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Atkinson, David. 2018. *The Ballad and its Pasts: Literary Histories and the Play of Memory*. Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer. 242 pp.

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David Atkinson reads lots of books: the text, footnotes, and bibliography of his latest book, *The Ballad and its Pasts: Literary Histories and the Play of Memory*, reveal the amount of data he brings to bear in suggesting expanded ways of thinking about the ballad, especially the ballad's connections with the past. His remarks are cogent and learned; they demand consideration.

Atkinson does not forget received ideas, whether real or imagined, including

the favourite early view that ballads were ancient national poetry. Following the available data (while admitting the need for fuller and more sequential data), he provides an expansive view that the ballad is a simple and persistent literary form that looks to the past even when newly minted: "Its weapons are the sword, the pen-knife, and the flintlock pistol, its modes of transport the horse and the sailing ship, its social structures (loosely speaking) feudal, its language formulaic and inclining towards the archaic" (7). Further, he says ballads are a "dynamic culture of cheap verse literature and song" (ix). He looks especially to English and Scottish materials from the 16th century to the early 20th century, before World War I. Most of the texts (and he focuses on the text rather than the music) eschew modernity; they provide what might be called a conservative perspective, looking to the past even when the subject could be contemporary. Sometimes the words — the narrative foci — are medievalized, somehow formed to seem old.

Atkinson takes from the data and received ideas what seems useful: he recognizes the persistence of the metrical and narrative patterns; he sees multiplicity whether texts were passed on orally or by print; and he finds no authoritative text. Implicitly, he questions Cecil Sharp's paradigm: continuity, variation, and selection based on the assumption of oral tradition. Stressing the role of print and, toward the later period, the pull of literacy, Atkinson sees discontinuity. Rather than valorizing the ballads from the past, his view is more catholic: in Chapter 5 he looks at a variety of texts dealing with the sinking of the *Ramillies*, as well as "one of the most famous of all ballads" (and a per-

sonal favourite), again of a sinking, “Sir Patrick Spens.”

For most histories of the ballad, the past almost always seems to lead to the Middle Ages. Atkinson’s take is particularly obvious when he writes that “one can say with confidence that ‘Hind Horn’ is a ballad retelling of a medieval romance story, but not that the ballad itself is medieval at all” (45). This simple straddling of the medieval past both accepts that past and refutes it. He suggests that the ballad genre was an emerging form at the end of the Middle Ages — or put another way, perhaps implicitly denying medieval origins, the early modern period! The medieval connection emerges into dominance with Thomas Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* in 1765 and the “imagining” of the minstrels and other evocations of the medieval past which inspired overtones of medievalism, later seen in the works of Walter Scott and Francis James Child.

Perhaps inspired by Bürger’s “Lenore,” a series of Gothic ballads arose dealing with love denied and death, the appearance of a ghost, or a revenant lover. Atkinson offers an extended discussion of two related ballads, contrasting their “different ways of handling their shared subject”: “William and Margaret” and “Fair Margaret and Sweet William,” the former attributed to David Mallet (90). Noting a shared stanza with Beaumont and Fletcher’s “The Knight of the Burning Pestle” leads Atkinson to a discussion of authorship. Whether authored or not, neither text maintains textual conformity and both ballads shared an 18th-century life: chapbooks and booksellers did not distinguish between the ballads.

Literacy opened the way for conscious imitations of the ballad and certainly for

conscious use of things presumed to be ancient. Printed texts proliferated and chapbook publications increased. In fact, before the Romantic period, imitation was considered a respectable literary practice. In a chapter on imitations, Atkinson discusses at some length two independent ballads about Sir James the Rose, distinguished especially by their first lines: “O heard ye of Sir James the Rose” and “Of all the Scottish northern chiefs.” Both appeared in chapbooks: “The ballad’s actual origin, and the absence of any real continuity back to ancient times, were evidently not pertinent” (129).

Ballad texts reference the past, presenting a presumed memory of it — what Atkinson refers to as a “weight,” a kind of “re-presentation” that is not reliable as fact or as historical record. He calls this “imaginative re-engagement with a past” (132). Here he talks about the ballads describing the loss of ships and their sinking with meticulous recovery of extant printed and some orally collected texts, commenting on “the unreliability of folk song collecting as a sampling method” (135). His recovery and presentation of textual sources and his comparison and reading of them reveals the depth of his knowledge — and his perhaps quite explicit juxtaposition of what might be called canonical texts with far lesser known exemplars.

Using texts that deal with the identification of a murderer, Atkinson also suggests that a variety of ballads (and other related literature) from the late 18th to the early 19th centuries reveal a way of thinking, a *mentalité*, that is distinctly not rational. The reliance on providence — the acceptance of “(quasi-) supernatural interventions” (166) like bleeding from the nose — offers a means of identifying

the culprit. There are details that suggest reality, but that are not revealed in historical records. The last words/confessions just prior to death or the “theatre of punishment” are filled with fictive facts (177).

The ballad, as a “genre” emerging at the end of the Middle Ages, has continued, especially in print as well as orally. Individual narratives persist, new ones are created, and, whether they circulate in print or aurally, their meanings are influenced by the particular social and cultural times in which they are heard and read. Atkinson rightly points to the importance of the past — not only in creating the histories of the ballad, but also within the texts themselves. His analysis is based on careful scrutiny of the available texts and histories: he points us in the direction of a fuller and richer history. While he does not offer a definitive definition or history of the ballad, Atkinson does offer a perceptual framework for looking at persistent literary materials, whether transmitted orally or by print, a way of thinking about a multiplicity of materials we might lump together and call ballads. 🍀

Harbert, Benjamin J. 2018. *American Music Documentary: Five Case Studies of Ciné-Ethnomusicology*. Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press. 312 pp.

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In the introduction to Paul Hockings’s *Principles of Visual Anthropology* (1975), Margaret Mead laments that “department after department and research project after research project fail to include filming and

insist on continuing the hopelessly inadequate note-taking of an earlier age” (4). And while we have made progress in some regards, I am not all too certain that my professional training was much different than that which Mead critiqued so long ago. It is interesting to note, as Jay Ruby did in *Picturing Cultures* (2000), how little filmmaking is discussed in the writing cultures debates of the 1980s and 1990s. Little has changed in Orin Starn’s reboot, *Writing Culture and the Life of Anthropology* (2015). Ethnomusicology has fared little better, as evidenced in Barz and Cooley’s *Shadows in the Field* (2008) and Stone’s *Theory for Ethnomusicology* (2008). Besides Steve Feld’s pathbreaking “Ethnomusicology and Visual Communication” (1976), only a few key articles set out an approach to ethnomusicological film, perhaps most notably Hugo Zemp’s “Filming Music and Looking at Music Films” (1988), Jeff Todd Titon’s “Representation and Authority in Ethnographic Film/Video Production” (1992), and John Baily’s “The Art of the Fieldwork Movie” (2009). While anthropology has long had a subfield of visual anthropology (as if films are only watched and not also heard and sensed) where ethnographic film theory and methods have developed, ethnomusicology has not followed suit. If there was a possibility for ethnomusicological film, that time has passed. The dissolution of the SEM audiovisual committee in recent years, the creation of the ICTM Study Group on Audiovisual Ethnomusicology — of which Harbert is a leading member — and the founding of the MusCan Film series here in Canada suggest a new phase that corresponds, incidentally or not, with the 2009 emergence of digital cinema.