

Willie Mathieson and the Primary Audience for Traditional Song

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ABSTRACT. Focusing on the song notebooks of William Mathieson (1879–1958), a farmworker in North-East Scotland, this essay examines the role of tradition in one man's life, proposing that people learn, preserve, and perform folklore largely for themselves. Mathieson's material is preserved as handwritten and typed texts, along with cylinder and tape recordings, made across more than half a century by three collectors: James Madison Carpenter, Hamish Henderson and, crucially, Mathieson himself. I suggest that this depth of evidence can be used in future to elucidate the essential nature of specific examples, but most importantly, I show that the primary audience for tradition is the individual.

KEYWORDS: repertoire, fieldwork, audience, folk song, autoethnography.

It this book that I have penned
Of songs that I hae¹ heard
About lovers true and ones that rue
And sangs about takin each ither's lives
Songs I've heard from young folk
And them that's growin a beard
Aboot some lassie they hae loed
And things that they hae heard

– William Mathieson, MS I, 4: 53²

This essay explores the texture of song in the life of Scottish singer Willie Mathieson (1879–1958), with particular reference to his extensive notebook collections of

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- 1 Mathieson spoke North-East Scots, or Doric, a regional variety of the Scots language. Selected words can be found in the glossary; for more detail, see the Dictionary of the Scots Language at www.dsl.ac.uk.
- 2 Copies of Mathieson's handwritten notebooks, from which this extract is drawn are held at the Archive of the School of Scottish Studies, Department of Celtic and Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh. The original volumes are still in the possession of the family.



Figure 1. William Mathieson in the early 1900s, “Studio of J. Shivas & Son, Peterhead. Loaned for copying by Hamish Henderson.” MLD 1981 (Archive of the School of Scottish Studies, Department of Celtic and Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh).

song referred to by Mathieson himself in the extract above, and suggests that the primary audience for “tradition” is often the “bearer” him- or herself³, challenging the divisions inherent in such categorisations as “audience” and “performance”.

When the American song collector and scholar, James Madison Carpenter, came across William Mathieson in 1930, he collected more than a hundred and fifty songs, around a third of them Child ballads⁴. Some twenty years later, Scottish folklorist, poet, and writer, Hamish Henderson, collected around 450 songs for the nascent School of Scottish Studies⁵.

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 3 I use quotation marks as I do not consider this term to be a fair representation of how the transmission of traditional materials works, implying as it does a passive relationship with content rather than one with creative agency.

4 See Bishop 1998 for an introduction to the collection, Carpenter Project for the project webpage, and Carpenter Collection for the full online collection. The “Child ballads” are those selected and collected together by Francis James Child (see Child 1882–98).

5 Now renamed the School of Scottish Studies Archive, Department of Celtic and Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh.

These are remarkable numbers, though not unprecedented in the annals of song collecting. And, indeed, the paradigm – collector and contributor – is well established. But there had been a collector in Mathieson’s life many years before Carpenter arrived in 1930, forty-four years before, to be exact, because Mathieson collected his own material in ledger notebooks from the age of seven, eventually filling more than half a dozen of them and amassing around 650 songs.

In studying song, perhaps any kind of transient lore, whether oral or performed, one is constantly confronted by the reality that hearing or witnessing a performance, an “item”, or tradition, or a record of it, is simply one hazy snapshot of a dynamic intellectual product at a moment in time. The totality of the artistic product is only slightly apprehended. One gets the impression that folklore collecting is sometimes thought to be something like capturing and killing sample butterflies, that a song out of context is dead, a desiccated husk of its true self. While this may be true for the resultant song *text*, printed in a book or served up on the internet, oftentimes without a melody, there are several false elements bound up within that concept.

The first of these is the idea of death. In fact, while a *particular* text or version may be dead, as it sits on the page, or in an archive, as soon as someone apprehends it in any way, reading, speaking, or singing it, the song may live again, albeit in a slightly different form (the folk process), just as the butterfly can in some way be reanimated in the imagination, in the description, or in the passing along of information about it. Second, and more important, a dead butterfly is one less living butterfly in the world, whereas a collected song actually means there is one *more* song in the world: the song in “tradition” and the “fixed” text derived from it.

In reality, all those eighteenth- and nineteenth-century collectors took snapshots of tradition, while the tradition itself continued its arc of life, changing, disappearing, reappearing, subject to human memory, use, and creativity. Mathieson’s own notebooks are far more continuous in inception and influence than outsider views, though even they are periodic, albeit frequent, insights into a life lived start to finish.

Nevertheless, taken together, Mathieson’s, Carpenter’s, and Henderson’s work (spanning 1886 to 1952), diverse forms of media (including handwritten texts, cylinder recordings, typewritten texts, and reel-to-reel recordings), and secondary materials, such as interviews with Mathieson and his descendants about his life and songs, give us rich and varied data for a huge number of “intellectual items”, a term for the mental concept from which each performance, manifestation, or iteration of a song is derived. This depth may allow us to construe something of the songs’ fundamental nature, shape, and stability, or lack thereof, not available in collections built upon just one or two encounters with a contributor within a very limited time frame.

Mathieson cited his time in the cradle as the beginning of his lifelong fascination with song. So, perhaps more important than repertoire studies, this diachronic range

of materials can give us insight into the man himself, and his relationship with tradition over a remarkable span of time covering more than eighty percent of his life.

Willie Mathieson was born in Overton o Dudwick, Ellon, in a stone cottage with a slated roof, though the family soon moved, when Mathieson was one, to a croft at Muir o Bank, Whitestone Hill, Dudwick, just down the road. This was a simpler clay-built house, with an earthen floor, a timmer lum⁶, and a thatched roof retained against the winds off the North Sea with ropes. When this house was lost in a fire, the neighbours all came to help replace it, cutting sods and rushes for a new roof – the North-East tradition of neepering, looking after your neighbours when they need it⁷ (SA1952.001.A11⁸).

Home life was sometimes harsh, with strict discipline maintained. “He’s *ma bairn*,” Mathieson reports his father saying, justifying stern discipline, and prompting a pointed rejoinder from his mother, “‘Is he nae mine as weel as yours?’, she says. I mind that” (*tearful*) (SA1952.015.B3)⁹. Mathieson left school at eleven years old¹⁰, to begin work with Sandy Massie, Feltachie, Ellon, filling and digging drains for agricultural improvement¹¹. To Henderson, he described the work and the weather, foul and fair.

I didnae like the jobs. Ach, twisna a great job fillin in drains. Hard job on your back onywey. I mind sittin in the snaa, takin your dinner; that wis aa that ye had tae brak to cauld blast wi.

Paid me nothing. Paid ma faither, ye see? Ma father hid tae pey me, bit I nivver sa it. Fin I asked, he jist said, “Well, ye get your clothes an your bed.”

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6 A wooden inverted funnel over an open hearth designed to guide the smoke out through a hole in the roof; see Fenton 1987.

7 For more on neepering see Carter 1979; McKean 1995.

8 SA numbers refer to fieldwork begun for the School of Scottish Studies in the 1950s. See bibliography for sources.

9 Quoted oral material is drawn, in the main, from tape-recorded interviews made by Hamish Henderson for the School of Scottish Studies Archive, Department of Celtic and Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh; they are available online through Tobar an Dualchais/Kist o Riches and cited as S(ound)A(rchive).year.tapenumber.track number. Transcriptions are made according to “revised verbatim” transcription standards (see Ives 1995), thus some repetitions and hesitations have been removed and a few elisions made; substantial elisions are marked with <...>.

10 The Education Act of 1872 had required education to age 13, but if you could show proficiency in “the three Rs” (reading, writing, and arithmetic), you could leave earlier.

11 The soil of North-East Scotland is underlain with a layer of clay which prevents drainage, making the soil too wet for many crops and higher yields. Agricultural improvements from the eighteenth century onwards principally took the form of better drainage, with more effective ploughs able to cut through this layer, and the installation of a vast system of subsurface drainage pipes. For details, see Smout and Fenton 1965; Fenton and Veitch 2011.

A good while, I'd dykes tae build an ditches tae <dig?> oot. Twid hae been in the ditches tae ma knees amon watter. Sair job, like. (SA1952.005.A10)

After a year or two of this work he fee'd¹² out to a farm as a cattleman, and thereafter for many years at various farms all over the North-East corner of Scotland (SA1952.005.A10). It was a hard working life, with farmers showing little respect for the lads' intelligence or capabilities, but they dared not object.

They wid hae nott a better head than you or I tae tell them that. They didna care for your views. Ye wis lookit doon on as dirt, supposin ye vrocht ma wark. There wis naethin, no no. (SA1952.012.A6)

The living conditions were difficult, too, as the men lived in unheated rooms in stables and barns.

Some o them took some stickin oot. Rise in the mornin, shakin the snaa aff o the blankets when ye rase. I didna ken far it come in; it twid blaa in onywey, on a gey frosty nicht. Your beets, fin ye gaed intae them in the mornin, ye cuidna win in; they were frozen like a buird. Aye, ye hid tae go on like at an dee your wark. (SA1952.010.A2)

Mathieson was at Dunlugas Estate outside Turriff when Carpenter met him, and in King Edward when Henderson recorded him twenty years later. In all his life, Mathieson never travelled outside the North-East of Scotland (or indeed south of Stonehaven or west of Forres), until 1952, when he went with Henderson to Edinburgh to supervise the copying of his notebooks (SA1952.003.B21).

The Notebooks

The farm servant's lifestyle was ideal for someone interested in songs, shifting farms on each new contract would have brought him into contact with a whole new group of people every six or twelve months and, as Hamish Henderson reports, Mathieson kept his notebooks in his kist, the small wooden chest in which farm servants stored their few possessions as they moved from farm to farm.

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 12 The feeing system pertained across much of lowland Scotland through the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth. Young men, from around the age of twelve or fourteen, would be hired to work on local farms for a six month "fee", after which they would stay on if it suited them, or move to another farm if not, taking their meagre belongings with them. Most such fees were residential, with the servants living in basic stone cottages (bothies), or in a room above a barn (a chaamer), or even, rarely, in the main house. See Carter 1979 for more details.



Figure 2. William Mathieson with Hamish Henderson in King Edward, “James Anthony, 1952. Donated Hamish Henderson 1958” (courtesy Matilda Duke; Archive of the School of Scottish Studies, Department of Celtic and Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh).

He was devoted to the task and put both time and money into the exercise: “I cuidna get paper, ye see? Cuid hardly get paper tae write letters or labels or anything” (SA1952.010.B7(B18)). Despite the cost, he would acquire a new notebook when necessary and each would gradually be filled with songs and other lore, with some books taking around five years to complete. According to Matilda Duke, Mathieson’s granddaughter, “When they got dubbie he wrote them out again an chucked em” (Duke 2006). Throughout his life, Mathieson was never in the best of health, which may have been conducive to his solitary hobby.

I wis never hardly able tae win a fee. I wis aye hauden doon. An will be hauden doon,
I suppose, till I’ll be doon an trampit doon.

I’ll just have tae go fin he calls. No more about it, same as the rest. (SA1952.003.A6)

So important were the manuscripts to him that he did not want to let them out of his sight, having lent one to someone from New Deer in 1902: “Oh there’s a good lot o them I’ll nivver see again, ye see, that chap <...> gaed awa wi them” (SA1952.006.B4). And, according to Matilda Duke’s father, at least one notebook

was lost in a fire and painstakingly reconstructed. Thus, when Henderson wanted to copy them for the School of Scottish Studies Archives in 1952, Mathieson accompanied him: “I’ve haen a jolly time in Edinburgh. I enjoyed masel wi Burl Ives” (SA1952.023.B13(B18)). Although Henderson made photostats of the ledgers in 1952, the originals are still in the possession of Mathieson’s grandchildren, still important, and distributed among them to keep the memories alive across the growing range of descendants.

Repertoire

In the course of decades of this itinerant farm work on short-term contracts, Mathieson acquired a broad and diverse repertoire of traditional material, from highly localised occupational songs of farm life – “bothy ballads” or bothy songs, so called because of their association with the farm servants’ accomodation¹³ – to extensive versions of international ballads (e.g., Figure 3). He also had an ear for other kinds of tradition, so his notebooks include interesting notes on calendar customs, proverbs and epigrams or aphorisms, along with stories and jokes of varying lengths.

The material comes from a wide variety of sources: relatives, including his own wife (SA1952.018.B2(B11)), friends, other farm workers met in a lifetime of moves from farm to farm, print sources, and some correspondence (SA1952.005.B10), and includes some Irish material from itinerant workers. This latter point should come as no surprise, as “local” North-East tradition is quite diverse and far reaching in its makeup. Indeed, when schoolmaster Gavin Greig set out to collect folk songs in the North-East in 1904, he found that around one third of the repertoire of “local” songs was, in fact, Irish in origin.

Mathieson was a dedicated and diligent collector, sometimes acquiring a song in a single meeting, following up with correspondence, or travelling some way to hear and procure a song for his collection. While most contributors were enthusiastic, some were less so. One man up in Kildrummy refused to make any further contributions.

I says, “I wid pey ye for’t.”

“Oh,” he says, “I’ll easy gie ye ‘The Sea Captain’ <Roud 947>, bit I winna gie ye nae mair.” So I nivver asked nae mair.

Well, of course there was a lot o them, ye see, Burns. “The Bonnie Lass o Ballochmyle” <Roud 6168¹⁴> an stuff like at, ye see. Oh he could really sing. Oh he wis a better singer than I wis. He kent it, tee. (SASA1952.003.B6(B15))

13 For more on the bothy song, see Greig 1914, 2000, and Hall 1987.

14 The Roud Folksong Index is a typology-based finding aid available at www.vwml.org.

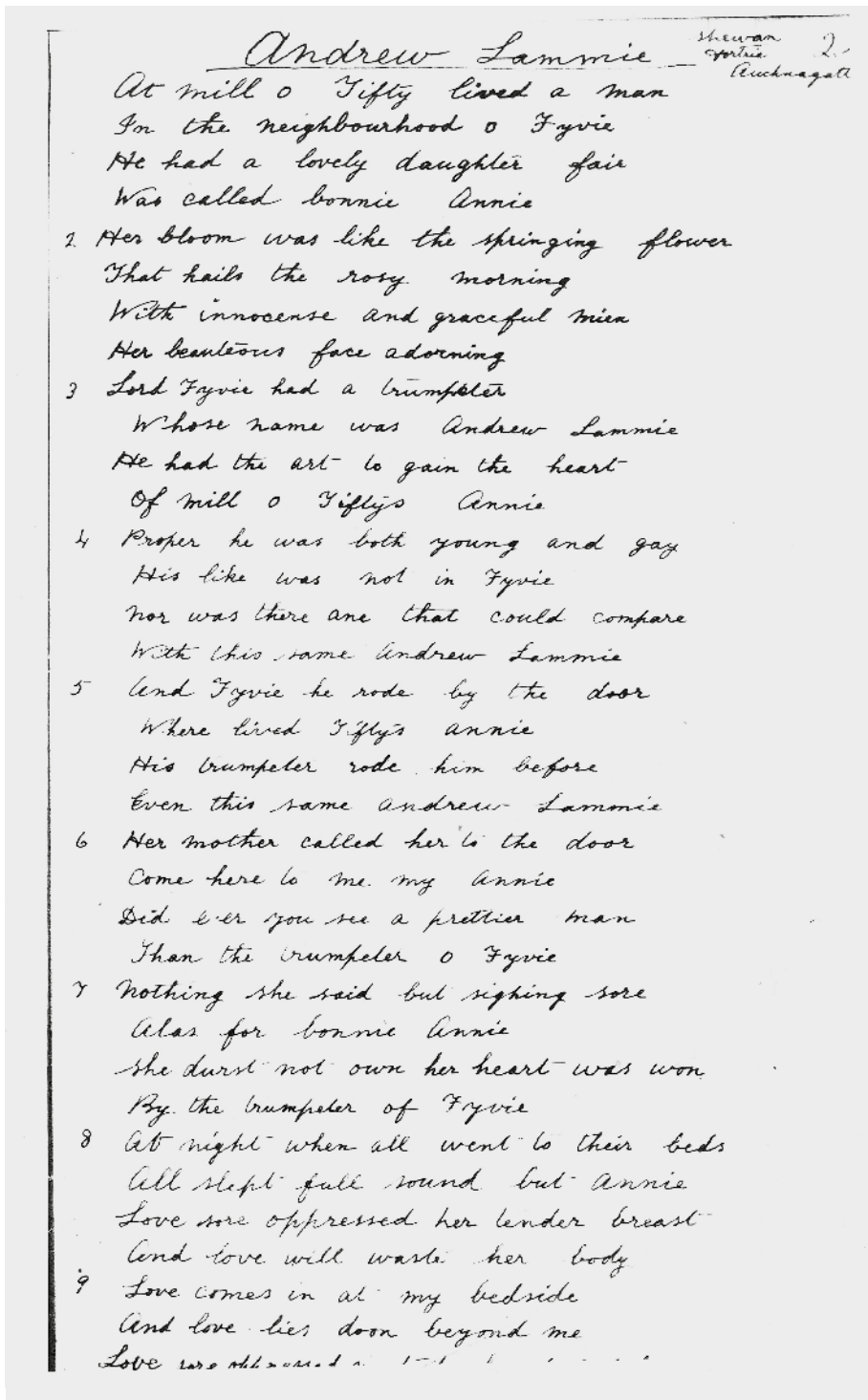


Figure 3. A page from Mathieson's handwritten notebooks featuring "The Mill o Tifty's Annie" (Roud 98). Note the provenance recorded in the upper righthand corner (image courtesy of Matilda Duke).

Some material in the notebooks also came from print culture, such as from Gavin Greig's column in the *Buchan Observer* (Greig 1914), books (e.g., Ord 1930; P. Buchan 1828), and, indeed, the still functioning broadside press (see Atkinson and Roud 2017). The ballad sellers were still part of daily life and Mathieson recalled his mother buying "The Glasgow Lights" (Roud 24046) for a penny from a "poor girl" selling broadsheets in 1896 (SA1952.006.A18, SA1952.017.B18). On another occasion, his father bought a copy of "The Ship that Never Returned" (Roud 77)

from a man <who> sellt ballads, songs...sang them even. An he wis at the market an he brought hame <the song>. An I wis affa taen wi it. It wis him that bocht "The Blaeberry Courtship" <Roud 1888>; I nivver heard him singin it. <...>

See, they'd hae come tae the door at that time, tee; after I grew up I was always on for buyin them. They cost a penny or tuppence depending on the size of the song, ye see? "The Blaeberry Courtship" wis tuppence. <...>

Well there wis one day they come tae the aul umman's door an I wis nae daein naethin at the time – twid happen tae be aboot the term – an I wis jist sittin in the hoose, newsin. A knock comes tae the door. Of course, I gaed awa tae the door. There's a man stannin there: "I'm only left with *one*. That's aa that I'm left wi. Ach, here," he says, "I'll gie ye it for a penny!" An so the aul wife says, "Fa is't?"

I said, "I've bocht the only een that he his. He's een o the ballad lads." So, course, he'd tae sing a sang, ye see, the auld umman gart him sing. An aifter he sung the sang <he hid> cup o tea. Aye, ma mither liked him. <...>

It turned oot there wis three on the sheet onywey an there wis only supposed tae be one. There wis one that wis named, ye see. <...> I wid hae been aboot thirteen year aul, I suppose, because in the winter time this year I gaed awa an learned tae be a jiner. (SA1952.006.A8(A18))

Mathieson also composed his own songs, some of them intensely personal. This was not an unusual activity at the time, as the numerous volumes of vernacular verse published in this era testify (e.g., Abel 1916; Campbell 1914).

Performance

Mathieson never sang in public, in his youth.

Not till I was up tae Rhynie. That wis in 1908, 1909, the very first day. There was a marriage at the hotel at Rhynie. They were aa nearaboot drunk, ye see, the men. They gart me sing a sang afore they gaed awa, "Scarborough's Banks" <Roud 185>. I learned that doon atween Cairndale an Ellon. The saicant lad wis singin't, ye see, an I learnt

alang wi him. I wid hae been about <pause> twenty-two. I married next year, ye see.
(SA1952.002.B9(A1/A10))

Before that time, he had really only sung to learn songs and to record them in his notebooks, not to perform, and this instance was due to the insistence of his hosts.

Outsider Fieldwork

Mathieson's songs first came to the attention of outsider scholars in 1930, when American collector James Madison Carpenter was travelling throughout North-East Scotland in his open-topped Austin 7 car, looking for ballads and songs. At the time, Mathieson was working as a cattleman on the Dunlugas Estate, near Turriff, Aberdeenshire, where Carpenter visited him at his then home, Denhead of Dunlugas.

Carpenter would record a stanza or two of each song on a cylinder recorder, to make note of the tune, and then take down the words, couplet by couplet, on his portable typewriter. He would then revise and correct the text in consultation with the contributor (for more on Carpenter and his methods, see Bishop 1998; the full collection is now available online; see Carpenter Collection).

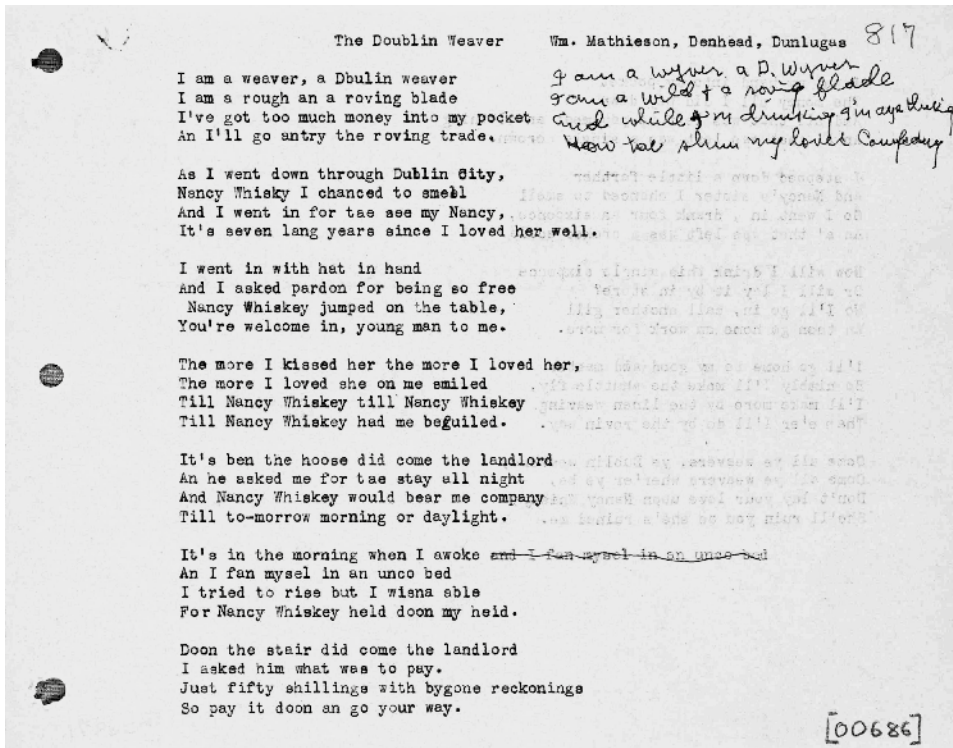


Figure 4. Mathieson's "Dublin Weaver" (Roud 883) as documented by James Madison Carpenter (Carpenter Collection, p. 00686).

In 1951, Hamish Henderson, in the company of American collector, Alan Lomax, recorded some material from Mathieson, later released on the latter's *World Library of Folk and Primitive Music* series for Columbia Records (Lomax 1998). The following year, Mathieson became the first "traditional singer", in Henderson's phrase, to record for the School of Scottish Studies (Henderson 1992: 25). Hamish spent days with Mathieson, camped out at the Commercial Hotel in Turriff, filling twenty-three 7-inch reel-to-reel tapes with songs as they worked their way through Mathieson's manuscript notebooks song by song to document their tunes and backgrounds, while also meeting some of Mathieson's colourful friends, such as Lordie Hay. These tapes contain a wealth of contextual detail about Mathieson's life, his relationship with song, and about the songs themselves and their history, information which builds an anecdotal narrative around the facts and names contained in the manuscripts.

By 1952, however, Mathieson had been collecting material for himself for more than sixty years, filling his large notebooks with ballads, lyric songs, children's material, jokes, stories, proverbs, weather lore, aphorisms and place name rhymes (some of this material is written in a natural vernacular Scots which was not taught in schools at that time). It is often said that doing good fieldwork requires establishing and nurturing good relationships with contributors, the people from whom we wish to learn (e.g., Jackson 1987; Ives 1995; McNeill 2013). But Mathieson had begun that process practically the day he was born, transcribing his first song text when he was seven years old:

I first heard it fin I wis a boy. I wis lyin in the cradle. <...> I wis nae able tae write it at aa. I wrote it in 1886, bit I'm nae tellin ye whit like writin it wis. (SA1952.006.A18)

Shortly thereafter, at the age of eight, he began his lifetime habit of keeping notebooks, finishing the last one in April 1952 with a song that he found pinned to a bothy (farm shed) door.

HH What first gave you the idea of writin down ballads in the book, Willie?

WM Oh well, I dinna ken it wis jist a sort o a hobby. I jist likit tae dee't. (SA1952.002. B9(A1/A10))

Once Mathieson had left home and was feeing on farms, he would while away the evening hours writing songs in the chaamer (farm worker accommodation in a barn or house).

WM Gas lit. Book on the kist an ma knees on the floor.

HH An what did the farmer, or the farm servants think o this habit o yours?

- WM The farmer wis pleased because I wis always there when he wanted me. There wis none o the rest o us at home, ye see? They were away near every night. <...>
- HH An what about the other farm servants?
- WM Oh they werena pleased. They were <sayin>, “Oh, what’s the eese o gaein on wi that? Come oot about wi the lave o us, then.”
- I wisnae a rovin sort. (SA1952.002.B9(A1/A10))

Fortunately, other farms on which he fee’d proved more compatible with his pastime.

Mathieson’s interest in the material itself was wide-ranging and, while he collected songs for performance, he also noted down many that interested him but were not in his singing repertoire. In addition, according to Hamish Henderson, he knew and performed songs that went unnoted due to their bawdy content – songs he described as “a bittie hot, ken” (SA1952.004.B16(B10, B15)) – but it is equally likely that he wrote only those materials that he felt worthy of preservation and that particularly appealed to him¹⁵.

Naturally, all singers must be gatherers of a sort simply to build repertoire, but in common with many others, Mathieson took his collecting quite seriously and devoted much time to it, describing himself to Henderson as, “sittin there till me erse was dottled” (SA1952.023.B12(B17)).

Mathieson was enthusiastic and tenacious and this extract from a recording session with Lordie Hay and Hamish Henderson gives us an insight into his manner and his curiosity.

- WM Ye’ll manage tae gie me “The Convict Maid” <Roud 5479>.
- Lordie Hay Oh aye.
- WM And “Black Velvet Band” <Roud 2146>.
- LH Yes.
- WM And you, Hamish, I’m needin “Star o the County Down” <Roud 4801>. Perhaps we’ll do it after; let’s write them back in here. (SA1952.017.A5)

His record keeping was methodical and precise, with typical entries like this one, which finishes off the last leaf of the 1926–30 volume,

This book was finished on 18.8.30 and I commenced to write this book on the 6/2/26 close on 5 years. Written by me Mr William Mathieson, Denhead Cotts, Dunlugas, Turriff, Aberdeenshire.

.....

15 That said, Henderson was interested in bawdy material and its underreported role in the folk song tradition, remarking that the bothy lads survived on a diet of oatmeal brose and bawdy songs.

One such note even mentions Carpenter's visit,

Written by William Mathieson on this the third day of August nineteen hundred and thirty the same year as Professor Carpenter was collecting songs for a book in this district Dunlugas. (Mathieson *Notebooks*, II, item 1)

Mathieson was fascinated by the historical background to his songs, as in this extract from his notebooks related to the ballad "The Earl of Errol" (Roud 96):

This Ballad was composed about Gilbert Hay who succeeded to the title of Earl of Errol in the year 1636 He afterwards married Catherine daughter of James who died without issue 1674

Figure 5. Extract from notebook entry for "The Earl of Errol" (courtesy Matilda Duke 2006).

Many North-East ballads are deeply rooted in historical incident and Mathieson seemed keen to connect his own singing tradition to its historical roots, to anchor it in time and place, increasing its cultural gravitas¹⁶.

He was aware, too, of key issues such as variation and multiformity, sometimes collecting extra verses for his songs when he came across different versions, often a year or two after he noted the main text. He recalled sitting with four other people, on one occasion, singing the same song – "The Dowie Dens o Yarrow" (Roud 13) – to five different melodies, to give the host and his wife the choice of which tune / version they preferred (SA1952.012.B15a). Most traditional singers are quite wedded to a single tune for a given set of words, with some expressing surprise when someone is able to employ different melodies for the "same" song (personal communication, Elizabeth Stewart). In the same interview with Henderson, Mathieson remarks, "I've heard often two people singing same sang an nae eesin the same words, an still it wis the same sang an a different tune" (SA1952.012.B15a), again showing an acute awareness of the variability inherent in tradition and, interestingly, a sense that there is an abstract concept of "the song", one that simply gets realised at different times, in differing versions, by different people.

Mathieson was also quite aware of the value of his material, having seen Gavin Greig's regular song column, "Folk-Song of the North-East", in the local paper, *The Buchan Observer*¹⁷ (SA1952.023.B11(B16)), and having been "fieldworked" by James Madison Carpenter in 1930. In the bigger picture, Mathieson also played a part,

16 See McKean 2015 for an exploration of the role of context and related information in creating, developing, and explicating meaning and function in the Scottish ballad tradition.

17 Greig's newspaper columns were collected together and published as Greig 1914.

telling Hamish Henderson about Carpenter's visits and collecting work. After this, and conversations with John Strachan, Fyvie, another of Carpenter's contributors, Henderson made a point of mentioning Carpenter's work to American folklorist Kenneth S. Goldstein, resident in the North-East on a Fulbright grant in 1959–60. Goldstein then agitated for years for the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., to purchase the collection, which they did under Alan Jabbour in 1972.

Curiously, he told few about this all-consuming hobby.

Nivver! I nivver told anybody. Ma father an mither didnae even know for a long time.

<...The> aul boy he says, "Fit's that ye hiv, noo?"

"Oh," I says, "songs I write doon." (SA1952.006.B4)

According to Mathieson's granddaughter, Matilda Duke, her grandfather was very private about songs, telling his children to get out of the way when he wanted to write.

It was never ever mentioned. It was never a big deal; it was just what he did.

Nothing else was mentioned. <...> Nobody knew. Nobody knew, at all.

TM In your generation, or the generation before?

MD Both. In both. Nobody knew. An the reason that people didn't know was that when he was recorded by Hamish, he wis livin wi Barbara an she died.

An he did keep it away from everyone. It was something *he* did, not that the family got involved with. (Duke 2006)

Hamish Henderson reports meeting the local doctor "who had attended Willie for many years. He looked incredulously at the recording gear strewn all over the cottage floor, and freely admitted that until he had seen the fact mentioned in the papers he had never realised that Willie was a singer" (Henderson 1992: 25).

Many other singers have similar areas of privacy. Lucy Stewart, for instance, was, by choice, similarly sheltered. Though she did perform with and for relatives, for occasional outsider aficionados, she never sung outside the home (McKean 2004). Other singers I have met were never public performers at all, while others sung to and for themselves, like Mathieson, and later became public performers in their sixties, such as Gordon Easton (see McKean 1997) and Geordie Murison (Murison 2017).

Other singers, too, have kept records of their own material, such as the prolific Ethel Findlater in Orkney (Findlater), and many in the North-East of Scotland, such as Elizabeth Stewart, Bill McKinnon, Jean Mathew, and Jane Turriff, kept notes of their own "pure oral tradition", too, ranging from a few scribbled lines to full-blown versions kept in valued notebooks (see McKean 2004; McKinnon 1995; Turriff 1996). In the wider British Isles context, Harry Cox is known to have

kept some notes on bits of paper (Marsh 2010: 23–24). Perhaps the best-known British Isles example is from England, the Copper Family of Rottingdean, Sussex (Copper 1995). “In 1922 James <Copper> was persuaded to write down the words of some of his songs by the daughter of the farmer for whom he had worked for over forty years. These were the old songs that he had loved all his life, songs that he remembered hearing as a boy in the 1840s and ’50s” (Yates 2006)¹⁸.

While the Copper notebooks in some ways parallel Mathieson’s, they owe their inception to rather different motive as James Copper was “persuaded”, to use Yates’s words, to write them down, whereas Mathieson began his out of his own interest and conviction at around the age of seven. So Copper was stimulated by an outside influence, whereas Mathieson appears to have been internally driven from a very young age, though the two men’s regard for tradition was similar.

In the North-East of Scotland, I have also been amazed at the number of families, some of them not at all well off, who had reel-to-reel tape recorders in the 1950s and 60s. I have listened to many a self-made recording, products of intra-community and intra-family collecting, from several families, and they offer an invaluable insight into the traditions these people *themselves* felt to be important, to be worth recording. Participation is key, entertainment and showing off are all part of it, and the repertoire ranges from family stories to Country and Western songs, from hymns to classic ballads and children’s songs. Participants are usually given free rein and encouraged to sing their specialties, regardless of genre.

Performing to Text

Any act of preservation implies an audience of sorts, an eventual receiver of the information, and Mathieson was certainly well aware that his notebooks, though created quite privately and for personal reasons, might also contribute to the preservation of tradition and might, at some time, be accessible to outsiders. But in the main, the notebooks were for him. So, though he was not a passive tradition bearer (von Sydow 1948: 12, 48) and did sometimes sing with others in the usual social settings of the time, he had little concern for the customary audience for such materials: the listener. *He* was the audience, the *book* the receiver of performance, the act of *writing* the act of performance.

Thus it was the *process* of collecting, writing, and preservation that was important to him. Collecting is a sociable act, when undertaken from outside sources (the standard fieldworker and contributor model), but there is an aspect of socialising even within Mathieson’s collecting paradigm. To undertake a hobby, especially one as time consuming and diligently followed as Mathieson’s, is to socialise with

.....
 18 Some examples outside Britain can be found in Croger 2004; Ūsaiytė 2015.

oneself. This solitary aspect was clearly very dear to his heart, as shown by his privacy regarding both the material and the process from the earliest days.

HH Oh, you were still at school when you wrote it down. Did the dominie know you were writin aa this ballads down?

WH Never. I never told anybody. Ma father an mother did nae even know for a long time. (SA1952.006.B4)

This sense of privacy persisted throughout his life, with even close family members not being aware.

Curiously, this urge to record, to put down a representation of experience in some sort of permanent record (making manifest aspects of what is otherwise an aural/oral world), runs in the Mathieson family. His granddaughter, Matilda Duke, tells me that when she was in school, long before she was aware of her grandfather's notebooks, she herself used to keep notebooks of 1960s pop songs. "I would sit an write books an books of their music, their songs. An sit an listen to it an write it, which I've always done" (Duke 2006). Sometimes she would do this for other people who wanted the words to a song (Duke 2006). Her grandfather was, upon occasion, asked to do the same, as in a request from Thomas, pigman at Auchterless: "Bit he widna gie me paper, so he nivver got it. <...> An I wasn't going tae buy a jotter for him" (SA1952.010. B7(B18)). In addition, Matilda and her grandfather share a decided ear for melody and lyrics, picking them up quickly and with fluency, which made their hobby possible.

Repertoire

The enormous corpus of materials accrued by Mathieson, Carpenter, and Henderson gives us a wonderful opportunity to explore synchronic and contextual change and stability. Such close study may, in turn, allow us to explore the fundamental character of particular examples within Mathieson's repertoire, to triangulate on the conceptual model that underlies particular renditions and versions in the corpus (cf. Porter 1976). We can explore the potential for this notion with a very quick look at "The Bonnie Rantin Laddie" (Roud 103).

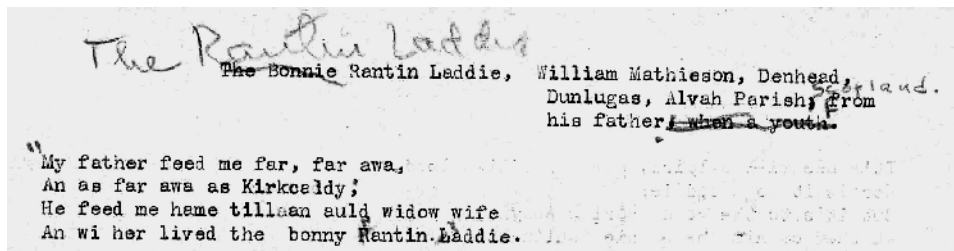


Figure 6. Dictated text, 1930 (Carpenter Collection, p. 05716).

My father fee'd me far, far awa
 Far, far awa tae Kircaldy
 He fee'd me at hame tae an aul widow wife
 An wi her lived the bonnie rantin laddie.

(Carpenter Collection, 1930, Cylinder 006 00:12, my transcription)

My father he fee'd me far, far awa
 As far awa as Kircaldy.

(SA1952.002.A14, my transcription)

Note the difference in line 2 between the dictated text (Figure 6) and the cylinder recording, which was probably sung on the same occasion that the dictated text was typed. Carpenter's text transcription of this cylinder is the same as mine, so line 2 in the dictated text, regardless of which was made first, was deliberately, and perhaps purposefully, different. An audio-recorded performance is obviously a very different event from a dictated one, particularly with regards to what we might call the intermittent, or interrupted, moment of performance in the latter, as the performer stops after each couplet for the typist to note down the words. It will be interesting to see what further work reveals on this front, for example, regarding the implications for variation if the cylinder was recorded after the dictated text. Should we assume that the sung text was a more natural form, due to the performance paradigm? Or is the dictated text closer to how Mathieson preferred it, given that he would have had the time and opportunity to change the text in conversation with Carpenter? What are we to make of these discrepancies? And are they are both equally valid realisations of the singer's wishes and creativity?

Perspectives on the repertoire

WM Notebooks (95.4%)	Carpenter (29.4%)	Henderson (61.8%)
650 songs +/-	200 +/-	420 +/-

Figure 7. Songs gathered by each collector, Mathieson, Carpenter, and Henderson.

As can be seen in the first column (95.4%), even Mathieson himself did not collect his complete repertoire (Henderson recorded around thirty songs not found in the notebooks, bringing the total number of songs in Mathieson's notional "complete" repertoire to around 680). In fact, that figure is probably generous, as he had a good few more unrecorded songs, not least the bawdy ditties that Henderson refers to in his reminiscences, along with all the non-song material (weatherlore, rhymes, proverbs, jokes), none of which was recorded by Carpenter or Henderson.

Carpenter appears to have noted down something like a *third* of Mathieson's song repertoire, generally as represented in the notebooks, but including a few not found there. We have no record of whether Willie used the notebooks when dictating to Carpenter, but the latter was so concerned with avoiding any book-sourced songs, that I would be surprised if he would countenance direct reference to a text¹⁹. Though Mathieson had a very good memory and good retention of songs, it is also perfectly possible that he may have referred to his notebooks when he knew another session with Carpenter was in the offing.

Henderson made a point of going through the notebooks with the singer, song by song, in order to get their tunes on record. But it was also part of a bigger vision of what sort of work the nascent School of Scottish Studies should be doing²⁰, as well as indicative of a certain idea that Henderson had of what tradition was and what traditional singers were, the latter conduits of a disembodied "carrying stream" of tradition, somewhat divorced from personal agency of those who "bear" it, though he retained his focus on "the folk" as central to our concept of culture, nation, and art²¹.

Henderson's goal was to document Mathieson's entire repertoire, prompting his memory with the notebooks, but from the recordings it is clear that Mathieson's memory was still very strong as he had a solid command of details from the first decade of his life and recollections of which song he had sung at a particular occasion more than forty years earlier. Of course, Henderson's use of the notebooks might also be seen to prejudice assessments of traditionality and variation, but, given that variation in textual transmission closely mimics that of the oral world in form, variety, and degree (Atkinson 2014: 51–52, 2018: 23–26; Dugaw 1984), that need not overly concern us.

The Folklore Act

When we perform our traditions, or indeed realise any kind of acquired skill or cultural knowledge, we engage in what one might call a "folklore act". Mathieson's folklore act – his acquisition, retention, and transmission (writing, performing, recording) – was, throughout his life, a revealing combination of the totally private and the semi-public. In his early years, Mathieson seems to have sung out and about a fair bit, at informal gatherings in people's homes and bothies, but he

19 On many of Carpenter's written texts, he has written "never saw in print", or some such formulation indicating his preference for oral transmission and origin.

20 For more on the foundation of the School of Scottish Studies (now the School of Scottish Studies Archives, Department of Celtic and Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh), see Munro 1991.

21 Corey Gibson explores Henderson's developing vision in *The Voice of the People* (Gibson 2015), and see pp. 176–177 for his ideas on how repertoire can illuminate the "folk process".

kept his inner life of song hidden from those closest to him for much of his life, particularly in his latter years. So, he had an intensely private side, both as a singer and collector (and he played many other roles in life, as well, husband, father, etc.), generally not allowing his “tradition bearer” side to be shared even with close family and neighbours.

Though he was clearly happy to perform for collectors, as witnessed by the amount of time he spent in the company of Carpenter and Henderson in his middle and latter years, it seems that he never *needed* such performance and interaction to develop a concept of himself as a singer, collector, or “tradition bearer”.

Obviously, the (outsider) collector’s gaze is not essential, but it is perhaps surprising that, given his social context, Mathieson was not more wedded to a standard singer-listener paradigm. In fact, it might be better to say that he was *both* halves of that paradigm, performer and audience, being content to collect and to perform *to his notebooks* and *to himself* through the act of writing and reading. Vocal and public performance seems to have run a distant second for Mathieson in terms of what his knowledge of songs was for, witness his first public performance at the late age of twenty-nine, and his desire to sing for others mainly in order to renew *his own relationship* with the songs.

Thus, Mathieson’s devotion to his tradition illustrates something fundamental about the “folklore act”: its *internal* nature. The fact is, communication (*pace* Ben-Amos 1972) is not essential to the folklore act. We learn, preserve and perform largely for, and to, ourselves. While communication through performance is enjoyable, even desirable, for some and at some times, it is not essential to a definition of lore or even tradition (though there are those who argue that there must be an element of diachronic continuity for “tradition”, as commonly conceived, to exist, e.g., Johnson 1972). It turns out that communication with the *self* is the critical feature of the folklore act and must be part and parcel of a definition of folklore. The act can be a private one, an internal one, sometimes with no physical or aural manifestation that can be apprehended by the outside world and yet still be the cultural product we call folklore (McKean 2007).

While most practitioners of the traditional arts of music, song, and story have some artistic interactions with the outside world, there is a significant element within the individual that is not shared. Moreover, public presentation and perpetuation of these arts is not essential to the working of that tradition within the individual. Notwithstanding the potential audience for Mathieson’s notebooks during Mathieson’s own lifetime and beyond (us, for example), and certainly within his own concept of the notebooks’ function, they were seen as part of himself. He entered his silent communicative folklore act in partnership an inanimate object, the notebook.

Mathieson’s notebooks, combined with the Carpenter and Henderson material, give us a remarkable chance to look at sixty-four years of repertoire documentation for a single individual, and with different technical methodologies.

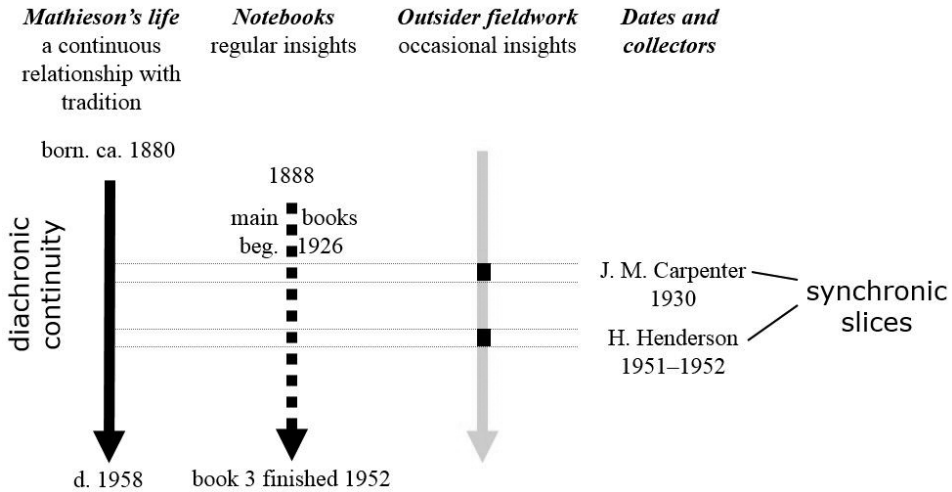


Figure 8. Diachronic and synchronic collecting patterns.

Life is, almost by definition, a diachronic journey, but most collecting work, even if pursued over a substantial period of time, is essentially synchronic, only a snapshot-in-time of the material being sought. By combining life’s journey with a collector’s journey, Mathieson has given us a diachronic record of his life-long relationship with tradition, one which the two later collections cannot match for depth or insider revelation.

Through Mathieson’s work, we learn that a man’s life with tradition is also a lifetime relationship with his own identity, a relationship in which the self defines itself, reinforces itself, and entertains itself. Social (i.e. public) art is only part of the story of tradition, the rest is personal and internalised, not seen or heard by the outside world and yet creating the self that the outer world encounters. Nevertheless, the outer image we present to the world is not necessarily, it seems, essential to the self in its quest for artistic depth, power, and experience. Willie Mathieson: “I never went tae dances, ye see. *This* is my work, ye see. *That’s* my dance” (SA1952.003.A6).

GLOSSARY

aa <i>all</i>	fit <i>what</i>	nivver <i>never</i>
about <i>about</i>	gaed <i>went</i>	nott <i>needed</i>
aff <i>off</i>	gaein on wi <i>continuing, doing</i>	onywey <i>anyway</i>
affa <i>lit. awfully, i.e. very</i>	gart <i>made (compelled someone to do something)</i>	oot <i>out</i>
alang wi <i>along with</i>	gey <i>very</i>	pey <i>pay</i>
amon <i>among</i>	gie <i>give</i>	rase <i>lit. arose, i.e. got up</i>
at <i>that</i>	hae/haen <i>have/had</i>	sa saw
atween <i>between</i>	hame <i>home</i>	saicant lad <i>farm servant</i>
aul(d) umman <i>lit. old woman, but meaning Mathieson's mother</i>	hauden doon <i>held back</i>	<i>second in the hierarchy of workers</i>
awa <i>away</i>	hid <i>had</i>	sair <i>sore</i>
aye <i>always, or yes</i>	hoose <i>house</i>	sang <i>song</i>
beets <i>boots</i>	intae <i>into</i>	sellt <i>sold</i>
blaa <i>blow</i>	ither <i>other</i>	snaa <i>snow</i>
bocht <i>bought</i>	jiner <i>joiner, carpenter</i>	stannin <i>standing</i>
brak <i>break</i>	jist <i>just</i>	stickin oot <i>lit. sticking out, i.e. endurance</i>
buid <i>board</i>	jotter <i>notebook usually used for schoolwork</i>	tae <i>to</i>
cauld <i>cold</i>	ken/kent <i>know/knew</i>	tee <i>also</i>
cuidna <i>couldn't</i>	kist <i>small wooden chest in which farm servants would carry their meagre belongings from place to place</i>	term <i>six monthly day on which farm servants would hire on to a new farm or renew their contract with the same farmer</i>
daein <i>doing</i>	laddie <i>young man, or boy</i>	trampit <i>trampled</i>
dee <i>do</i>	lave o <i>rest of</i>	tuppence <i>two pence</i>
dee't <i>do it</i>	likit <i>liked</i>	twid <i>it would</i>
didna/didnae <i>did not</i>	loed <i>loved</i>	twisna <i>it was not</i>
dinner <i>midday meal</i>	lookit <i>looked</i>	vrocht <i>lit. wrought, i.e. worked</i>
dominie <i>schoolmaster</i>	ma <i>my</i>	wark <i>work</i>
doon <i>down</i>	masel <i>myself, or alone</i>	watter <i>water</i>
dubbie <i>dirty, muddy</i>	mind <i>remember</i>	werena <i>weren't</i>
dykes <i>stonewalls built with unshaped stone, no mortar</i>	mither <i>mother</i>	whit like <i>how</i>
een <i>one</i>	naethin <i>nothing</i>	wi <i>with</i>
eease/eesin <i>use/using</i>	near <i>almost</i>	wid/widna <i>would/wouldn't</i>
erse <i>backside</i>	nearaboot <i>just about, pretty much</i>	win <i>get</i>
fa is't <i>who is it</i>	newsin <i>chatting</i>	winna <i>will not, won't</i>
faither <i>father</i>	nicht <i>night</i>	wis/wisna <i>was/wasn't</i>
far <i>where</i>		
fee'd <i>contracted to a farm for a six-month term</i>		
fin <i>when</i>		

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Willie Mathiesonas ir pirminė tradicinių dainų auditorija

THOMAS A. MCKEAN

Santrauka

Straipsnyje analizuojama šiaurrytinės Škotijos dainininko Willie Mathiesono (1879–1958) dainų tekstūra, ypač daug dėmesio skiriant didelės apimties jo dainų sąsiuviniams, kauptiems per visą gyvenimą. Autorius kvestionuoja skirtį, suponuojamą tokių apibūdinimų kaip „klausytojai“ ir „atlikimas“: Mathiesonas pats surinko savo dainas ir surašė į tris storus odinius aplankus; taip pat jas užrašinėjo Amerikos mokslininkas ir dainų rinkėjas Jamesas Madisonas Carpenteris ir škotų folkloristas Hamishas Hendersonas. Mathiesono repertuarą iš viso sudaro 650 kūrinių, įskaitant balades, lyrines dainas, eilėraščius, taip pat yra pluoštas patarlių, mįslių ir kitokių smulkiųjų žanrų.

Lauko tyrimai dažniausiai tėra trumpa akimirka laiko tėkmėje, tačiau mūsų turimas diachroninis Mathiesono tradicinės kultūros išmanymo aprašas teikia įstabią galimybę pažvelgti į tradicijos gelmes, fiksuotas per maždaug aštuoniasdešimt procentų jo gyvenimo. Ilgesnis laiko tarpas leidžia mokslininkams išanalizuoti dainos esmę – tą dvasinę sampratą, įkūnijamą daugybės atskirų variantų.

Mathiesonas vienuolikos metų metė mokyklą ir paskui visą gyvenimą dirbo įvairiose šiaurrytinės Škotijos vietose, niekur iš šio regiono neišvykdamas ligi tol, kol jam teko kartu su Hendersonu keliauti į Edinburgą prižiūrėti, kaip perrašomi rankraštiniai jo dainų sąsiuviniai. Samdinio gyvenimas, kai tenka nuolat kraustyti iš vieno ūkio į kitą ir tolydžio susidurti su naujais žmonėmis, puikiai tiko mokyti dainų ir jas rinkti.

Medžiagą savo užrašams jis sėmė iš daugybės šaltinių: iš giminių, iš savo žmonos, iš draugų, kitų ūkio darbininkų, spaudos, kai kurių laiškų. Mathiesonas buvo atsidaavęs ir kruopštus tautosakos rinkėjas: kartais per kokį susitikimą užtikęs dainą, jis tikslindavo duomenis susirašinėdamas arba net tolokai nukeliaudavo, kad išgirstų ir į savo rinkinius įtrauktų naują dainą. Negana to, jis ir pats kūrė dainas, kai kurios jų – labai asmenišką pobūdžio. Jis retai dainuodavo klausytojams, tad net kai kurie jo vaikaičiai nė neįtarė, kad senelis taip domisi dainomis.

Pašaliečiai rinkėjai pirmąkart Mathiesono dainomis susidomėjo 1930 m. (tai buvo Carpenteris), paskui, nuo 1951 metų, jas ėmėsi užrašinėti Hendersonas. Carpenteris dainas fiksuavo voleliuose ir užrašydavo spausdinimo mašinėle, o Hendersonas jau naudojo juostinį magnetofoną. Mathiesono sąsiuvinų nuorašai saugomi Edinburgo universiteto Škotijos studijų mokyklos archyve, o Carpenterio medžiaga – Kongreso bibliotekoje Vašingtone, JAV. Neseniai Vaughano Williamso memorialinės bibliotekos pastangomis ji tapo prieinama ir internetu. Hendersono medžiaga taip pat saugoma Škotijos studijų mokykloje, o daugelį įrašų galima rasti tinklalapyje *Tobar an Dualchais*.

Mathiesonas puikiai išmanė svarbiausius dalykus, kaip antai – variavimą ir daugialypumą. Jis užrašydavo skirtingus dainų tekstų ir melodijų variantus, taip pat fiksuavo istorines dainų gyvavimo aplinkybes ir įvairius su jomis susijusius tikroviškus nutikimus.

Iš anglų kalbos vertė Lina Būgienė