

The Songs and Travels of a Tudor Minstrel

*Richard Sheale of
Tamworth*



ANDREW TAYLOR

THE SONGS AND TRAVELS OF
A TUDOR MINSTREL

RICHARD SHEALE OF TAMWORTH

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A TUDOR MINSTREL
RICHARD SHEALE OF TAMWORTH

Andrew Taylor



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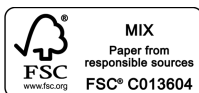
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When this book was in proof, I heard that Anne Lancashire, in her work on the London civic records, had located a reference to Sheale being admitted as a member of the Minstrels' Company in London in 1555. I am deeply grateful to Sally-Beth MacLean for bringing this reference to my attention and to Anne Lancashire for allowing me to cite from her forthcoming edition of the London records.

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Note on the Texts

Where convenient modern editions are available, I have used them, retaining the spelling and punctuation supplied by the editors, with occasional minor modifications, and providing glosses for some of the less familiar words or expressions. For quotations from Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 48, and of other manuscripts containing Stanley material, I have supplied modern punctuation and capitalization, silently expanded abbreviations, substituted 'and' for & and 'th' for thorn and occasionally modified word division. To facilitate cross-reference, I have also supplied references to the numbers assigned to the ballads by Thomas Wright in his edition. Unless otherwise specified, all translations or modernizations are my own.

Abbreviations

Briquet	C.-M. Briquet, ed., <i>Les filigranes: Dictionnaire historique des marques du papier dès leur apparition vers 1282 jusqu'en 1600</i> . A facsimile of the 1907 edition with supplementary material contributed by a number of scholars, ed. A. Stevenson (Amsterdam, 1968).
Complete Peerage	<i>The Complete Peerage of England, Scotland and Ireland, Great Britain and the United Kingdom</i> , ed. G. E. Cokayne; rev. edn, ed. V. Gibbs, 13 vols (London, 1910–40).
DNB	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i> , ed. L. Smith and S. Lee, 63 vols (London, 1885–1900)
DSL	<i>Dictionary of the Scottish Language</i> (on-line editions of the <i>Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue (DOST)</i> and the <i>Scottish National Dictionary (SND)</i>)
EETS, OS	Early English Text Society, Original Series
EETS, ES	Early English Text Society, Extra Series
First-Line Index of English Poetry	M. Crum, <i>First-Line Index of English Poetry 1500–1800 in Manuscripts of the Bodleian Library</i> , Oxford, 2 vols (Oxford, 1969)
MED	<i>Middle English Dictionary</i> (on-line edition)
NS	New Series
ODNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
PL	<i>Patrologia Cursus Completus ... Series Latina</i> , ed. J.-P. Migne, 217 vols (Paris, 1844–55)
REED	Records of Early English Drama
RS	Rolls Series
STC	<i>A Short Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and British America and of English Books Printed in Other Countries and Ireland, and of English Books Printed Abroad, 1475–1640</i> , ed. A. W. Pollard and G. Redgrave; 2nd edn, newly revised, ed. J. J. Morrison, C. W. Nelson, and M. Secombe, 3 vols (New York, 1994)
Statutes of the Realm	<i>The Statutes of the Realm. Printed by command of His Majesty King George the Third. In Pursuance of an address of the House of Commons of Great Britain. From Original Records and Authentic Manuscripts</i> , ed. A. Luders, T. E. Tomlins, J. France, W. E. Taunton and J. Raithby, 11 vols (London, 1810–28)

Abbreviations

<i>Summary Catalogue</i>	<i>A Summary Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library at Oxford</i> , ed. F. Madan and R. W. Hunt, 7 vols (Oxford, 1895–1953)
<i>Tudor Royal Proclamations</i>	<i>Tudor Royal Proclamations</i> , ed. P. L. Hughes and J. F. Larkin, 3 vols (New Haven, CT, 1964–69)
<i>VCH: Lancashire</i>	<i>The Victoria History of the County of Lancashire</i> , ed. W. Farrer and J. Brownbill, 8 vols (London, 1906–14)
<i>VCH: Warwick</i>	<i>The Victoria History of the County of Warwick</i> , ed. H. A. Doubleday, W. Page, <i>et al.</i> , 8 vols and index (London, 1904–69)

Preface

This book falls into two parts. The first centres on Richard Sheale, harper of Tamworth, peddler and minstrel for the Stanley family, and the two sides of his career. On the one hand, I argue that Sheale worked for the London ballad market and that he owned Bodleian MS Ashmole 48, a plain paper volume copied by several hands that is largely devoted to songs and ballads, many of them first printed at about the same time the manuscript was copied. On the other hand, I argue that Sheale also performed the role of a traditional praise-singer for the Stanleys, attending the English lords at Berwick in 1558 during the last great border campaign and composing a long piece of family encomium, *The Stanley Poem*, which has previously been attributed to bishop Thomas Stanley.

How best to refer to this second part of Sheale's career poses something of a problem. The term 'praise-singer' is one that Sheale himself would scarcely have recognized; it was never used in medieval or early modern England. When Edmund Spenser referred to the Irish praise-singers of his day he used the Celtic word 'bard', but he described these bards flourishing in an uncivilized society in which poets were admired, feared and rewarded beyond the hopes of any English poet or musician.¹ Had Sheale lived a century earlier, we might still use the standard medieval equivalent, *gestour*, that is, one who sings of the *gesta* or deeds of worthy men, but by Sheale's day the *gestour* had been transmuted into the modern 'jester', evoking the less dignified (but no less ancient) side of the minstrel's art. Sheale was both. He made his living partly by diverting people with comic patter and also partly by knowing, remembering and singing or reciting the great deeds of his patrons and their allies and ancestors, and so praise-singer I have called him.

Why bother telling the story of a minor poet about which so little can be known with certainty? The answer, I would argue, is twofold. First, Sheale was a minstrel, a professional oral entertainer, and hence provides a glimpse of one of the channels by which early poetry circulated. Minstrels have long been a subject of interest, not just for antiquarians and Romantic poets but also for literary scholars and historians, for whom minstrel recitation repre-

¹ Edmund Spenser, *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, ed. W. L. Renwick (Oxford, 1970), p. 1. On the role of the Irish bards as arbiters of honour and perseverers of family history, see B. Kane, *The Politics and Culture of Honour in Britain and Ireland, 1541–1641* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 7–8, 23–4, 46–7, 66–7.

sents one of the main channels for the circulation of poetry before print.² But, as Joseph Ritson long ago remarked, 'the misfortune is, that no historian or other writer who flourished in the time of the minstrel, has ever thought them worthy of much attention'.³ Almost no English minstrel is known to us by more than a few entries in an account book. One might, then, expect Sheale's detailed story to have been the subject of close attention. It has certainly been known for a long time. It was first published by Thomas Hearne in 1719 and was mentioned by Bishop Percy in his *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, while Thomas Wright published an almost complete edition of Ashmole 48 in 1860.⁴ Sir Walter Scott reproduced part of Sheale's lament, which he found 'melancholy, and yet ridiculous enough', as an illustration of the degraded condition of minstrels by the Tudor period.⁵ It is striking, then, that there has been no sustained effort to reconstruct Sheale's career.

Two factors in particular have stood in the way of a fuller investigation. The first is the puzzling nature of the manuscript. Most discussion, including that of Tessa Watt in her influential study *Cheap Print and Popular Piety*, and even that of her major source on Sheale and the manuscript, an article by the great ballad scholar Hyder E. Rollins, has been based on Wright's edition, and follows Wright's conclusion that Ashmole 48 was in large part copied from printed ballads.⁶ Unfortunately Wright (who probably had the manuscript

² T. Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry Consisting of Old Heroic Ballads, Songs, and Other Pieces of Our Earlier Poets, Chiefly of the Lyric Kind*, 4 vols (Dublin, 1766), I, xi.

³ J. Ritson, 'A Dissertation on Romance and Minstrelsy', in *Ancient English Metrical Romances ... Revised by Edmund Goldsmid* (Edinburgh, 1884), p. 85. A version of this essay, entitled according to Ritson's system of spelling, first appeared in 1802.

⁴ T. Hearne, ed., *Gullielmi Newbrigensis Historia* (Oxford, 1719), I, lxxxii ff.; Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, I, 1 ff.; T. Wright, ed. *Songs and Ballads Chiefly of the Reign of William and Mary* (London, 1860), There is also a note 'No XIII, Author of Chevy Chase' by 'C.' (probably J. J. Conybeare) in *The British Bibliographer*, IV, ed. E. Brydget and J. Haslewood (London, 1814), pp. 97–105.

⁵ Walter Scott, 'Essays on Romance', in *The Miscellaneous Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott*, 28 vols (Edinburgh 1848–57), VI, 127–216 at p. 210. The essay first appeared in 1824 as part of a six-volume supplement to the fifth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* of 1819.

⁶ T. Watt, in *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550–1640* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 16–21, draws heavily on H. E. Rollins, 'Concerning Bodleian MS. Ashmole 48', *Modern Language Notes* 34 (1919), 340–51. The conclusions of Rollins and Watt have been frequently repeated. J. Raven, for example, notes that the 'most extensive retail networks [in the book trade] were those worked by country petty chapmen, ballad sellers and sometimes minstrels, like Richard Sheale working through Staffordshire, Lancashire and routes south to London ('The Economic Context', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, Volume IV, 1557–1695*, ed. J. Barnard and D. F. McKenzie (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 568–82 at p. 577). See also, L. Manley, 'Literature and London', in *The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature*, ed. D. Loewenstein and J. Mueller (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 399–427 at p. 408 and A. Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500–1700* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 2–3, 4, 9, and 27.

transcribed for him) made no attempt to distinguish the various hands in it, and thus failed to realize that its central section was originally copied in a very short period, 1556–58.⁷ This means the manuscript predates the licensing of a number of the ballads in it, providing the first clue that the manuscript was not copied *from* printed ballads but was instead used to gather ballads together so that they *could be printed*. This possibility is confirmed by the way the manuscript groups material into clusters attributed to the same balladeer, something which, in a period when many ballads were anonymous, would have been very difficult for anyone to do once the ballads had been printed. As Watt has suggested, '[t]he minstrels seem to have occupied a position as mediators between older musical traditions and the London printing press'.⁸ Once its curious make-up has been clarified, Ashmole 48 emerges as a specific instance of how traditional ballads came to the printers and Sheale emerges more fully as a crucial mediator. The manuscript also provides us a glimpse into the inner workings of early print shops, something the destruction of records wrought by the Great Fire of 1666 has made very rare.

The second impediment to a full discussion of Sheale is that he comes too late. He is an early modern minstrel, and yet everyone knows (or thinks they do) that minstrels belong to the Middle Ages. Had Sheale lived even a century earlier there would probably already be several books on him. Yet it is precisely because his career challenges traditional periodization that it is now potentially of great interest, not just to those who work on performance history but also to those who work on the history of early print. Sheale and his career challenge nostalgic images of the minstrel as a practitioner of a dying art and show that the break between print and older forms of cultural transmission was not as abrupt as is often suggested. They also show how a minstrel could work not as an exotic alien, a free-floating wanderer, but as a known member of a number of communities, with both his songs and his travels reinforcing communal solidarity. Acting as a middleman between the London print shops and the world of the great Cheshire and Lancashire family the Stanleys, whom he served as a praise-singer, Sheale is a striking transitional figure.

In the second part of this study, I turn from Sheale's career to his best-known song (that is, the best-known of the songs he performed). This is the ballad usually called *The Hunting of the Cheviot* which describes the fatal confrontation between Henry Percy, earl of Northumberland, and James, earl of Douglas, on the field of Otterburn. While it is highly unlikely that this was Sheale's original composition, it bears his name in Ashmole 48 and could

⁷ M. Chesnutt identifies the hands of the manuscript in 'Minstrel Poetry in an English Manuscript of the Sixteenth Century: Richard Sheale and MS. Ashmole 48', in *The Entertainer in Medieval and Traditional Culture*, ed. F. G. Andersen, T. Pettitt and R. Schröder (Odense, 1997), pp. 73–100.

⁸ Watt, *Cheap Print*, p. 14.

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have formed part of his repertoire. *The Hunting of the Cheviot* is part of a widespread and enduring ballad tradition that originates with the battle of Otterburn, in the Cheviot Hills, in 1388. The tradition survives in two sixteenth-century manuscripts (Ashmole 48 and Cotton Cleopatra C IV), and numerous broadsides. The two manuscript versions diverge so much that it is hard to be sure they refer to the same event, yet short core passages which centre on the defiant speeches of the two leaders appear in almost identical form. The same pattern appears in other Stanley verse encomia and it suggests the existence of an audience that already brings a strong sense of how a story's key moments should be told and regards these moments as part of its heritage. There is, therefore, a strong parallel between the way Sheale travelled within a series of communities and the way his songs and those of other minstrels circulated.

In the final chapter I confront what I see as the central question of Sheale's career: why were his songs so powerful? How could he make material as apparently feeble as 'Within the North Country' appeal to sophisticated courtiers such as Henry Stanley, later Queen Elizabeth's ambassador to the Duke of Parma's court in the Netherlands, or Sir Henry Lee of Ditchley, later the master of the queen's Accession Day Tilts? Or, to put the question another way, why was it that Sir Philip Sidney, the mirror for Elizabethan courtiers, could find his heart 'moved more than with a Trumpet' at 'the old Song of Percy and Duglas'? Part of the answer, I will argue, lies in the attitudes of Renaissance gentry and nobility to military honour and their frustrations at the constrictions of the royal court. The great magnates, such as the Stanleys, naturally resented the encroachment of royal power on their ancient feudal privileges, but even the lesser gentry hankered after an older social and military order, an order which, to a considerable degree, still prevailed on the borderlands. While they played the role of Renaissance courtiers in the south, Sheale's patrons and heroes fought in the north as knights. The emotional force of *The Hunting of the Cheviot*, like that of Sheale's art in general, lies in its ability to evoke a tight community for the broad and anonymous audience of the printed ballad, linking the old world and the new.

Introduction

The Minstrel Rides Out

At nine o'clock in the morning late in the autumn around the year 1556 or 1557, Richard Sheale, minstrel, harper and mediocre poet, rode out alone from his home town of Tamworth on the border of Shropshire and Staffordshire and headed south. He carried with him, or so he subsequently claimed, roughly sixty pounds in gold, with which he intended to clear his debts in London. Sheale's wife was a 'sylke woman', that is, a kind of peddler, and sold shirts, skirts, smocks, neckerchiefs, ribbons, edging, silk thread and linen at fairs and markets in the vicinity of Tamworth. Sheale too may well have supplemented his income as a minstrel by selling merchandise of this kind. His friends in London had provided him with both cash and merchandise on credit, allowing his wife to carry on her business, and now, at the end of the peddling season, he was on his way down to London to clear the debt, having changed his money into gold to make it the easier to carry.

No doubt Sheale hoped that along the way he would have an opportunity to play his harp to alleviate his poverty. Some of the songs he knew were old ones, like the famous ballad *The Hunting of the Cheviot* which told how the reckless Harry Percy led a raid into the borderlands and met and killed the redoubtable Lord Douglas, only to be captured himself. This ballad had been popular for over a century, and was no doubt a favourite of Sheale's patron, Edward Stanley, third earl of Derby. The earl had himself participated in a raid against the Scots several years earlier, in 1542, while his great-uncle, Edward Stanley, had been created Baron Monteagle for his crucial role in defeating the Scots at Flodden in 1514, and his great-grand-father, the first earl of Derby, had (at least according to family history) won Berwick from the Scots in 1482.¹ But most people in the 1550s seemed to want to hear recent ballads, the ones that had appeared that particular year and were circulating in broadsheet. Peddlers often doubled as ballad sellers, and it would be surprising if a minstrel with a peddler wife had not been involved in the ballad trade in some way. Indeed, there is a good deal of evidence that Sheale not only sold ballads but also worked for one of the London printers, composing or gathering material. We can imagine Sheale purchasing a stock of new ballads in London and then hawking the original broadsheets in his

¹ *The Stanley Poem* actually gives the date of the siege as 1472.

travels, rather after the fashion of Shakespeare's cunning Autolycus, who assured his audience that his ballads were 'very true and but a month old'.² As we shall see, Sheale appears to have composed for the ballad market himself and also to have collected compositions from others to bring down to London.

Sheale rode on, following the old Roman road, Watling Street (now the A5) for some thirty miles until, around seven o'clock in the evening, he came to Dunsmore Heath, just to the north-east of Rugby. Foolishly, he continued riding in the dusk alone across the heath, a notoriously convenient spot for robbers.³ He believed, however, that his harp would show that he was a minstrel, and thus unlikely to be carrying much money, for everyone knew that 'minstrels offt with mony the be not moche infecte'.⁴ Suddenly he was set upon by four men who robbed him of every penny of the sixty pounds.

Sheale returned to Tamworth and broke the news to his wife, who not surprisingly was distraught. The two were now in severe financial embarrassment. Sheale owed an immense sum and, stunned by his loss, he could no longer find the heart to sing or amuse his audience:

After my robbery my memory was so decayde
That I colde neathar syng nore talke, my wyttes wer so dismayde.
My awdacie was gone and all my myrry tawke;
Ther ys sum hear haue sene me as myrry as a hawke.
But nowe I am so trublyde with phansis [fancies] in my mynde
That I cannot play the myrry knave accordyng to my kynd.⁵

In his distress Sheale appealed to his various friends and patrons, particularly to 'his good lord and master', Edward, earl of Derby and his son, Henry 'my lord Strange', both of whom gave him some assistance. Several of his neighbours suggested that he raise money by holding an ale (a fundraising event at

² *The Winter's Tale*, 4.4.268.

³ In the 1480s, John Rous described Dunsmore as 'a den of thieves and murderers' ('spelunca latronum & homicidarium') and noted that 'the road is dangerous and it is the high and common way between the city of London and the city of Coventry'. *Joannis Rossi antiquarii warwicensis Historia regum Angliæ. E codice MS in Bibliotheca Bodlejana descripta* ... 2nd edn (Oxford, 1745), p. 123 and VCH: Warwick, II, 158; IV, 79.

⁴ Sheale suggests that some 'false knave' must have betrayed him, for the thieves knew that he had started from Tamworth by nine o'clock, and adds that many men are betrayed by the chamberlains and ostlers at inns. This was a common accusation, and is echoed by William Harrison in *The Description of England: The Classic Contemporary Account of Tudor Social Life*, ed. G. Edelen (1587; Washington, DC, 1994), p. 398.

⁵ In the citations from Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 48, and of various manuscripts containing Stanley material, I have silently expanded abbreviations, supplied punctuation and capitalization, substituted 'and' for & and 'th' for thorn and occasionally modified word division.

which home-brewed ale was sold to charitable neighbours; see pp. 28–31 for more details) and gave him enough money to buy a bushel of malt. The ale was a marked success, raising nearly five pounds.

Many of the people of Tamworth refused to believe Sheale's story, however, and said that it was impossible for a minstrel ever to have had so much money. To convince them, Sheale composed a brief lament, recounting how he had been robbed. He may well have delivered an initial version of this poem at the ale and then later expanded it for other fundraising performances, where he would refer back to the generosity he had already enjoyed. The poem, in its current version, ends with a direct appeal to an unspecified audience to make a contribution:

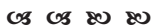
God save my good lorde, for whos sayke I fynd frenddes,
That helpes me euery whar, and thus my tall enddes.
Desyryng youe all to bear this taylor in mynde,
That I among your pursis nowe sum frendshipe may fynd.
Euery man a lyttell wold satisfye my nede;
To helpe a poor man owt off dett yt ys a gracious dede.

Eventually someone, I believe probably Sheale himself, copied this poem down. It is the major source of the story I have just told. It survives in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 48, a small volume filled with love songs, short poems on moral themes and ballads, many of them closely resembling those available in printed broadsides. The manuscript is the work of several hands, but one of them was either that of Richard Sheale himself or, at the very least, of someone with a connection to him, for the manuscript contains several other pieces that bear Sheale's name, including two, the lament and a comic closing speech for his performances, which only Sheale or his circle could have found of much interest.

Exactly when this robbery occurred we do not know, nor whether his business ever fully recovered. As we shall see, it appears that in the spring of 1558 Sheale joined the great English muster against the Scots and followed the earl of Derby north to Berwick. One last sad reference provides what might once have seemed to be Sheale's obituary. On 5 June 1561, Henry Machyn, a London merchant, noted in his diary 'dyd hange ym-selff be-syd London stone [blank] ... lle harper, the servand of the yerle of Darbe'.⁶ Of course the term 'servant' could mean no more than that minstrel bore the

⁶ *The Diary of Henry Machyn, Citizen and Merchant-Taylor of London, from AD 1550 to AD 1563*, ed. J. G. Nichols (London, 1847), p. 259, ellipsis in original. I owe this reference to Thomas Pettitt. The Staffordshire historian G. T. Lawley (active in the 1890s and early twentieth century) has left two short notes on Sheale, now in the Wolverhampton Archives, and states in both that Sheale died in 1574. The only source Lawley mentions, however, is Sheale's lament, which he titles 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel'. I owe this reference to an anonymous reviewer.

earl's badge and had some loose claim on his protection, and there might have been several such men, but a harper under the earl's patronage who also visited London and whose name ended in 'lle' sounds like Sheale. Julian Harrison, however, who kindly examined Machyn's text for me using fibre-optic light, concluded that the crucial line is more likely to read 'stone <...>ta harper' than 'stone <...>lle harper'.⁷ It seems Sheale's life after 1558 remains a mystery.



Nobody would claim that Sheale was a great poet, but he is one of the very few English minstrels whose career has left a record beyond a few entries in an account book. Considered by itself, the account of his robbery offers a quantity of plausible information about the economics of sixteenth-century minstrelsy. By a series of fortunate coincidences, however, several kinds of documents survive that help place Sheale's story in its social context. Sheale lived during a period when various social controls, notably those directed against vagrancy, had been greatly extended, providing us in consequence with a wide variety of evidence about peddling, ballad selling and the activities of independent minstrels. Had Sheale been working a century earlier, our ability to set his activities within a reasonably well delineated industry would be far more limited. A second piece of good fortune is that the one English minstrel to leave us such a detailed account of his career also happened to have worked for one of the greatest households of northern England, that of the Stanleys, whose members were keen supporters of drama and fostered a strong tradition of verse encomium. Although the Stanley household papers were mostly destroyed during the Civil War and those that survive do not cover the period when Sheale was active, we still have a great deal of information about the lives and interests of these powerful patrons.

There are several further pieces of good luck. The first is the survival of an extended verse history of the Stanley family known as *The Stanley Poem*, which was composed within a few years of Sheale's robbery. Although traditionally attributed to Bishop Thomas Stanley, the poem, a piece of naked flattery of the bishop's father, the third earl, and his sons, can scarcely have been by the bishop himself. It was most probably composed by someone who was associated with the family but held a relatively humble position – someone, in other words, very much like Sheale. Moreover, in its prosaic style and even in certain turns of phrase, the poem closely resembles several of Sheale's other pieces, a matter I shall return to in chapter 3, where I argue that Sheale was indeed its author. Even if he was not, *The Stanley Poem* provides a rich example of the family lore that Sheale would have known and drawn upon in his travels as a Stanley minstrel. Equally fortuitous is the association of Sheale

⁷ London, British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius F.V, fol. 137r, and personal correspondence of 2 March 2011.

with the famous border ballad *The Hunting of the Cheviot*. This version of the ballad is preserved in only one manuscript, Ashmole 48. Not only is the ballad famous but its historical origin, the battle of Otterburn of 1388, is unusually well documented and provides us with a rare opportunity to trace the various stages of a ballad tradition, from the original accounts of the veterans recorded by Froissart to the eventual emergence of a broadside tradition nearly two centuries later.

While *The Stanley Poem* tells us much about the social role of poetry, the manuscripts that preserve it, copies made by antiquarians from lost originals, tell us little or nothing further. With Ashmole 48, however, the situation is different. The manuscript's original core – for there are a number of later additions – dates from about 1558, a period when Sheale was active as a Stanley minstrel. Moreover, Sheale is credited with five of the poems in the manuscript, although at least one of these, *The Hunting of the Cheviot*, is certainly not his own composition. The other four, the lament for his robbery, an after-dinner speech of thanks, a moral lament beginning 'Remember man thy frayle estate' and a eulogy for Margaret, countess of Derby, have several stylistic features in common, however, as do several of the anonymous pieces, and it is entirely likely that they were the work of the same man. Given the highly personal nature of the lament in particular, it seems a reasonable supposition either that Sheale compiled the book himself or that it was compiled by somebody close enough to him to think his works worthy of inclusion. This possibility is one I shall return to in chapter 4.

If the account of Sheale's robbery allows us to place him in one social context – in which his partnership with his wife, the silk woman, takes him from Tamworth to London and the world of new commodities and printed ballads – a second poem in Ashmole 48 allows us to locate him in another and very different tradition. It is a piece of only thirty-six lines in praise of the 'Lords of the North Country' and while it bears no name, in its style it closely resembles the other works by Sheale. The poem's historical moment can be located precisely. For the most part, the names it lists are famous, those of the great Marcher lords who had fought on the borders for generations. Two of the men mentioned, however, are southerners: Sir Richard Lee, a military engineer, and Sir Henry Lee of Ditchley, later Garter knight and master of ceremonies and royal champion for the famous Accession Day Tilts of Queen Elizabeth. While a minstrel with northern connections might have chosen to praise the other lords on any number of occasions, there is only one on which he might have included the two southerners, indeed only one on which the two men found themselves together in the north, and that was the English muster of the summer of 1558. It was in this campaign that Sir Henry Lee first distinguished himself, being singled out for his valour in a raid under the leadership of Henry Percy, a descendant of the Henry Percy of the ballad. Taken together, *The Hunting of the Cheviot* and this short piece of military

encomium provide an instance of traditional minstrelsy at work within a specific community, preserving the community's heroic genealogy.

With a detailed account of his misfortunes, a substantial poem on his patrons that is in his style and may indeed be his work, a manuscript that either belonged to him or to someone with a strong connection to him and a song of praise in his style for a specific campaign whose leaders are known, we have enough material to begin to form a picture of Sheale's career and of the social bonds linking performer and audience in early modern England.

The Wandering Minstrel

When he rides out with his harp, Sheale traces a familiar narrative: from the Anglo-Saxon Widsith to Gilbert and Sullivan's Nanki-Poo, a 'thing of shreds and patches', the archetypal minstrel is a wanderer. He is part of that 'changefully coloured current of travellers, vagabonds, wayfarers, and wanderers', those people who are 'neither fanciful nor dreamy things, bony beings on the contrary with strong muscles and alert tongues, and the dust of the road to Rome or the East on their feet', who stirred the imagination of J. J. Jusserand and so many others and are such a vital part of the medieval landscape.⁸ Edmond Faral, in his early study of the French *jongleurs*, evokes just such a figure:

It is the destiny of the *jongleur* to wander. In search of hospitality and welcome he follows the roads, going from castle to castle, boasting of his talents and offering to display them. Generally he is well received as a man who brings news and gaiety. He is the light which passes and lights up for a moment the monotonous life of the knights and barons.⁹

Faral's words capture part of the essence of what it is to be a *jongleur*: to live by one's wits, to wander freely, to see the world. This familiar conjunction is maintained both by performers and their critics. For the restless goliards, who glamorize their life of drunkenness, poverty and defiant fornication, but equally for innumerable Church councils, which vilify popular entertainers, wandering is a form of riot, error and subversion. This medieval commonplace gains strength under the Tudors, for whom vagrancy was a continual source of fear. In *The Anatomie of Abuses* the Elizabethan pamphleteer Phillip Stubbes pours scorn on such 'drunken sockets, and bawdye parasits as range the Contreyes, ryming and singing of uncleane, corrupt, and filthie songs in Tavernes, Ale-houses, Innes, and other publique assemblies', and Tudor laws

⁸ J. J. Jusserand, *English Wayfaring Life in the Middle Ages (XIVth Century)*, trans. L. T. Smith (London, 1912), pp. 143, 221.

⁹ E. Faral, *Les jongleurs en France au moyen âge* (1910; New York, 1970), p. 96.