combative exchanges – starting with the verbal confrontations but often developing into physical ones – between rival communities. These were a common feature of those occasions in rural France when village representatives happened together – at fairs, conscription rallies, pilgrimages and even weddings.[112] However, we have no proof to offer in defence of this hypothesis.

Nonetheless one can assume, in both these cases, that these traditions expressed some form of social identity, as members of specific sub-regional communities and more generally as peasants suspicious of townsfolk. All collective identities require some shared narrative, an account of the origins of things, and explanation of the divisions within society: these identities were not only expressed through the songs, they were actualized

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[110] William A. Wilson, 'The *Kalevala* and Finnish Politics', *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 12 (1975): 131-55; Norman Iles, *Who Really Killed Cock Robin: Nursery Rhymes and Carols Restored to their Original Meanings* (London, 1986); Albert Jack, *Pop Goes the Weasel: The Secret Meanings of Nursery Rhymes* (London, 2008).

[111] 'Structural amnesia' is discussed in Paul Connerton, 'Seven Types of Forgetting', *Memory Studies* 1 (2008): 59-71.

[112] Alain Corbin,'L'histoire de la violence dans les campagnes françaises au XIXe siècle: esquisse d'un bilan', *Ethnologie française*, 21 (1991): 24-236. See also the article in the same issue by François Ploux, 'Rixes intervillageoises en Quercy (1815-1850)', 276-81.

in the moment of the performance, a historical reality made tangible again in the present. By singing the song, by hearing it and passing it on, that social identity was revivified.

Other, less dramatic oral genres than ballads demonstrate the same tendency to be useful. Legends as a genre very often serve an aetiological function – explaining the genesis of landscape features, and simultaneously explaining how that landscape and its resources came to be divided up among different communities. Legends also explore the origins of the social landscape, how we became us and they became them: that red mark on the ground where no plant will grow, that is the blood of a murdered seigneur whose death was never avenged; that lake covers the ruins of a castle, sunk by its lord's sins…[113] In Ireland the landscape itself served as a mnemonic of events whose significance was explained through legends about revolts and their suppression.[114] Similar 'topographies of remembrance' were alive in early modern England, where landscape features and place-names inscribed bitter disputes.[115] In the Pyrenees legendary claims to the landscape were a frequent accompaniment and sometimes the cause of the recurrent violence between the inhabitants of the valleys of Aspe and Lavedan.[116] Further examples are easily found, because the location of a narrative in the daily experience of neighbourhood geography was, and is, a strong underpinning to the perpetuation of oral traditions.[117]

Legends do not just provide an account of the world as it is, they offer strategies to deal with its contingencies. They encapsulate lessons about what forms of social contestation work and what do not.[118] What tends to get remembered, in this genre at least, are the moments of tricksterism when the tables are turned on lords, or the moments of audacious cunning. They have a lot to say about the small arms of social resistance –when Jacques cheeked his master, stole from him, slept with his wife, even got him killed – rather than with large-scale upheavals.[119] When they do deal with moments of open rebellion, again they might offer strategies for how to resolve the conflict, such as appealing to a higher authority over the head of the immediate oppressors (Robin Hood by-passing the Sherriff of Nottingham and Prince John on his way to King Richard, or the 'Good Tsars' of Russian Legend).[120] However, it is also noticeable how many legendary memories deal

[113] David Hopkin, 'Legends and Peasant Histories of Feudalism and Emancipation in France and Beyond', in Daniel Savborg and Ulo Valk (eds), *Supernatural Places* (Helsinki, forthcoming).
[114] Sarah Covington, '"The Odious Demon from Across the Sea": Oliver Cromwell, Memory and the Dislocations of Ireland', in Erika Kuijpers, Judith Pollmann, Johannes Müller and Jasper van der Steen (eds), *Memory before Modernity: Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe* (Leyden, 2013), pp. 149-64; Beiner, *Remembering the Year of the French*, pp. 208-30.
[115] Wood, *The Memory of the People*, pp. 236-46; see also Nicola Whyte, *Inhabiting the Landscape: Place, Custom and Memory, 1500-1800* (Oxford, 2009).
[116] Christian Desplat, *La guerre oubliée: Guerres paysannes dans les Pyrénées (XIIe-XIXe siècles)* (Pau, 1993), pp. 78-98.
[117] See Terry Gunnell, 'Legends and Landscape in the Nordic Countries', *Cultural and Social History* 6 (2009): 305-22.
[118] See David Hopkin, *Voices of the People in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, 2012), chap. 1.
[119] Although removed a little from the conflict between peasant and lord, Edward Ives' study of a poacher turned folk hero illustrates well why the clever and the comic loom larger in such narratives than success through violence: *George Magoon and the Down East Game War: History, Folklore and the Law* (Urbana IL, 1993).
[120] Kirill Čistov, *Der gute Zar and das ferne Land. Russische sozial-utopische Volkslegenden des 17.-19. Jahrhunderts* (Munster, 1998).

with the horrors of repression, such as the 'Bloody Assizes' in the West Country after Monmouth's Rebellion of 1685.[121]

Legends as a genre permit more freedom of action than ballads; and not just for male characters but also for women, as demonstrated in Allyson Poska's study of Galician oral traditions surrounding the figure of MariCastaña. She was the wife of a rich landed proprietor in Galicia who revolted against ecclesiastical taxation in 1386 and killed the bishop's emissary. This much is known from the written archives. However her story circulated orally throughout the early modern period and later, to the point that it became proverbial. Castilian Authors of the Spanish Golden Age invoked 'The Times of MariCastaña' as a distant epoch when the world was turned upside down, and frogs talked while women led revolts. However, while in the works of Quevedo and Cervantes it was depicted not as a utopian alternative to the social norms of early modern Spain but as repudiated disorder, in Galician oral culture it had a different meaning. Early Modern Galician women understood the story as positive, and that they were empowered to resist authority too. High levels of male seasonal out-migration meant that the women who stayed at home had considerable autonomy in running their property. In Galician legends, folk tales and proverbs, enterprising and even insurgent women take pride of place, both reflecting and reinforcing a local culture in which they had considerable authority.[122] Thus oral traditions can add a gender dimension to our knowledge of early modern rebellions, something which is often difficult to recover from the written sources.

Legends act as warnings, prophecies and charters for claims made in the present. Stories can mobilize, as in the case of the anarchist philosopher Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, brought up in the belief that he resembled physically and spiritually his grandfather, the old soldier and revolutionary Tournési who, so the story went, had killed the seigneur's forest guard when he tried to prevent him from collecting wood.[123] The young Michael Collins, future IRA commander in chief, was enthused by the village blacksmith's stories of 1798 rebels and the Fenians of the mid nineteenth century.[124] But stories can also discourage some forms of resistance, as the Nazi district leadership learned when in the spring of 1945 they told the villagers of Zipplingen to prepare to fight to the last man. The villagers responded that their home could not be defended and that 'it seemed senseless to allow our homeland to be destroyed for a second time' after it had been ravaged by the Swedes in the 1630s. On that occasion only two men had managed to escape to perpetuate the story of the village's destruction.[125]

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[121] Ruth Tongue, 'The True Lads of Taunton', *Folklore* 80 (1969): 37-40.
[122] Allyson M. Poska, *Women & Authority in Early Modern Spain: The Peasants of Galicia* (Oxford, 2005) 216-20. See also Marisa Rey-Henningsen, *The World of the Ploughwoman: Folklore and Reality in Matriarchal Northwest Spain* (Helsinki, 1994).
[123] George Woodcock, *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: A Biography* (London, 1956), p. 2.
[124] Tim Pat Coogan, *Michael Collins: A Biography* (London, 1991) pp. 6-13.
[125] Jill Stephenson, *Hitler's Home Front: Wurttemberg under Nazi Rule* (London, 2006), pp.325-6. This variants of this legend are discussed in David Hopkin, 'Legends of the Allied Invasions and Occupations of Eastern France, 1792-1815', in Alan Forrest and Peter Wilson (eds), *The Bee and the Eagle: Napoleonic France and the End of the Holy Roman Empire* (Basingstoke, 2009), pp 214-33. Legends of sole survivors are also commonly associated with outbreaks of the plague.

This example of village oral tradition might appear to be an example of 'local memory', but in fact it is, to resume the definition formed by Niall Ó Ciosáin, an example of 'popular memory'. It is a migratory legend, part of an international repertoire about violence between soldiers and peasants, told as true about numerous communities in the Franco-German borderlands ravaged during the Thirty Years War. In some cases it is a single survivor who carries the lessons of the events to subsequent generations, in others ghosts perform the same task. There are many such legends concerning peasant comportment in the face of external violence: they are always localized and always told as true for a particular conflict, but they reoccur across administrative and linguistic boundaries, and have become associated with many different threats.[126] For example, the motif of the hung pregnant woman reappears regularly in narratives associated with the French Wars of Religion and the Dutch Revolt.[127] Similarly, oral traditional accounts of iconoclasm, such as those explored in this volume by Erika Kuijpers and Judith Pollman, follow established narrative schemas. This strategic element, the necessity for narrative to carry not just historical knowledge but lessons for the future, helps to explain the prevalence of stock anecdotes and motifs in oral tradition, often combining with elements of 'local memory'. Of course the historian's natural reaction on finding the same story told as true for different places and times is to turn sceptic; but while not necessarily true in the sense of factually accurate, legends do encapsulate an experienced 'truth' about the past for the communities that relate them. If tradition is to survive it must have a narrative form that can be readily transmitted, a plot that accords with the aesthetic expectations of oral genres and the ideological expectations of its audience; if it is to be useful that narrative must also be a tool which can be deployed as arguments in future discussions.

Traditions of the past as motors of action in the present and guides to the future are most visible in another genre: prophecy. Prophetic utterances formed an impressive reservoir of motifs that could be reworked to serve political ambitions. They had wide circulation in the early modern period itself, both through oral performance and as written or printed text, so they were available to all social classes to use. Henry VII made the most of his dual Welsh and English descent, emphasising his genealogical connection not just to the House of Lancaster but, through the lineage of the ancient kings of Gwynedd, to Cadwaladr. Thus he was able to present himself as the long expected British hero of Welsh prophecy, He altered his actions to fit with the pattern predicted in prophecy, for example coming by sea to land in Wales, as was ordained, and then naming his son Arthur to honour the belief in that hero's return.[128] Henry Tudor was drawing on long-

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[126] Roger Maudhuy provides a sample of Lorraine legends on the Thirty Years War, but most of these have also been recorded in Luxembourg, Wallonia, the Rhineland and elsewhere, often relocated to the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars: *La Lorraine des légendes* (Paris, 2004), pp.33-61.

[127] David El Kenz, 'La mise en scène médiatique du massacre des huguenots au temps des guerres de Religion: théologie ou politique?', in *Sens Public* (2006-9): http://www.sens-public.org/article333.html [page consultée le 30 mars 2016]; Erika Kuijpers, 'The Creation and Development of Social Memories of Traumatic Events: The Oudewater Massacre of 1575', in Michael Linden and Krzysztof Rutkowski (eds), *Hurting Memories and Beneficial Forgetting: Posttraumatic Stress Disorders, Biographical Developments and Social Conflicts* (London, 2013), pp. 191-201. For other examples of circulating motifs in early modern legends see Judith Pollmann, 'Of Living Legends and Authentic Tales: How to Get Remembered in Early Modern Europe', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 23 (2013): 103-25.

[128] Tim Thornton, *Prophecy, Politics and the People in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge, 2006).

established Welsh traditions: several attempted uprisings in the later Middle Ages had taken their inspiration from widely diffused prophetic tales which drew on the living tradition of past uprisings to encourage participation in the present. Owain Glyndŵr, the last significant Welsh rebel leader against English rule, inscribed his actions within this prophetic tradition, and he in turn would became the object of tales and stories which mixed older traditions with the events of his campaign.[129]

The living value of a tradition may go a long way to explain its longevity. Chouan and rebel ballads like 'Roddy McCorley', to cite the examples considered by Le Prat and Beiner in this volume, still do political work. Sung in a bar they are a badge of identity, often a subaltern identity that requires such places and occasions to find public recognition; sung during a demonstration they become rallying cries. It is more powerful still when the song invokes a collective heritage which unites the living with the dead, praising martyrs whose sacrifice poses a challenge to the current generation. They were prepared to die for the cause you now chant; will you do as much? Each performance is another link in the chain of memory uniting the current generation to its heroic ancestors: the song recalls not just their actions but all the other occasions on which the song was deployed as a slogan or as a taunt. No Orangeman can 'remember' 'The 18th December' (1688, when the apprentices of Londonderry closed the city gates to an approaching Jacobite army), but they might well remember where, and with whom, they sang the song. A song sung together develops a collective emotion and turns a mass of bodies into a unity, proclaiming a common identity and a shared intent. Song also has powerful mnemonic qualities linked to rhythm, rhyme and melody, making it an ideal vehicle in which to transfer historical information from generation to generation. Yet even when historical memory seems at its most tribal and anthemic, the ambiguity of oral traditions manifests itself once again as tunes and words are borrowed and parodied. Even a Republican ballad like 'Roddy McCorley' can serve as a conductive channel for that most secret of hidden histories, a Presbyterian revolutionary tradition.

Oral Traditions: Sources for Rethinking the Early Modern?

Our argument therefore is that oral traditions about early modern social conflicts are sources, difficult but rewarding sources, both for the early modern period itself and for the later periods in which they were collected. They have something to say to both early modernists and modernists.

Rebellion, according to a well established historiography, is one of the defining features of the early modern period. The debates between Mousnier, Porchnev, Bercé, Zagorin and Tilly, helped develop an idea of the early modern as a period in which new relationships generated new confrontations – between peasants and lords, between lords and monarchs, between the towns and the countryside, between the 'people' and the state.[130] Medieval

[129] Glanmor Williams, *Religion, Language, and Nationality in Wales. Historical Essays* (Cardiff, 1979), pp. 71-86; Elissa R. Henken, *National Redeemer. Owain Glyndŵr in Welsh Tradition* (Cardiff, 1996).

[130] Boris Porchnev, *Les soulèvements populaires en France de 1623 à 1648* (Paris, 1963; 1st ed. Moscow andLeningrad, 1948); Roland Mousnier, *Fureurs paysannes: les paysans dans les révoltes du XVIIe siècle. France, Russie, Chine* (Paris, 1967); Perez Zagorin, *Rebels and Rulers, 1500-1660*, 2 vols, (Cambridge, 1982);

local and mostly anti-seigneurial revolts gave way to much larger rebellions mobilizing many different social groups through shared ideologies. New forms of collective consciousness were articulated, including visions of a 'commonwealth' that could inspire collective action.[131] Yet the early modern remained a status society, a society of corps, estates and orders, in practice bonded more by interpersonal ties of patronage and obligation than through 'imagined communities' of nation and class.[132] At the risk of reifying these distinctions, one might add that the former, because interpersonal, could be primarily oral, while the latter, because imagined, had to be textual, and the interactions between these different technologies and the social imaginaries associated with them fuelled the conflicts of the period. The early modern gave way to the modern when rebellion gave way to revolution: for revolution was the result of the breakdown of this status society and the emergence of a new society of classes with far greater resources for communication (the 'bourgeois public sphere') and mobilization. According to a Marxist viewpoint, only with the mass organization made possible through factories, unions and the labour movement, only with the intellectual exchange that flourished through such contact (not just textual, but texts such as *The Communist Party Manifesto* obviously played a part) could the plebeian social classes politically exert their numerical dominance. Eric Hobsbawm may have admired the popular visions of justice, equality and freedom that animated early modern bandits and peasant insurgents, but they remained 'primitive rebels', doomed to failure; for him, only the emergence of a class society carried the real promise of liberation. [133]

According to the historians who have drawn this line between the early modern and the modern, the distinction was apparent also in the ideologies at work in moments of contestation as opposed to revolution. Rebellions tended to appeal to notions of 'right' social relations, a 'moral economy', that did not necessarily contest hierarchy but only its specific implementation in the present.[134] A food riot was violent but the crowd's actions were a performance aimed at the authorities, in effect a symbolic petition to them to fulfil popular expectations of patricians. Rebels very often seem keener to make a point rather than actually eliminate those that oppose them. Chouan bands might make their Republican opponents drink with them, sing with them and swear oaths with them,

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Yves-Marie Bercé, *Révoltes et Révolutions dans Europe moderne* (Paris, 1980); Charles Tilly, *European Revolutions , 1492-1992* (Oxford, 1993).

[131] David Rollison, *A Commonwealth of the People: Popular Politics and England's Long Social Revolution, 1066–1649* (Cambridge, 2010).

[132] See M. L. Bush (ed.), *Social Orders and Social Classes in Europe since 1500: Studies in Social Stratification* (Londres and New York, 1992). For a recent survey of the literature, see Déborah Cohen, 'Ordres et classes sous l'Ancien Régime', in Christian Delacroix, François Dosse, Patrick Garcia and Nicolas Offenstadt (eds), *Historiographies, II: Concepts et débats* (Paris, 2010): 1140-9.

[133] Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Manchester, 1959). Charles Tilly likewise locates the mid nineteenth century as the moment for the emergence of a new form of collective contestatory action; *The Contentious French: Four Centuries of Popular Struggle* (Cambridge MA, 1986).

[134] E.P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present* 50 (1971): 76-136. See also Jean Nicolas, *La Rébellion française, mouvements populaires et conscience sociale (1661-1789)* (Paris, 2002), and John Markoff, *The Abolition of Feudalism: Peasants, Lords, and Legislators in the French Revolution* (University Park PA, 1996). All three are interested in the radical possibilities implicit in 'golden age' mythologies, as well as in the process of radicalisation through the experience of contestation.

thereby obliging them to reintegrate with their 'early modern' notions of community both ideologically and practically.[135] Violence, in this case, forms part of a repertoire of gesture politics, bordering on street theatre.[136] Revolutionaries, on the other hand, do not appeal to the authorities, they rely on their own resources. They do not invoke notions of a golden age and an era of 'right' social relations, their aim is to create new social relations.

We are of course condensing and simplifying huge and unresolved debates. We do not intend, here, to enter into these questions ourselves and we do not offer a clear-cut definition of what separates the early modern from the modern, let alone a decision on when it occurred. Our wish is only that, given how central the topic of rebellion is to questions of periodisation, and to invite historians to test what oral traditions might contribute to such debates. For example, do such sources reveal, to rekindle the issues in the Porchnev/Mousnier debate (the former used oral texts in support of his arguments, though rather uncritically),[137] whether class tensions predominated in moments of rebellion, or whether vertical bonds of allegiance were activated against the unwanted intrusion of the state?

On first encounter, it is difficult to force oral traditions to speak to such historiographical questions. The oral traditional archive seems as bewildering to the historian as Youtube to the modern sociologist: millions of people envisioning and performing their concept of the world without any reference to the categories devised and promulgated in universities. Oral traditions very seldom even mention social categories. Rather, they deal with the personal, as predicted by Olrik's laws. They concentrate on Stenka Razin, or William Tell, or Richard Parker, not categories such as free peasants or lower-deck sailors. 'Concentration on a central person' is a generic feature of oral traditions, but it probably also reveals something about how events were conceived of at the time. Oral traditions also enthusiastically embrace supernatural interventions, not an engine of historical change endorsed by today's historians. However, again we would argue that it is important for historians to pay attention to historical actors' own conceptions of how things happen. What people in the past believed to be true guided their actions. The emic categories deployed in oral traditions are as important for making sense of early modern rebellions as the etic categories imposed by subsequent researchers.

The traditions considered in this volume also complicate the division between the early modern and the modern, the age of rebellions and the age of revolutions. Earlier events were alive and relevant in later confrontations, channelled by oral traditions. Written knowledge, catalogued and indexed, feels like an inheritance from a lost past: but oral traditional knowledge, which can only be grasped through performance in the here and now, collapses the distinction between past and present. Old slogans, old sobriquets, old threats and challenges, were revivified through their repetition in oral tradition. Not only

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[135] Timothy Le Goff and D.M.G. Sutherland, 'The Revolution and the Rural Community in Eighteenth-Century Brittany', *Past and Present* 62 (1974): 96-119.
[136] Andy Wood, 'Collective Violence, Social Drama and Rituals of Rebellion in Late Medieval and Early Modern England', in Stuart Carroll (ed.), *Cultures of Violence: Interpersonal Violence in Historical Perspective* (Basingstoke, 2007), pp. 99-116.
[137] Boris Porchnev, 'Les buts et les revendications des paysans lors de la révolte bretonne de 1675', in Arthur de la Borderie and Boris Porchnev (eds), *Les Bonnets Rouges* (Paris, 1975), pp. 280-3.

was Stenka Razin revived in Pugachev, but Pugachev was also revived in 1905 and 1917.[138] Every rebellion created the prophetic conditions for its resurrection: Jacobite traditions informed later Scottish and Irish rebellions and could even be heard in the twentieth century. During the self-consciously revolutionary events at the end of the eighteenth century, one could still hear famous Jacobite melodies such as 'The Chevalier's Muster Roll' or 'The White Cockade'; the song 'An Spailpin Fánach' associated Patrick Sarsfield – a popular hero from the time of the Williamite war (and a significant presence in Gaelic oral culture as the chapter in this volume by Éamonn Ó Ciardha demonstrates) – with Napoléon Bonaparte.[139] In this way the older language of rebellion, of appeal to authority, of a moral economy or a golden age, were entwined with more radical languages of revolution: the two are not easily separated. While it is worth searching for the defining characteristics of early modern memorial cultures,[140] the mechanisms of oral traditions transcend the habitual chronologies used by historians and complicate our attempts to create coherent periodisations. Because even when traditions were updated to become relevant in new contexts, they might carry with them echoes of past confrontations, and past loyalties.

'The value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new... story is different. It does not expend itself.'[141] Many meanings are pregnant in stories, and many lessons can be drawn. This means that rebel oral traditions could be simultaneously conservative and radical, threatening and placatory. In a similar fashion to Eugene Genovese's observation about another primarily oral culture, 'the world the slaves made' in the antebellum American south, resistance was always partnered by accommodation, while accommodation always intimated resistance.[142] So too rebel oral traditions could move from harmless, nostalgic idioms to revolutionary challenges by simple tone of intonation: and both were always implicit. This polyvalency is characteristic of oral traditions. It explains why John Ball's question to the Kentish peasant rebels assembled at Blackheath in 1381 — 'But when Adam delved, and Eve span,/ Who was then a Gentleman?' — has resonated down the centuries.[143] It also explains why historians have been debating precisely what he meant for almost as long.[144]

The recollection of past events invoked in rebel traditions may also help explain why rebellions so seldom succeed. The patterning of cultural action imposed by tradition

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[138] John Keep, 'Emancipation by the Axe? Peasant Revolts in Russian Thought and Literature', *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique* 23 (1982): 45-61.

[139] Murray G. H. Pittock, *Poetry and Jacobite Politics in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 207-15; Murray G. H. Pittock, *Jacobitism* (Basingstoke, 1998), pp. 67-70; Beiner, *Remembering the Year of the French*, pp. 86-94 and 145-52.

[140] This issue is central to the research project 'Tales of the Revolt', as presented byJudith Pollmann and Erika Kuijpers in their 'Introduction. On the Early Modernity of Modern Memory', in Erika Kuijpers, Judith Pollmann, Johannes Müller and Jasper van der Steen (eds), *Memory before Modernity. Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe* (Leyden, 2013), pp. 1-23.

[141] Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolae Leskov', in *Illuminations* (New York, 1968), pp. 83-107.

[142] Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1975), p. 598.

[143] Albert B. Friedman '"When Adam Delved…": Contexts of a Historic Proverb', in Larry D. Benson (ed.) *The Learned and the Lewd: Studies in Chaucer and Medieval Literature* (Cambridge MA, 1974), pp. 213-31.

[144] Anna Vaninskaya, 'Dreams of John Ball: Reading the Peasants' Revolt in the Nineteenth Century', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 31 (2009): 45-57.

creates the conditions for failure as rebels follow a choreographed path that can lead only to familiar outcomes, like the Parisian Communards of 1871, reliving other great revolutionary 'journées' with their barricades while their enemies were armed with machine guns and incendiary shells; even 'Revolutionary iconoclasts cite antique virtues'.[145] Stated like this the weight of the past might be seen as a problem, as suffocating the initiative of the present. To abuse the famous quote of George Santayana, it is not those who forget the past but those who remember who are doomed to repeat it. No doubt many politicians in Ireland and elsewhere have often felt the truth of this. But the presence of the past through tradition also blurs the specificities of modern concerns in ways that might be quite helpful in the elaboration of new political claims, and new forms of action. If all rebels and revolutionaries had to state baldly their manifesto of demands and also the compromises they were willing to accept, and if all their followers had to agree those demands, one might find the band very reduced. But oral traditions deploy the language of metaphor, and the pictures they draw invoke emotions that cannot be expressed in the bullet points of a manifesto. In this way the very fuzziness of oral traditions, which so infuriates documentary historians, encapsulates their power. But if we are to understand the choices of people in the past then we need to know what stories they told among themselves, for it was these stories that articulated a common identity, and created the conditions for collective action.

Oral traditions and memories of social conflict: a history waiting to be written

Having issued this injunction to colleagues, it would be disappointing if there was not the material for them to find. To return to the question raised at the beginning, why are there not more oral traditions concerning early modern revolts ready to hand? In his chapter below, Georges Bischoff offers one, highly localized Vosgian memory of the Peasants' War of 1525. Perhaps this should give historians' food for thought: the local triumphed over any putative collective identity even in this moment of mass peasant mobilization. But given the scale of this rebellion, can it only be in this one, atypical (because French-speaking) corner of the Holy Roman Empire that a tradition persisted through three centuries? Were these events forgotten by the descendants of the rebels throughout the German-speaking lands?

In his chapter below Philippe Joutard offers a sketch of a potential taxonomy of tradition which might help explain why some events appear to be forgotten while others, such as the Camisard Revolt in the Cévennes, are urgently present centuries later. If a local event can be seen as part of a holy struggle, part of a sacred chronology, that endows it with enormous significance that reinforces a tradition over the long term. One can find examples to range alongside the Camisards, such as Covenanters, Carlists, and Russian Old Believers.[146] More commonly, perhaps, if a local event can be interpreted as part of a national struggle, it is more likely to be remembered and celebrated. In eastern and

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145 David Lowenthal, 'Past Time, Present Place: Landscape and Memory', *Geographical Review* 65 (1975): 32.

146 See, for example, Jeremy MacClancy, *The Decline of Carlism: Anthropology and History in Northern Spain, 1939-1995* (Reno NV, 2000); Terry Brotherstone (ed.), *Covenant, Charter and Party: Traditions of Revolt and Protest in Modern Scottish History* (Aberdeen. 1989); Georg Michel, 'The Solovki Uprising: Religion and Revolt in Northern Russia', *The Russian Review* 51 (1992): 1-15.

southern Europe, haiduks, klephts and other bandits were taken up first by nationalists as forerunners of the patriotic struggle for liberation from foreign oppressors, and then by Communists as forerunners of the class struggle against foreign *and* domestic oppressors.[147] Their stories were told and retold in paintings, plays, films, school textbooks: in this case oral traditions have benefitted massively from the institutional and ideological underpinnings of the state. The particular has become a symbol of a larger conflict, leading to a diffusion of the tradition over a much greater area, and greater familiarity. The same can be said of traditions that can be made to speak to other large scale transformations. The specific details of John Henry's encounter with the steam hammer are all but impossible to recover, but because the song is relevant to both industrial relations in the age of Fordism, and race relations in an age of Civil Rights, some tradition of the event survives.[148] (And of course it remains appreciated as a good song, not an unimportant criteria.)

However, we also believe it is possible that other oral traditions persisted locally whose historical significance has not yet been recognized. It is not implausible that, in the innumerable reviews published by the equivalents of the Société philomatique de Saint-Dié in other towns and regions of the former Holy Roman Empire over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, dozens if not hundreds of other local traditions concerning the Peasants' War might be waiting for an interpreter. And it may still be worth going to look for them, sound-recorder in hand, in the communities affected by this and other rebellions. One might sometimes get the impression from the titles given to published collections based on oral traditions, which tend to invoke whole regions if not nations and peoples, that everything has been said, nowhere remains to be visited and no-one remains to be heard. Actually this is far from the case; titles like 'Cornish Traditions' or 'Legends of the Auvergne' often rely only the testimonies of a handful of people in a couple of locations. Although dozens of books have been published concerning the memory of the Revolution in the west of France, and the counter-revolutionary insurgencies that opposed it, no substantial, scholarly historical work has yet incorporated the very numerous oral traditions about these events which continue to circulate in the communities affected. When it comes to oral traditions concerning early modern rebellions, our case is not just that there are sources which are underused, there are sources which are still to be found.

[147] For example, the Slovak (or Polish, or Hungarian) 'social bandit' Juraj Janosik, active in the early eighteenth century, was the subject of both nationalist and socialist reinterpretations during the twentieth century: Anikó Imre, 'Adventures in Early Socialist Television Edutainment', *The Journal of Popular Film and Television* 40 (2012): 119-30.

[148] Scott Reynolds Nelson, *Steel Drivin' Man: John Henry, The Untold Story of an American Legend* (Oxford, 2006).