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**English and Scottish Popular Ballads: The
Origin and Reflections in Other European
Cultures**

Bachelor's Diploma Thesis

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*I declare that I have worked on this thesis independently,
using only the primary and secondary sources listed in the bibliography.*

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Author's signature

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1 Introduction

The popular ballads are still after centuries of studies a mysterious ground. As David Buchan says in the introduction to his book on popular ballads:

Ballads are awkward things. Few literary genres give so much pleasure to so many kinds of people and yet pose such refractory problems for the scholar and critic. These tales of marvel, love and butchery, told in a style strikingly distinct from that of most poetry, appeal to a diverse audience, but yet provoke questions which have never been satisfactorily answered. (1)

These few sentences represent the issues connected with ballads very truthfully. There is a number of questions about ballads which concern especially the question of authorship and origin. Scholarly opinions on this subject diverge, particularly in the question of the authorship. The two major theories, communal and individual, escalated in the first half of the 20th century and the scholars discussed whether the ballads are products of an oral tradition or individual literary objects. It is hard to determine which one of these theories is closer to the truth. The purpose of this work is to put some light on these issues and to support or contradict the ideas about ballads presented by the early 20th century scholars. I suppose that the origin and authorship may differ from ballad to ballad, therefore, there might be no such thing as the correct approach. In other words, both of these theories can be partially right but each applies to the different kind of ballads. Ballads, thus, can be both, traditional and literary. To prove this, it is necessary to study ballads in depth with a special regard to their classification. The appropriate classification is useful when searching for the ballad variants in other languages and studying ballads in a wider context. I suggest creating a classification system that shows the similarities and differences of the particular ballads according to

their narrative themes and then compare them to the similar materials from other European countries. Based on this classification and research, their questionable origin and authorship are analysed.

The first chapter of this thesis describes what a reader can imagine under the term ballad and describes the ballad form regarding its language devices and narrative themes. It also discusses the scholarly debate on the topic describing how the ballads were collected and comments on the major opinion streams in searching for the origin of ballads. The second part of the chapter introduces some of the major problems of the classifications made by Francis James Child and Francis Barton Gummere.

The second chapter is devoted to the suggested classification, dividing ballads from Child's collection into several thematic groups and analysing their similarities from the perspective of their plotlines. The third chapter searches for the reflections of the English ballads in non-English cultural context focusing especially on the Czech folklore. The last chapter uses the results from the previous two chapters to analyse the origin and authorship of the ballads and finds the relations between ballads and other forms of popular art within the frame of the European tradition. This is then used to support or contradict the scholars' ideas presented previously. The findings and conclusions from the whole thesis are then summarised in the last part of the work. I

2 On Ballad

2.1 Ballad as a form

Defining the ballad as a term may be complicated because nowadays, it has many different meanings. But the most accurate definition in the context of English medieval ballads seems to be a "short narrative folk song". ("Ballad", *Britannica*) The word narrative should be emphasized, because every ballad is a compact story focused

mainly on its plotline. Each ballad starts with a short description of the setting, for example: “Fair lady Isabelle sits in her bower sewing (...) /There she heard an elf-knight blawing his horn.” (“Lady Isabelle and the Elf King”, C. 4, 1) Usually, no further details are given. Typically, the protagonists are also not characterized in depth but only by one adjective, such as “fair”. After this brief introduction, the story is being developed. In the case of “Lady Isabelle and the Elf King”, the story is told in a dialogue which is occasionally interrupted by a narrator:

‘It’s a very strange matter, fair maiden,’ said he,
‘I canna blaw my horn but ye call on me.
‘But will ye go to yon greenwood side? (4-5)

Other ballads, however, may use different methods. In the ballad called “Whummil Bore”, the main hero retells the story of his life in a monologue while for example “The Cruel Mother” is almost wholly told by a narrator.

Because the ballad as a form was originally intended for singing, it usually contains also a refrain which is inserted between the lines that carry the storyline. Some ballads use even two or more different refrains, for example in “Riddles Wisely Expounded”:

There was a lady of the North Country,
Lay the bent to the bonny broom
And she had lovely daughters three.
Fa la la la, fa la la la ra re (C.1, 1)

The refrain can, as in this case, have two functions. Firstly, it may highlight the meaning of the poem, using symbols. For instance, “broom” in this ballad may symbolise the supernatural powers because it was believed that the broom is a plant of witches. (Folkard n.p.) Secondly, it may have only a lyrical function, “rather connected with

melodies to which the ballads are sung than with the actual narrative.” (Kekelainen 22) In “Riddles Wisely Expounded”, it can be observed on the alliteration in the first refrain and the use of solfege syllables in the second refrain.

2.2 Scholar’s Debate on the Medieval Ballads

Medieval ballads from the British Isles has been a subject of study approximately since the 17th century. First written ballads appear at the end of the 15th century, however, it is not clear whether these ballads were original works of contemporary minstrels or much older oral tradition. In the first half of the 17th century, first collections of ballads appear. The most notable are those by Samuel Pepys and Robert Harley. Later in the 18th century collecting ballads becomes more and more popular and what is worth mentioning from this period is the collection *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* by Thomas Percy. These efforts lead in the 19th century to the creation of the largest ballad collection by an American scholar Francis James Child. His five-volume work *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* contains 305 ballads which are mostly taken from the collections mentioned above and others. This huge catalogue became the basis for studies of English folk literature in the 20th century and later.

After publishing *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, there was no interest in collecting ballads anymore and scholar’s debate focused on the unexplained origin and authorship of ballads. At this point opinions divided into two main streams. The first one, represented by scholars such as George Lyman Kittredge and Francis Barton Gummere, believed in so-called communal authorship. This means that ballads were a work of ordinary people as a part of an oral tradition. According to them, the ballads were created “collectively during the excitement of dance and song festivals”. (“Ballad”, *Britannica*) In opposition to them stood William John Courthope and

Andrew Lang who were convinced that each ballad was a work of an individual author. (“Ballad”, *Britannica*) Courthope states that “minstrels composed them to please a tribal chieftain or feudal landlord.”(445) In his works, he holds the view that the minstrels spread the ballads among people who then preserved them. The only effect the people had on the creation itself was that they determined their themes. In other words, the minstrels composed ballads based on what ordinary people cared about. (Courthope 445)

These scholars also couldn't find consensus in discussing the way ballads were transmitted. Kittredge claims:

It is capable of practically formal proof that for the last two or three centuries the English and Scottish ballads have not, as a general thing, been transmitted by professional minstrels or their representatives. There is no reason whatever for believing that the state of things between 1300 and 1600 was different. (in. Gummere, *Popular Ballad*, xxiii)

He believes that ballads were transmitted similarly as they were created, by ordinary people. In his works, he does not mention how ballads were transmitted between different countries and it seems that he does not even count on that. Gummere, contrariwise, admits that minstrels might have transmitted ballads from land to land, however, he still claims that: “It was not the people who took and sang the minstrel's ditty but rather minstrel who intruded upon popular tradition.”(*Popular Ballad*, 10)

A Czech scholar Vilém Mathesius does not comment on the transmission itself but he comes up with a theory that most of the across Europe ballads have a common origin. He claims that the English ballads were developed indirectly from a European proto-ballad, combining the elements of a Germanic ballad, Anglo-Saxon ballad and French dance songs. (276)

2.2.1 On Classification by Gummere and Child

One of the aspects which has an immense influence on exploring the origin of ballads is the way they are classified in collections. Francis James Child was one of the first who created a complex catalogue with certain systems of classification which he presented firstly in *English and Scottish Ballads* published in 1857 and then in the more complex work *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* published between 1882 and 1898.

In 1885 Francis Barton Gummere claimed about his work:

Professor Child has grouped our national ballads as follows I. Romances of Chivalry and legends of the popular history of England. II. Ballads involving various superstitions; as of Fairies, Elves, magic and Ghosts. III. Tragic love-ballads. IV. Other tragic ballads. V. Love ballads not tragic. (*A Handbook Of Poetics: For Students Of English Verse* 36)

However, Gummere is not completely right. In the eight volume *English and Scottish Ballads*, which he published in 1857, Child differentiates more ballad types than Gummere says. In fact, each volume of this work is devoted to a specific kind of ballad covering those which Gummere mentions, but subdividing ballads which Gummere calls “Romances of Chivalry and legends of the popular history of England” into:

Ballads of Robin Hood, his followers, and compeers; Ballads of other Outlaws, especially Border Outlaws, of Border Forays, Feuds, &c.; Historical Ballads, or those relating to public characters or events and adding Miscellaneous Ballads, especially Humorous, Satirical, Burlesque ; also some specimens of the Moral and Scriptural, and all such pieces as had been overlooked in arranging the earlier volumes. (*English and Scottish Ballads*, ix)

This classification is based mostly on the theme of the ballads. Nevertheless, in *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, he changed the methodology and for the final edition of this work adopted “a modified form of Grundtvig's proposal that the ballads be arranged by metrical form, an arrangement assumed to be natural and historical.” (Wilgus 4-5) D.K. Wilgus criticises this approach stating that it is “rather like indexing folk melodies according to their opening phrase.” (5) Within this Child tries to create also a thematical order. This, however, was not satisfactory because it lead to separation of ballads which are related and “perhaps even forms of the same ballad.” (Wilgus 5)

Another endeavour to classify ballads came from Francis Gummere who adopted a part of Child's original thematical classification, but on the contrary, he regarded more aspects. Gummere took mostly Child's ballads and divided them as he says „according to their subject, their form their relative age.” (135) This leads to creating six major groups of ballads which are called The Oldest Group, The Ballads of Kinship, The Coronach and Ballads of the Supernatural, Legendary Ballads, The Border Ballads and The Greenwood Ballads. Within these groups he distinguishes several subgroups, however, I do not think that this arrangement is satisfactory. The reason for this is that considering many aspects makes the whole classification inconsistent. Moreover, the ballad as a form usually cannot be defined by the age of its creation:

In fact, to ask for the date of a folk ballad is to show that one misunderstands the peculiar nature of balladry. (...) the first recording of a ballad must not be assumed to be the ballad's original form; behind each recorded ballad can be one detected the working of tradition upon some earlier form, since a ballad does not become a ballad until it has run a course in tradition. Historical ballads would seem on the surface to be easily datable, but their origins are usually quite uncertain. The ballad

could have arisen long after the events it describes. (“Ballad”, *Britannica*)

Therefore, considering the age of ballads when analysing them can be confusing and it can lead to the wrong conclusions. In spite of that, Gummere names, for example, the first group “The Oldest Groups”. Here he distinguishes riddle ballads where the characters exchange riddles, flytings where characters exchange insults and ballads with a theme of domestic complications which focus on problems within a family. What can be regarded problematic is the fact that most of these ballads could come under “The Ballads of Kinship” as well. This may lead again to the separation of similar ballads.

3 Classification

Judging from Child’s and Gummere’s approaches, I am convinced that it is necessary to classify ballads according to only one criterion. I do not offer a classification as complex as Child or Gummere. What I offer is rather a proposal how ballads could be classified, using some of Child’s and Gummere’s classification. I search also for ballads which are similar, however, in classifications of these scholars got separated. The criterion I have chosen are the narrative themes. The term narrative theme in this work means a simplified plotline, for example “a boy loves a girl”. I created five different groups for Child’s ballads to be divided into and described the most recurrent narrative themes in them. These groups are supernatural ballads, murder ballads, love ballads, ballads about heroes and battles and religious ballads. However, the ballads are much more complex and it is not an exception that one ballad contains more than one of these themes, for example the supernatural ballads often talk also about love. Therefore one ballad can be a part of more than one group. It is also very likely that there are some ballads, among those that Child collected, which do not belong to any of the groups I suggest.

3.1 Supernatural Ballads

The first big group of ballads, I suggest, is the group which both Child and Gummere describe as well. It consists of ballads with supernatural topics, which means that the protagonists of such ballads are supernatural beings, usually an elf king or queen, a devil, a witch, a demon or a ghost. The theme of those ballads, in general, is that a human meets a supernatural being which results in various complications. In some cases supernatural ballads have versions where a supernatural element has been changed in natural ones (for example some cases of the “Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight”). Yet, I do not think it is necessary to separate them since the frame of the narrative theme is the same.

The first narrative theme to discuss is a story of a human who is seduced by a supernatural being. Examples of such ballads are “Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight” and “The Daemon Lover” (C. 243), both stories about women who were seduced and left their homes with a stranger, usually a supernatural being. In “Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight” a woman who left her home with an elf (or just an outlandish knight in some versions) tricks him in order to survive. When the knight reveals that he has killed several women in a wood, drowned them in the sea or a well, and intends to kill Lady Isabel, she distracts him and, depending on the version, “stroakd him“ (version A, 11), “thrown him headlong in“ the well (version B, 12) or „throw him in the sea“ (version C, 9). “The Daemon Lover” is a very similar story which differs only in setting and ending. In this story, a woman leaves her family with a sailor, her former lover who is later revealed to be a ghost or a devil. Again after some time the man discloses his intentions with the woman showing her a gate to hell saying: “O yon is the mountain of hell, (...) /Where you and I will go.”(14) The theme of seduction by a supernatural being appears in other ballads too. It is the base for the ballads of “Hind Etin” (C. 41) and

“Tam Lin.” (C. 39) In the case of these ballads, however, the seduction does not lead to death but to the seduced woman’s pregnancy. There are also ballads in which the seduced human is a male. In “Clerk Colvill” (C. 42), the man is seduced by a mermaid and dies, in some versions, he is offered to live in the sea which he refuses. All in all, although these ballads have the common narrative theme, the seduction by a supernatural being, neither Child nor Gummere connect them together.

The second narrative theme in this group is a story of a human who serves a supernatural being for a certain period of time. This theme appears for example in “Thomas Rhymer” (C.37) and “The Queen of Elfan’s Nourice” (C.40). These two ballads are so similar that they could be understood as two versions of one ballad. “Thomas Rhymer” tells a story of a minstrel who meets an elf queen. She shows him three ways – to heaven, to hell and to Elfland:

It’s dont ye see yon broad broad way,
That leadeth down by yon skerry fell?
It’s ill’s the man that dothe thereon gang,
For it leadeth him straight to the gates o hell.
It’s dont ye see yon narrow way,
That leadeth down by yon lillie lea?
It’s weel’s the man that doth therein gang,
For it leads him straight to the heaven hie.’ (10-11)

After that, he serves her for seven years. In “The Queen of Elfan’s Nourice”, it is a woman who serves an elf queen. While nursing the queen’s child, she misses her own son. The elf queen sends her home again showing her the paths to heaven and hell:

That’s the road the righteous goes,
And that’s the road to heaven.

‘An see na ye that braid road,
Down by yon sunny fell?
Yon’s the road the wicked gae,
An that’s the road to hell.’ (12)

In his commentary, Child points out the similarity of these stanzas saying: “We could well have spared stanzas 10-12 which belong to ‘Thomas Rymer’ to know a little more of the proper story.” (Child 358) I am convinced that these ballads have much more in common than these stanzas, meaning the main theme of a human serving to an elf queen, and therefore are of the same origin.

Another theme reoccurring in supernatural ballads is the theme of a human who is turned by an evil witch in an ugly animal, usually a worm. There are at least three ballads with this motive. “Allison Gross” (C.35) where the witch tries to bribe a man to become her lover and turns him into a worm after his refusal, “Kemp Owyne” (C.34) where a girl is transformed into a worm by her stepmother and “The Laily Worm and the Machrel of the Sea” (C.36) where a stepmother turns her step-son into a worm and step-daughter into a mackerel. These stories also share a happy ending – the protagonists are rescued and gain the human form again.

The last supernatural narrative theme I will comment on is the theme of riddles as described by Gummere. There is an uncountable number of riddle ballads, “most of them placed by Professor Child in the forefront of his collection.” (Gummere 135) Gummere, however, does not count them as supernatural, although supernatural characters often play a role in some versions. “Riddles Wisely Expounded” (C.1) and “Proud Lady Margaret” (C.47) are typical riddle ballads. In “Riddles Wisely Expounded” a lady is questioned by a stranger who is sometimes a knight sometimes the devil. The devil threatens to carry her away unless she answers the riddles correctly.

In the versions with the knight, the knight determines this riddle exchange as a condition of their marriage. The lady, thanks to her wisdom, wins the challenge. “The Proud Lady Margaret” differs from this ballad only very slightly. The hero who answers the riddles is not a lady but a knight, as in the previous ballad, he wins and is accepted as a suitor but reveals that he is a ghost and moreover Lady Margaret’s brother. In this case, again Child does not see the similarity or does not comment on that. Very much riddle-like are also the ballads which deal with the exchange of impossible tasks. For instance in “The Elfin Knight” (C.2) where an elf knight gives a lady impossible tasks which she must fulfil in order to become his lover. On a similar principle but conversely is based another ballad which is called “Twa Magicians”. In this ballad a lady creates obstacles, turns herself into various animals, in order to not become her suitor’s lover while he suggests how he would overcome those obstacles. Again this resemblance stays unnoticed in Child’s classification.

3.2 Murder Ballads

As murder ballads, I denote those ballads which deal with the theme of murder. Most ballads from this group would be probably recognised as “Ballads of Kinship” by Gummere and “Tragic Love Ballads” or “Other Tragic Ballads” by Child because most of the murders in ballads are committed by the hand a loved one or relative.

There is a large subgroup of murder ballads which are based on a dialogue between a dying person and his or her relatives. Within this subgroup, several narrative themes appear. The first one of them is the theme of a brother who murders his sister for disagreeing with her marriage. The ballads with this topic are for example “The Cruel Brother” (C.11) and “Andrew Lammie” (C.233). These two ballads have not only the same storyline but also the structure. In “The Cruel Brother” the brother kills his sister

because her groom did not ask him for permission with the marriage. The murder is described as follows:

He has taen a knife, baith lang and sharp,
And stabbd that bonny bride to the heart. (17)

In “Andrew Lammie” the brother beats his sister to death because he does not agree with her affection:

Her brother beat her cruellie,
Till his straiks they werena canny;
He brak her back, and he beat her sides,
For the sake o Andrew Lammie. (16)

Both ballads continue with the girl’s talk to her family where she instructs them what to do after her death.

Another theme that comes under murder ballads based on dialogue is the theme of a fight in which one brother deadly wounds the other one. This theme appears in “The Twa Brothers” (C.49) and “Edward” (C.13) and it was Child’s belief that “Edward” should not be counted as “complete in itself” but rather a “detached portion” of “The Twa Brothers”.(Child 167) In “The Twa Brothers” the conversation takes place between the dying brother and his killer while in “Edward” it is between mother and son who confesses to killing his brother and inflicts a punishment for himself, usually death. Moreover, in both ballads the conversation has the same structure – first, explaining what happened:

‘O it is the bluid o my grey hounds,
They wadna rin for me.’
It’s nae the bluid o your hounds, Willie,
Their bluid was never so red. (“The Twa Brothers”, 16-17)

It is the bluid of my greyhound,

And it wadna rin for me.'

'Hound's bluid was neer sae red,

Son Davie, son Davie ("Edward", 4-5)

And then giving the instructions what should happen after the protagonist's death which is almost identical with the conversation that appears in "The Cruel Brother":

'What will you leave to your mother dear?'

'My velvet pall and my silken gear.'

'What will you leave your sister Anne?'

'My silken scarf and my gowden fan.'

'What will you leave to your brother John?'

'The gallows-tree to hang him on.' (22-25)

Furthermore, the same dialogue is contained in "Lord Randal" (C.12) where a young man poisoned by his lover talks to his mother:

'What d'ye leave to your mother, Lord Randal, my son?

What d'ye leave to your mother, my handsome young man?'

'Four and twenty milk kye; mother, mak my bed soon,

'What d'ye leave to your sister, Lord Randal, my son?

What d'ye leave to your sister, my handsome young man?'

'My gold and my silver; mother, mak my bed soon. (7-8)

This kind of discourse appears also in another murder ballad "Twa Sisters" (C.10) which tells a story of a sororicide and where it is not spoken by the dying heroine but by a musical instrument (usually a harp) made of her corpse:

'O yonder sits my father, the king,

And yonder sits my mother, the queen.

‘And yonder stands my brother Hugh,
And by him my William, sweet and true.’
But the last tune that the harp playd then,
Was ‘Woe to my sister, false Helen!’ (26-28)

The theme which is also very widespread is the theme of incest between brother and sister. This theme is a subject of ballads such as “Babylon” (C.14), “King’s Dochter Lady Jean” (C.52) and “Bonny Hind” (C.50). In all of these ballads a man has sexual intercourse or suits a woman who he later recognises as his sister. In all cases, this leads to a catastrophe which is a suicide of the protagonists or a murder. In some ballads, this incestuous relationship results in a pregnancy. This is the case of ballads “Sheath and Knife” (16) and “Lizie Wan” (51) where the woman pregnant with her brother’s child is murdered by him.

An unwanted pregnancy which results in murdering the baby is also a very popular theme. Practically the same ballads “The Cruel Mother” (C.20) and “The Maid and the Palmer” (C.21) tell a story of a woman who kills her illegitimate children right after their birth repent from their sins. In “The Maid and the Palmer” this expiation is provoked by the arrival of the pilgrim who seems to be aware of her crimes. As in the case of “Edward” and “The Twa Brothers”, these ballads share a stanza which describes how to obtain an absolution: But 7 yeere to be a stepping-stone.

‘Other seaven a clapper in a bell,
Other 7 to lead an ape in hell. (“The Cruel Mother”, 6-7)

‘Seven years a fish in the sea,
And seven years a bird in the tree.
Seven years to ring a bell,

And seven years porter in the hell' ("The Maid and the Palmer", 13-14)

"The Maid and the Palmer" could be also read as a religious ballad, because it works with the biblical motive of a samaritan woman at the well.

3.3 Love Ballads

The theme of love appears in ballads very commonly and usually is not the only theme covered in the ballad. Love ballads often coincide with both supernatural and murder ballads.

The first narrative theme to focus on is the theme of young lovers who run away together. An example of such ballad is "Earl Brand" (C.7) where lovers run away from the girl's father, however, are attacked, the male hero dies and the heroine dies of sorrow shortly after him. The same narrative theme but with a happy end is contained in "Erlinton" (C.7). Again, the lovers run away and are attacked but the hero kills the attackers and saves them both. A more different version of this theme appears in "The Fair Flower of Northumberland" (C.9) where the heroine escapes with her lover, later finds out that he is already married with children and she returns home humiliated. Another ballad where the heroine is tricked and betrayed by her lover is "Young Andrew"(C.48). In this ballad, the escape ends up with the heroine robbed by her lover and sent back home naked. This theme also slightly similar to the theme of "Lady Isabel and The Elf Knight". There is also a ballad called "The Gypsy Laddie" (C.200) which deals with the theme of escape as well but only in some versions is love the reason for escape.

Another narrative theme that appears commonly is the theme of lovers who get separated. There are two very similar ballads "Hind Horn" (C.17) and "Bonny Bee Hom" (C.92). In these ballads, one of the lovers owns a ring which turns its colour

when the other lover dies or loves someone else. Again there is the same stanza in both ballads describing the ring's power:

But gin this ring shoud fade or fail,
Or the stone shoud change its hue,
Be sure your love is dead and gone,
Or she has proved untrue.' ("Hind Horn", 5-6)

'As lang as that ring keeps new in hue,
Ye may ken that your love loves you.
'But whan that ring turns pale and wan,
Ye may ken that your love loves anither man. ("Bonny Bee Hom", 8)

Basically, "Hind Horn" and "Bonny Bee Hom" differ only in ending. While in "Hind Horn" the lovers meet again in "Bonny Bee Hom" they both die.

Another narrative theme is the one where a hero saves a heroine or else a heroine saves a hero. The ballads containing this theme are, for instance, "Kemp Owyne" and "Tam Lin", that I have already mentioned ballads in supernatural ballads, but also "King Orfeo" (C.19) and "Sir Cawline" (C.61). The connections between these ballads are rather loose but there is still an observable similarity. In all of them the protagonist must accomplish a task in order to rescue the beloved one from a curse or captivity.

3.4 Ballads about Heroes and Battles

A large group of ballads deals with the exploits of various heroes or battles. These ballads have in common the fact that they are or might be based on real historical events and that is the reason why I decided to put them in together. Within this group, it is not possible to classify ballads according to the narrative theme as strictly as in the

previous groups. However, the recurring hero, such as Robin Hood or King Arthur, playing a role in those ballads, can be counted as an independent narrative theme. Similarly, the historical ballads which on principle cannot have the same narrative theme since they relate to different historical events are assigned to one narrative theme because of their supposed historicity. Therefore, ballads in this chapter are divided into two groups which are ballads about legendary heroes, consisting of Robin Hood ballads and Arthurian legends and ballads about historical battles. This classification is slightly similar to the one which Child and Gummere suggest. They both, as mentioned in chapter 1.2.1., have one special category for ballads about Robin Hood (Greenwood Ballads according to Gummere) and connect the Arthurian legends, still, they do not put the battle ballads together, and do not put these three themes in one group.

To analyse the ballads about legendary heroes, there are more than 35 ballads in Child's collection featuring Robin Hood and three Arthurian legends. Ballads about Robin Hood can be divided basically into two types, "one being Robin Hood's quasi-criminal adventures and the other a set of ballads that can be summarised as 'Robin Hood meets his match'." (Knight xx) Both of these types have usually the same structure. The first type commonly narrates the stories how Robin Hood defeats the nobility which can be seen for instance in "Robin Hood Rescues Three Squires" and "Robin Hood and the Prince of Aragon". In the second type, Robin Hood meets an ordinary man and challenges him to fight. After that, he offers the man to be a member of his suite of outlaws. This plotline occurs in "Robin Hood and the Tanner", "Robin Hood and the Ranger", "Robin Hood and the Tinker" and many others. The ballads inspired by the Arthurian legends are hard to classify because according to Child himself, they are not folk ballads but songs for professional minstrels. (278, vol. 1)

A considerable number of ballads is based on the real historical events such as battles. These ballads describe mostly the domestic conflicts. A favourite topic is the battles between English and Scottish forces, this is the case of “Battle of Otterburn” and “The Hunting of the Cheviot”, which are also called “The Ballad of Chavy Chase”, both presumably refer to the Battle of Otterburn in 1388. Then there are ballads about clan battles, “Battle of Harlaw”, battles between Royalists and Covenanters, “Battle of Drumclog”, but also ballads about foreign battles, for example, “King Henry Fifth’s Conquest of France”, which describes the Battle of Agincourt and the surrounding events. Most of these ballads are highly fictionalized and romanticized.

3.5 Religious Ballads

Folk balladry covers also religious topics. The narrative themes of these ballads are inspired by the biblical stories mostly from the New Testament, some of them are used as Christmas carols. However, the ballads usually retell the Bible very loosely, usually keeping the characters but connecting them to the different events or creating completely new stories.

There are three ballads describing the events surrounding Jesus’s birth. Two of them, “St. Stephen and Herod” (C.22) and “The Carnal and the Crane” (C.55), are very similar. They both tell the story of King Herod’s reaction to the birth of Jesus

Lakyt me ney $\overline{\text{P}}$ er gold ne fe,
ne non ryche wede;
 $\overline{\text{P}}$ er is a chyld in Bedlem born
xal helpyn vs at our nede.’
 $\overline{\text{P}}$ at is al so soth, Steuyn,
al so so $\overline{\text{P}}$, iwys,

As Þis capoun crowe xal

Þat lyth here in myn dysh.’ (“St. Stephen and Herod”, 8-9)

‘If this be true,’ King Herod said,

‘As thou tellest unto me,

This roasted cock that lies in the dish

Shall crow full fences three. (“The Carnal and the Crane”, 10)

From these excerpts, it can be observed that in both ballads Herod’s reaction is identical. The only difference is that in “St. Stephen and Herod” St. Stephen is the person who informs him about the birth, while in “The Carnal and the Crane” it is an unknown Wise Man. The third ballad which takes place before the Nativity is “The Cherry Tree Carol” where Jesus in Virgin Mary’s womb causes the tree to bow down so that she could pick some cherries. Another biblical ballad is “Judas” (C.23). The ballad explains that Judas was relieved of his 30 pieces of silver for food for Apostles and as a result of not being able to admit his loss he betrayed Jesus. All these ballads are highly biblically inaccurate and there is the only one religious ballad, in Child’s collection that copies the biblical story accurately. It is called “Dives and Lazarus” (C.56) and it narrates the parable of the rich man and Lazarus from the Gospel of Luke.

4 Reflections in European Culture

The narrative themes described in the previous chapter very often have their equivalents in other national literatures not only in ballads but also in other genres such as legends and fairy tales. In this chapter, I show the examples of non-English ballads and fairy tales which contain the narrative themes listed above, focusing especially on the Czech ballads but presenting some examples from other European countries as well.

The main sources for analysing the folk balladry in the Czech cultural context are the collections of Božena Němcová and Karel Jaromír Erben. Their collections are very different from Child's one, mainly because they have both re-written the collected texts. Nevertheless, it is not problematic because the narrative themes were preserved. Another valuable source of Czech ballads is František Sušil's collection "Moravské Národní Písňe". Sušil, unlike Němcová and Erben, does not try to give the ballads an artistic value, therefore, the ballads collected by him have the original text and structure.¹ When searching for ballads from other European countries, it is possible to use Child's commentaries placed in front of each ballad where he suggests plenty of non-English sources, mostly from Scandinavia (Edda), Germany (works of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm).

From the narrative themes described as supernatural almost all have their variants in other countries. The theme of a woman being seduced by a supernatural being, included in "Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight" and "The Daemon Lover", can be found in Czech literature in Sušil's collection under the name "Rubáš"² (110). It is also the main theme of Erben's poem "Svatební košile"² (125). The plotline of "Svatební Košile" is more like "Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight". The girl follows her lover but soon learns that he is already dead and it is his ghost who she is following but thanks to her piety, manages to survive, as well as in the English ballad. In "Rubáš", on the contrary, the female character is taken by her deceased husband to his grave and is forced to stay there, which is rather as the ending of "The Daemon Lover". According to Child, ballads with this narrative theme appear in Denmark, Sweden, Germany and Poland as well (41, vol. 1). Moreover, Erben, in his commentary to "Svatební Košile"³

¹ For demonstration of the parallels between Czech and English texts and better orientation I provide each Czech quotation with the short translation.

² Could be translated as "Shroud"

³ Could be translated as "Wedding Gown"

points out that the theme appears in ballads of many Slavic nations and also in France. (123-124) Worth mentioning is a German adaptation of this ballad “Lenore” by Gottfried August Bürger. In this poem again, the girl leaves with her dead lover and dies falling to his grave. (123-124)

The theme of human serving to a supernatural being, as in “The Queen of Elfan’s Nourice” and “Thomas Rymer”, occur in other countries as well. The supernatural element is usually a devil, not a fairy queen, but the rest is very alike. Božena Němcová registers a fairy tale “Čertův Švagr”⁴ (266, vol. 1) which appears for example in Switzerland and Austria as well. (Ashliman n.p.) Exactly as in “The Queen of Elfan’s Nourice” and “Thomas Rymer”, in this story, a man is a servant of the supernatural being (in non-English variants in hell) for seven years and then is released.

The third narrative theme mentioned is the theme of a human turned in an ugly animal. Again, Child finds this theme in various Scandinavian and German collections. This theme slightly modified is noticeable in Grimms’ fairy tale “The Frog King” (17). The prince who was cursed and turned in an ugly frog is unspelled by a princess, similarly as in “Kemp Owyne”. Child points out the Danish versions of this ballad. (307-316, vol. 1)

The last supernatural narrative theme is the theme of riddles which is also very widespread across the Europe, especially in fairy tales. Although these fairy tales contain the riddle theme in a markedly altered version the base is still the same. In Czech literature there is a ballad with the same features as “The Riddles Wisely Expounded” called “O Chytré princezně”⁵ (Němcová 204, vol. 1). While in “The Riddles Wisely Expounded” the girl answers the devil’s riddles to save herself in “O Chytré princezně” the princess saves her husband from being carried off by giving the

⁴ Could be translated as “Devil’s Brother-in-law“

⁵ Could be translated as “Clever Princess”

devil impossible task and outsmarting him. The theme of answering a riddle in order to save someone from the power of a supernatural being is also central for the Grimm's fairy tale "Rumpelstiltskin" (264) where a queen needs to guess right the name of an imp who threatens to steal her child. The ballad "Elfin Knight" also has its equivalent in Czech folk balladry and it is a folk song "Kdyby Tady Byla Taková Panenka"⁶ (Jánský 15) where a man and a woman impose impossible conditions, such as making a shirt without a needle, for getting married. Additionally, "Twa Magicians" is almost identical with the Moravian folk song "Proměny"⁷ (Sušil 808), where a girl suggests to turn into various animals to escape from her suitor and he replies with possible solutions how to still catch her.

The first narrative theme discussed in the chapter about murder ballads is the theme of a murder between relatives which is followed by a discussion on what should happen after hero's death as in "Edward" or "Twa Brothers" There is a possible connection to the Czech ballad "Zabitý"⁸ (Sušil 165) where a young man is deadly wounded by unknown attackers and has a conversation with his mother on the same topic as in English ballads:

Zandite, mamičko,
pro tech kněžů gbelských,
já sa vyzpovídám
z mojích hříchů těžkých⁹ (10)

The only difference is that in the Czech ballad the murderer is not the victim's relative however, the rest remains the same. I also mentioned the ballad called "The Cruel Brother" which contains the theme of murder on a wedding. This theme appears in the

⁶ Could be translated as "If There Was Such Lassie"

⁷ Could be translated as "Metamorphoses"

⁸ Could be translated as "Killed"

⁹ Could be translated as: "Bring me, mum, the priests of Gbely, I will confess my heavy sins."

Czech ballad “Matka Travička”¹⁰ (Sušil 157) (Mother Poisoner) in which the mother accidentally poisons her son because of disagreement with the marriage. This is again followed by the discourse on what should be done after the victim’s death:

Tobě, bratře, tobě

štyry koně vrané

pěkně osedlané

(...)

Tobě, matko, tobě

Ten kameň široký

A Dunaj hluboký¹¹ (12-16)

This dialogue correlates exactly with the one from “The Cruel Bother”¹² because it includes the instructions about the possible heritage and it also suggests a punishment for the murderer. The theme of murder within a family is also a part of the Erben’s poem “Zlatý Kolovrat”¹³ which was collected by Němcová as well (6, vol. 1). In “Zlatý Kolovrat” one sister murders another in order to marry her suitor, the king, and her crime is revealed by the song of a magic spinning wheel. This theme, featured in English ballad “Twa Sisters”, occurs in many literatures across Europe, including Scandinavian, Eastern European and Germanic ones. (Child) In some variants the sisters are replaced with brothers, and also the crime is revealed by a different object, as for example in German “Singing Bone” (Grimm 148).

Another narrative theme, the theme of unwanted pregnancy which results in murdering the baby is very popular too. The theme which appears in “The Cruel Mother” and “The Maid and the Palmer” can be found in Czech ballads

¹⁰ Could be translated as “Mother Poisoner“

¹¹ Could be translated as: “For you, my brother, for you, four nicely saddled black horses. For you, mother, for you, the wide rock and deep Danube.”

¹² Cited in chapter 3.2.

¹³ Could be translated as “Golden Spinning Wheel”

“Nezachovalá”¹⁴ (Sušil 151) and “Hříšnice”¹⁵ (Sušil 3) which both refer to a girl who murdered all her unwanted children and Erben reflected this theme in the poem “Dceřina Kletba”¹⁶ (147) too. “Hříšnice”, moreover, is a faithful copy of “The Maid and the Palmer” with the only difference that the pilgrim who reveals her sins is Jesus. According to Child this ballad appears in Denmark and Germany as well. (218-219, vol.1)

For love ballads, the narrative themes are not so easily recognisable in other literatures, however, there are some observable similarities in Czech ballads. For example the theme of separated lovers who get information about each other through a magical ring can be connected to the theme occurring in Czech and other European tales frequently. The ring in Czech tales is not magical but serves as an element which reconnects the lovers. In Němcová’s “Neohrožený Mikeš”¹⁷ (172, vol. 1) the hero and the princess cut the ring in two halves, each of them takes one half and thanks to that are able to recognise each other after the long separation. Another Němcová’s tale with this theme is “O Princezně se Zlatou Hvězdou”¹⁸ (32, vol. 2) where again the ring has the same function and under various names it appears also in France, Germany, Italy and many other countries. (Ashliman n. p.)

Probably the most widespread love narrative theme is the theme of a hero or heroine saving the loved one by accomplishing various tasks. In Božna Němcová’s collection of fairy tales there is a countless number of tales with this theme such as

¹⁴ Could be translated as “Unpreserved“

¹⁵ Could be translated as “Sinner“

¹⁶ Could be translated as “Daughter’s Curse“

¹⁷ Could be translated as “Dauntless Mikeš“

¹⁸ Could be translated as “Princess with a Gold Star“

“Princ Bajaja”¹⁹ (121, vol. 2) “Neohrožený Mikeš” and “O Slunečniku, Měsíčníku a Větrníku”²⁰ (119, vol. 1).

The narrative themes of ballads about heroes and battles are hard to find in non-English literatures mostly because they are related to concrete heroes and historical events that are related to only one country. Child claims that there are some motives from the ballads about Arthurian legends elsewhere, for example the motive of a mantle as in “The Boy and the Mantle”. However, the narrative theme discussed in the previous chapter are the heroes and not the mantle, thus, it can be said that the narrative themes of King Arthur and Robin Hood as well as themes about English and Scottish battles are not very likely to appear anywhere else but in Britain.

Contrariwise, religious ballads, can be found in other literatures sometimes almost unchanged. A perfect example is Czech son “Lazar a Bohatec”²¹ (Sušil 18) which is exactly the same as English “Lazarus and Dives” or the ballad already mentioned “Hříšnice”

Given these examples, it is predictable that the narrative themes analysed may exist in other variants and countries and that there is only a very limited number of narrative themes included in Child’s ballads which do not have equivalents in other languages. Knowing that, it is possible to consider these relations when exploring the origin of English popular ballads.

5 Origin

It is necessary to take into consideration that the subject of controversy between communalists and individualists was not only the communality or individuality of the

¹⁹ Could be translated as “Prince Bajaja”

²⁰ Could be translated as “The Sun King, the Moon King and the Wind King”

²¹ Could be translate as “Lazarus and the Rich Man”

authorship. As mentioned,²² they had also disagreements about whether the authors were ordinary people or minstrels. From the research made, it is still neither possible to determine for sure whether the ballads were created communally or individually, nor whether they were transmitted by minstrels or ordinary people. However, it is possible to work with the fact that some narrative themes appear in other countries whereas some others do not and from this information deduce if the authors were minstrels or folks.

The resemblance of narrative themes appearing in European ballads is presumably not coincidental and could prove the theory of the popular origin. However, what may seem problematic about this is that the ballads with no equivalents in Europe would contradict it. Having considered that, it is reasonable to divide ballads into two groups, those which are widespread across Europe and those which are not, and study the origin of these groups separately.

As already said, the ballads with variants in other countries would point to the non-literary origin, but the whole question of origin is much more complex. Arthur Beatty points out the resemblance of narrative themes in ballads and folktales which was denied by the communalists. According to him:

The communalists have persistently maintained that the ballad is a thing apart, and have neglected to deal with it in connection with the other forms of popular art, such as popular tale and popular drama, which were developed among the people out of whose general life the ballad also arose. Thus they have dwelt upon certain characteristics of the ballad which differentiate it from cultivated poetry, but in no wise differentiate it from related forms of popular art. To correct this, it is necessary to

²² See chapter 2.2.

dwell on its similarity to related forms, and so to deal with the general conditions under which popular art originates. (475)

The research above verifies this theory because many narrative themes from ballads appear in Němcová's and Grimms' tales. At the same time, the research contradicts that "the ballad is not derived from any pre-existing literary material, but is the result of a primary impulse which is as old as man and out of which the various forms of communal poetry spring" (Beatty 474) Because the tales collected by Grimms and Němcová, or at least their narrative themes, are created by people and are part of an oral tradition it is improbable that the same narrative themes of the ballads would have a different origin. Thus, it can be supposed that they are made by the ordinary people as well. This means that the communalists might be at least partially right about the origin, while stating that ballads were not usually created by minstrels, although they did not count on the links between popular ballad and other forms of popular art.

To prove the actual communality of the authorship is more difficult. The whole idea of communal creation is based on presumptions about connections between the ballads and primitive savage songs which lack historical evidence. (Beatty 486) Although it is still highly unlikely that the minstrels would be able to create the same ballad in so many European countries, there is no reason for not believing, on the contrary to what Kittredge claims²³, that they might have spread them, enrich them with some extra parts or give them their form because whether the ballad as a form²⁴ is the work of the folk or not cannot be proven. Despite the fact that the ballads have features such as "their impersonality, their refrain, their depicting of but a single situation, their use of incremental repetition" (Beatty 474) which could signify the communal origin, there are also facts that point rather at the individual authorship of ballad as a form.

²³ See chapter 2.2.

²⁴ See chapter 2.1.

Firstly, “there is no record among any of these peoples of a dance or dance-song which even remotely suggests the precise forms of our European ballads, whether English, or Danish, or French, nor yet which suggests any of the lyric dance-songs of Europe.”(Beatty 487) For this reason it is not possible to prove that ballad form originates in the excitement of dance. Secondly, the ballad does not exist in countries such as Italy and Spain. There are dances and tales but not ballad as it is known from the English context. (Beatty 488) If the ballad form was the result of some dance, as the communalists say, there would be no explanation of the question why it was created in England, Scotland and other countries but not in Italy and Spain. Beatty additionally suggests that only the refrains could be developed under the communal conditions during a dance but refuses that the complete ballad form could be the result of such events. The conditions of such creation are described by Adelaide Witham who supposed that the narrative lines of the ballad was already set when it came to creation of the form. She writes:

Suppose messengers coming into the midst of a community to tell of the tragedy, and the people gathering around them. The listening throng greet their words with the motions and inarticulate exclamations of strong excitement, and these gradually, like the cheering and swaying of any mob, become rhythmical. The speakers, too, fall into the swing, partly because the influence of the gesticulating crowd is upon them, and partly because their own intense feeling tends to voice itself in rhythm. They narrate one incident after another until the tale is told with some completeness. And in their pauses, for breath or for recollecting, the undertone of the crowd, which has been like a burden to their song, rises into a chorus or refrain. The singers use the simple traditional phrases of

the people naturally, so their tale is easily remembered. Again and again will they be called upon to tell it, and again and again will the people, for they cannot help learning it, sing it for themselves. (xii)

Beatty develops this idea stating that these communally created refrains were then “consciously and artistically elaborated and made more precise” and then carried to other countries where, by mixing with the tales, developed into the ballad. (494) Knowing that, it is possible to presume that it was not the ballad itself that was transmitted between the European countries but rather the narrative themes. Those themes got combined with the dance songs in countries that were convenient for such development. In other countries, including Czech, this merging never happened and although there are songs which are “something like ballads, (...) they represent a different tradition,” and it is possible that they are narrative themes developed into the song form. (Beatty 498) This theory seems to be acceptable, especially while it is taken into consideration that the form of Czech ballads is really different from the English and Scottish one. The biggest difference is that they do not contain the lyrical refrain which is so typical for the English and Scottish ballads. But without it, most of the ballads in the Czech context can be taken completely as a result of the oral tradition which, contrariwise, this cannot be said about the English and Scottish ballads. In the case of these ballads, it is possible that the merging was done by an individual but it also cannot be proven.

The role of the minstrels in creating ballads is also very questionable. It is highly plausible that they could be responsible for elaborating the refrains and carrying them to other countries as Beatty suggests but there is no evidence of their contribution to the rest of the process. However, as already mentioned, there is also no proof of the opposite. Some scholars even assume that the ballad is a result of minstrels’

improvisation on the popular narrative themes and that the differences in versions of particular ballads are also made by them:

Every minstrel who has any skill at all always improvises his songs according to the inspiration of the moment, so that he is not in a position to recite a song twice in exactly the same form; but one must not suppose that this process of improvisation involves composing a new poem every time. (...) A skilled minstrel can recite any theme he wants, any story that is desired, extempore, provided that the course of events is clear to him. (Buchan 56)

This theory may be accepted as well, however, there is still the problem that it cannot be proven.

What can be proven is that there are ballads composed completely by minstrels. These are probably the ballads that appear in Britain only, such as ballads about heroes and battles, have probably different origin. As Child explains in the commentary of “The Boy and the Mantle”:

This ballad and the two which follow it are clearly not of the same rise, and not meant for the same ears, as those which go before. They would come down by professional rather than by domestic tradition, through minstrels rather than knitters and weavers. They suit the hall better than the bower, the tavern or public square better than the cottage, and would not go to the spinning-wheel at all. (Child 257, vol. 1)

It does not have a refrain, its theme, the theme of King Arthur, does not appear commonly in the rest of Europe and, contrariwise to the other ballads, Arthurian legends do not have so many versions. In this case, the different version could be the result of minstrels’ improvisation, as it is noted in Buchan’s work. The same case are the ballads

about Robin Hood. They again do not contain the refrain and do not have as many variants as the other ballad and it is not known from literatures of non-English speaking countries.

The ballads about battles are difficult to distinguish because some of them, such as “King Henry Fifth’s Conquest of France”, are similar to the Arthurian legends and Robin Hood ballads and thus have probably a minstrel author too, some others such as “The Ballad of Chavy Chase” are rather folk. Frank Jewett Mather claims: “Certainly no ballad in all Professor Child's stately collection seems less literary, and more truly of the people; and we shall be loath to believe that we have to do with anything like conscious authorship.” (398) But despite their difference from the minstrel ballads, they were not created as the ballads from the first group, meaning from the folk tale and dance song. It is because they still lack the refrain and have a unique narrative theme. Consequently, they must have developed in their own way.

To summarise, there are folk ballads as well as the minstrel ballads. The folk ballads are presumably derived from the French dance songs and the folk tales and even though they are probably not created during some festival as a whole, it is possible that some parts were created communally.

6 Conclusion

To conclude, popular ballads are the phenomenon which was very hard to analyse in the first half of the 20th century and there are still questions that cannot be sufficiently answered. The reason for that is especially the lack of historical records on this subject. Most of what can be said about them is based on presumptions and none of the theories on that topic can be convincingly proven and the research on this topic has to be made mostly through observing similarities in other forms of literature. However, the research made above offers at least some explanations of the problems presented.

From the research it is clear that various genres of folk literature across Europe share the narrative themes with the English and Scottish popular ballads and it is possible to work with this fact when discussing the origin of ballads. The results show that the authorship of ballads, as to their popular or minstrel origin, highly depends on the particular type of ballad. There are ballads created by the folk and there are ballads created by the minstrels. Folk ballads tend to be those which contain the same narrative themes as folk texts from other European countries while minstrel ballads are those which has no or only very few equivalents in other languages.

Regarding the communality or individuality of the authorship, it can be said that minstrel ballads are created individually for sure. As for the folk ballads, it is rather unlikely that they would be created either completely communally or individually. The most probable variant is that they were created as a mixture of both, hence that some parts were made communally, some individually and the result is the mergence of these parts which is summarised by Adelaide Witham:

This is the only kind of authorship which can be recognized for the popular ballad. It is a composite of two parts, mutually dependent: first, an initial act of composition at a given time by one person; second, a subsequent process of collective authorship. The proportion contributed by each may vary with every ballad. The peculiar position of the one however, must be clearly understood, neither over- nor under-estimated.

(16)

Therefore it is neither possible to verify nor contradict any of the theories presented but it can be assumed that both of them are partially correct.

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Résumé

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá původem anglických a skotských lidových balad, které ve své sbírce *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* zahrnul profesor Francis James Child. V úvodu je čtenář seznámen hlavním cílem této práce, což je potvrdit či vyvrátit některé z teorií týkající se původu balad, které rozvíjeli vědci v první polovině 20. století. Druhá kapitola této práce analyzuje baladu jako literární formu a popisuje její znaky. Dále také rozebírá jednotlivé přístupy ke studiu balad, které se rozvíjely zejména na přelomu 19. a 20. století, z nichž poté vychází zbytek práce. Mimo jiné se věnuje i otázce klasifikace balad a hodnotí jednotlivé systémy, podle nichž byly balady doposud klasifikovány. Třetí kapitola nabízí vlastní způsob klasifikace založený na jednoduchých motivech, které spolu některé balady sdílí. Podle toho dělí balady do pěti skupin – balady o nadpřirozenu, balady o vraždách, balady o lásce, balady o hrdinech a bitvách a balady o náboženství. Čtvrtá kapitola se věnuje srovnání motivů popsanych předchozí kapitole s motivy, které se objevují ostatních literaturách v Evropě, z čehož vychází následující kapitola, která podrobněji zkoumá, jak výsledky výzkumu provedeného na Childových baladách odpovídají teoriím prezentovaným dříve. Veškeré poznatky jsou shrnuty v poslední kapitole, které je zároveň také závěrem celé práce.

This bachelor's thesis focuses on the origin of English and Scottish popular ballads which were covered in the collection *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* of Professor Francis James Child. The introduction presents the main purpose of this thesis, which is to verify or refute (disprove) some of the theories, concerning the origin of ballads, presented in the first half of the 20th century. The second chapter of this thesis analyses the ballad as a form and describes its features. Furthermore, it discusses particular approaches to the ballad studies which escalated at the turn of 19th and 20th

century and which are the basis for the rest of this thesis. Among others, this chapter covers the question of ballad classification and assesses the systems according to which ballads were classified. The third chapter offers its own way of classification based on simple motives which some ballads have in common. According to that divides ballads in five groups – supernatural ballads, murder ballads, love ballads, ballads about heroes and battles and religious ballads. The fourth chapter is devoted to the comparison of motives described in the previous chapter with those which appear in other European literatures which is the basis for the following chapter that explores how the research made on Child's ballads can be applied at the theories presented previously. All the findings are summarised in the last chapter that is also a conclusion.