

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO ATTITUDES TOWARDS ILLEGITIMATE BIRTH
AS EVIDENCED IN THE FOLKLORE OF SOUTH WEST ENGLAND**

by

SARAH JOANNE DAVIES

A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth
in partial fulfilment for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Exeter School of Arts & Design
Faculty of Arts & Education

October 1999.

Dedication

For my brother James, in honour of the colour green.

ABSTRACT

Sarah Joanne Davies

An Investigation into Attitudes Towards Illegitimate Birth as Evidenced in the Folklore of South West England

This thesis is a comparative, cross-generic, study of attitudes towards illegitimacy as evidenced in folksong and folk narrative genres. It is a regionally based study, focusing specifically on oral materials collected from the counties of Devon, Cornwall and Somerset, in the South West of England since 1970. Hence archival sources, in addition to my own fieldwork, provide the main sources of folklore data for this project. This is the first thesis to draw extensively upon the large body of material known as the Sam Richards Folklore Archive, which includes over 500 hours of taped recordings. The collecting towards this archive was originally inspired by the prolific work of early folksong collectors Sabine Baring-Gould and Cecil Sharp in the South West region.

My work on this project is the first broad-based critical analysis of selected materials from the resulting thirty years' collecting.

Representations of out-of-wedlock pregnancy in South West folksong are often extremely diverse. Illegitimacy is commonly fused with other types of theme, including seduction and betrayal. By contrast, a fairly narrow depiction of "illegitimate" pregnancy is given in supernatural legends and memorates, local legends and local character anecdotes, where it is consistently seen as having negative repercussions for the woman and sometimes the child, concerned.

An extensive overview of folklore scholarship informs my eclectic approach to this study. In the early chapters of this thesis I delineate my source materials in some detail, also setting out the historical context from which my chosen songs and narratives emerged. In my analysis of these materials in Chapters 6, 7, and 8, I have combined the use of detailed textual analysis with a consideration of the creation of meaning in the interaction between text and performance context.

LIST OF CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>Author's Declaration</i>	<i>ii</i>
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
<u>Geographical/Social Background</u>	7
<u>Early Collectors of Folk Narrative and Song in the South West Region</u>	9
CHAPTER 2: THE GROWTH OF SCHOLARSHIP RELATING TO THE THEME OF ILLEGITIMACY IN FOLK NARRATIVE GENRES	19
FOLKSONG SCHOLARSHIP	22
SCHOLARSHIP RELATING TO PROSE NARRATIVE GENRES	57
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	63
<u>Collection of Material</u>	63
<u>Analysis of Material</u>	65
<u>Illegitimacy: Arriving at a Working Definition</u>	71
<u>Defining Illegitimacy</u>	75
<u>Presentation of Material</u>	77
<u>Abbreviations</u>	79
CHAPTER 4: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE MAIN SOURCES OF DATA	80
<u>ARCHIVAL DATA</u>	80
<u>The Sam Richards Folklore Archive</u>	82
<u>The Wren Trust Archive</u>	87
<u>The Patten Archive</u>	89
<u>The Vaughan Williams Memorial Library Sound Archive</u>	91
<u>DATA RESULTING FROM MY OWN FIELDWORK</u>	94

<u>Interviews with SRFA Singers</u>	97
<u>Interviews with Friends and Relatives of SRFA Singers</u>	102
<u>Singers Located Through Other Archives</u>	103
<u>Singers Located through Fieldwork and by Other's Recommendation</u>	106
<u>Non-Singers Located Independently and by Other's Recommendation</u>	109
<u>PUBLISHED SOURCES</u>	111
<u>Twentieth Century Folklore Writers and Collectors</u>	111
<u>Fiction</u>	116
CHAPTER 5: SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT	119
<u>Introduction</u>	119
<u>PART A: THE OVERVIEW OF ILLEGITIMACY IN NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURY ENGLAND</u>	120
<u>PART B: KEY ASPECTS OF ILLEGITIMACY-RELATED FOLK NARRATIVES AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THE SOCIAL EXPERIENCE OF ILLEGITIMACY BETWEEN 1850-PRESENT DAY</u>	126
<u>The Diffusion of Sexual Knowledge and Birth Control</u>	126
<u>Sanctions Against the Begetting of Illegitimate Children</u>	132
<u>Official Sanctions</u>	132
<u>Social Sanctions</u>	139
<u>The Social Identities of Those Having Illegitimate Children</u>	148
<u>Urban Domestic Servants</u>	149
<u>Female Rural Labourers and Rural Domestic Servants</u>	152
<u>Parental Responses to Out-of-Wedlock Pregnancy</u>	156
<u>Suicide</u>	156
<u>Alternative Responses to Illegitimate Pregnancy</u>	159
<u>Preventing Birth: Recourse to Abortion</u>	159
<u>Child Minders, Foster Parents and Adoption</u>	167
<u>Residing With Family</u>	168

<u>Infanticide and Child Abandonment</u>	169
<u>ATTITUDES TOWARDS ILLEGITIMACY</u>	173
<u>Attitudes Towards Illegitimacy in the South West</u>	178
CHAPTER 6: FOLKSONG RELATING TO THE THEME OF ILLEGITIMACY IN THE SOUTH WEST OF ENGLAND	188
<u>Part A: Presentation of Data</u>	188
<u>Part B: Texts as Evidence of Attitudes Towards Illegitimacy</u>	210
<u>Conclusion</u>	225
<u>Performance</u>	226
<u>Conclusions</u>	266
CHAPTER 7: FOLK NARRATIVE RELATING TO THE THEME OF ILLEGITIMACY IN THE SOUTH WEST OF ENGLAND	267
<u>SUPERNATURAL LEGENDS AND MEMORATES</u>	268
<u>The Narratives</u>	270
<u>Analysis</u>	272
<u>Supernatural Narratives As Evidence of Experiences And Attitudes in The Past</u>	287
<u>LOCAL LEGENDS</u>	290
<u>The Legend of "Jay's Grave"</u>	292
<u>Attitudes Towards Illegitimacy Within the Narratives</u>	302
<u>Performance</u>	310
<u>Historical Context</u>	316
<u>THE LOCAL CHARACTER ANECDOTE</u>	325
<u>Conclusion</u>	330
CHAPTER 8: COMPARISON OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS ILLEGITIMACY AS EVIDENCED IN FOLKSONG AND PROSE NARRATIVE GENRES IN THE SOUTH WEST OF ENGLAND	332
<u>ATTITUDES TOWARDS ILLEGITIMACY IMPLICIT WITHIN THE TEXTS</u>	332

<u>Songs</u>	332
<u>Prose Narratives</u>	335
CONTINUITY AND CHANGE	337
<u>Songs</u>	337
<u>Prose Narratives</u>	339
<u>Texts as Evidence of Attitudes Towards Illegitimacy in the Distant Past (1750-1930)</u>	341
FOLKSONGS AND PROSE NARRATIVES AS EVIDENCE OF CONTEMPORARY ATTITUDES TOWARDS ILLEGITIMACY IN THE HISTORICAL PAST	344
<u>Folksongs</u>	344
<u>Prose Narratives</u>	346
<u>Songs and Prose Narratives as Evidence of Attitudes Towards Illegitimacy in Living Memory and Experience</u>	349
CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION	359
Critique	360
Suggestions for further work	364
<i>Appendices</i>	366
<i>Bibliography</i>	402

List of Tables and Diagrams

Chapter 3 (Methodology)

Figure 1	<u>COMPARISON OF PATHS TOWARDS LEGITIMATE AND ILLEGITIMATE BIRTH</u>	72
Figure 2	<u>ROUTES TOWARDS ILLEGITIMATE BIRTH: INDICATING RANGE OF POSSIBLE CIRCUMSTANCES AND INDIVIDUAL DECISION MAKING PROCESSES</u>	73

Chapter 4 (Sources)

Table A	<u>CONTACT WITH SRFA SINGERS</u>	98
Table B	<u>AVAILABILITY OF WREN TRUST ARCHIVE SINGERS</u>	104
Table C	<u>AVAILABILITY OF PATTEN ARCHIVE SINGERS</u>	104
Table D	<u>AVAILABILITY OF VWML SOUND ARCHIVE SINGERS</u>	105

Chapter 6 (folksongs)

Table A	<u>SONG DATA COLLECTED DURING FIELDWORK</u>	194
Table B	<u>TAPE-RECORDED VERSIONS OF ILLEGITIMACY-RELATED SONGS COLLECTED SINCE 1970</u>	196

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank all my interviewees and correspondents, who so generously contributed their time towards this thesis: Pat Barker, Chris Binmore, Sheila Bricknell, Joe and Dilly Davis, Jack Gard, Dave German, Edwin Hall, Charlie and Jess Hill, Bessie French, Denis Hutchings, Vic Legg, Dave Lowry, Bill Packman, Margaret Palmer, Ken Penney, Tish Stubbs, Maureen Tatlow, Wray Tucker, Paul Wilson, and George Withers.

Particular love and thanks are due to Jacqueline Patten and Pete Gill for their constant support and encouragement, and to Angela Blaen, without whom this project would never have happened. I am also much indebted to my specialist supervisor Julia Bishop for her professional advice, patience, perseverance, and hospitality over and above the call of duty; to my Director of Studies, Philip Hull, for his unfailing confidence and kindness; to David Holt for his swift reading of final drafts; and Richard Williams for his interest and encouragement.

Gratitude is also due to my friends and colleagues at Wandale Research Base, in particular to Val Clarke, Ian Dalgleish, Simon Rippingale, Anna Trussler, and Amy Williams, both for their humour, and for a whole range of emotional and practical support, including the sharing of ideas, chasing up material, the painstaking reading of earlier drafts, and technical assistance. I am also indebted to Karen Somerfield, for her calming temperament and optimism. Thanks also to other dear friends; to Helen and Paul Seaton-Burn for faith and encouragement; to Ed and Ali Pawson, for their hospitality and constant love and kindness; to Vic Chadwick, for her strength and practical help, including her more than generous hospitality.

Gratitude is also owed to a number of other institutions for their help and collaboration; to the Wren Trust, and the Librarian, Malcolm Taylor, and Assistant Librarians, at The Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, for making my archive research possible; to NATCECT, particularly for the use of their unique resources; to the committee members and staff at the Folklore Society, particularly to Steve Roud, for selflessly slaving over a hot computer, to Doc Rowe, for generous hospitality and the use of his archive, and the librarian, Dr Caroline Oates. Thanks also to the library and media staff at University of Plymouth, particularly Sue White for help with inter-library loans, and Alex Palmer for help with computing; Moi Deighton and Sam Richards, for help with fieldwork; Madeleine Midgeley for chasing books and obscure references; and Martin Graebe and Dr Marion Gibson, for guidance and professional advice.

Finally, considerable thanks are due to my family; to my sister Alex, for the use of her house as a "research" base, to my mother, for her assistance with proof-reading and editing final drafts of the thesis, and to my father, for backing and financially assisting this project.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other university award.

This study was financed with the aid of a studentship funded by the University of Plymouth.

Signed . *J. H. D. Jones* .

Date . 17th . October . 1999

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study has used a thematically based cross-generic approach to explore attitudes towards illegitimacy as evidenced in folk narrative genres in the South West of England. A variety of folksongs and three types of prose narratives - supernatural narratives, local legends and local character anecdotes relevant to this theme form the central focus of the discussion. This study has a contemporary emphasis and therefore only considers narratives if the evidence points to their actively circulating in oral tradition in the South West region since approximately 1970, whether or not they have continued into the present day. It combines the use of textual analysis, with various kinds of contextual approach (see Chapter 2). Consequently, it attempts to interpret attitudes within the narratives in terms of their performance context, as well as the wider socio-historical context of their circulation. In the process of collectively evaluating these narratives as evidence of attitudes towards illegitimacy in the distant, and recent past, as well as the present, the comparative usefulness of the data will also be considered in relation to other types of source material, such as official records and historical researches.

Four different archival collections - the Sam Richards Folklore Archive (hereafter SRFA), the Wren Trust Archive, the Patten Archive, the Sound Archive at the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, in addition to my own fieldwork and a variety of folk narratives recorded in printed sources - collectively form the main source of data in relation to this project. Each of the archives is linked by their folklore content, their association with the local area and their strong emphasis on contemporary tape-recorded material. Recordings and notes from my own collecting reflect a similar concern with local folklore, particularly with songs and narratives relating to this theme, as do these additional printed sources.

Folksongs provide a particularly unique resource because they belong to an extremely deep-rooted tradition. Whilst undergoing spates of revival since the late nineteenth century, this has generally suffered a decline in terms of a smaller, increasingly marginalised proportion of the general population performing folksong, or participating in folk singing events. A study of this particular corpus of post-1970s folksongs therefore provides the means to test the hypothesis that with the declining popularity of a cultural artefact, such as

song, a corresponding decline occurs in the relevance of the social attitudes expressed within it. In other words, declining popularity may reflect the increasing inability of song to resonate with the values of the immediate social group (see Pickering "The Past", "The Farmworker").

That the theme of illegitimacy also surfaced in prose narrative genres, such as local legend, as well as song, provided a useful body of comparative materials. Because different types of narratives convey, and provide, an insight into social attitudes, as already observed by scholars such as Polly Stewart and Isabel Peer, these could be used to further test my hypothesis in relation to song. One might reasonably expect a decline in particular types or attitude in certain generic categories to be followed by a corresponding decline in another. My increasing awareness of the subjective nature of different types of classification as essentially academic constructs also confirmed the validity of this cross-generic approach (Dundes "Texture" 252). It was clear that certain types of folklore in performance, such as a folksong, might intrinsically be a mixture of many different forms, perhaps being incorporated as part of a custom or rite of passage, whilst also having particular elements in common with the joke. Finally, this approach stemmed from an awareness of the dearth of studies of this kind, particularly in relation to English folklore.

There were two additional reasons for using folklore materials as the main source of data for this project. Firstly, whilst folklore has always been a vital and persistent current within our society and continues to be so, for numerous reasons folklore data still stands as a neglected resource, in spite of its relevance to a wide range of academic disciplines including history, linguistics, literature and cultural studies (Widdowson). As a relatively untapped resource, the kinds of folk narrative included in this thesis were considered to be worthy of discussion. For similar reasons, maximum use of materials from other generic categories, such as language, custom and belief, which also reveal attitudes towards sex and illegitimacy, is made in Chapter 5. Hence folklore data is combined with other types of material, such as oral testimonies and more conventional historical writings, to assemble a wider picture of socio-historical context in which these focal folksongs and prose narratives pertaining to the theme of illegitimacy were and are circulated.

Secondly, there has been a growing recognition that until recent years, mainstream historians have tended to exclude certain aspects of human experience from historical discourse, focusing in particular upon politics, certain types of "historical" event, and prioritising the views and experiences of the educated

élite in their discussion (Shorter The Making 8-13; Newton "Introduction"; Neilands 3-4). This has been common not only with regard to certain groups of people, such as the lower classes and women, but also with certain subject areas. This neglect is particularly apparent in relation to areas defined as essentially personal, such as "supernatural" beliefs, or as intrinsically taboo, such as sex and childbirth.¹ Folklore data is thus a means of redressing the balance in terms of the distorted view traditionally provided by élitist mainstream history by adding an alternative point of view. It follows the wider move by other groups of scholars, such as oral and women's historians, towards the greater acceptance of more unconventional sources, since approximately the 1960s. Hence, whilst drawing upon alternative kinds of data, including autobiographical testimony or writing and family histories, scholars have begun developing new working models with which to view them. The qualitative, subjective nature of the folk narratives themselves ensured that they were a better source of information, given the nature of my research questions, than other less descriptive, statistical kinds of evidence, such as census returns, more suited to quantitative research.

My interest in this central theme, out-of-wedlock pregnancy and illegitimate birth, was sparked by the apparent disjuncture between the attitudes alluded to in folksong texts within the SRFA (with which I was initially concerned), and prevailing attitudes within the more liberal climate of today. Songs such as "Catch Me if You Can" seemed to have an obvious affinity with the past, and yet their existence in a relatively contemporary tape-recorded archive compiled since the 1970s suggested that they might have continued in active circulation up until the present day. Intriguingly, further research revealed that the same anomaly appeared to exist within other types of folk narrative, such as local legends, and the environments of their circulation, and thus the theme aroused my curiosity. Moreover, this subject area also provided a useful case study of the dynamic relationship between folklore and its social context, choosing an aspect of experience which has been subject to considerable rapid social change.

This thesis primarily seeks to establish how folksongs, supernatural narratives, local legends, and local character anecdotes relate to attitudes towards illegitimacy in the relatively contemporary environments of their circulation (i.e. from 1970-present day). However, the retrospective nature of many of the narratives also suggested the possibility that the narratives might evidence

¹Significantly, the discrepancies between official histories and the reality of past experience is highlighted in Chapter 5, even on the basis of South West data alone (see abortion and infanticide, Chapter 5).

attitudes and experiences in the distant past to which they seemed to refer, thereby demonstrating the kind of "time-lag" which is characteristic of folklore in oral tradition. Similarly, the obvious antiquity of particular songs seemed to confirm that this might be the case.² Because of the need to anchor attitudes within the narratives to a particular era, they were viewed from a diachronic perspective. Changing experiences and attitudes were therefore reconstructed for the period 1850-present day, for reasons further explained in Chapters 3 and 5.

This thesis was written during my time as a Research Student for the University of Plymouth. This full-time studentship, which commenced in November 1993, was funded by a three-year bursary and was established following the acquisition of a contemporary tape-recorded archive, the SRFA. The use of this resource, which was housed in an office space at the Exmouth campus of the University of Plymouth, was a condition of the studentship. It was also intended that I would undertake my own fieldwork, the resulting materials being deposited with, and augmenting, the existing archive. Hence, to a certain extent, the type of data considered within this project was pre-determined. My initial investigation of the SRFA, with which I was completely unfamiliar, revealed that most of the material related to musical traditions.

Hence, the decision to examine three additional archival collections was motivated firstly by the wish to conduct a more extensive survey of illegitimacy-related songs collected within the South West region during a comparable time period. Secondly, the additional sources were chosen with a view to further investigating other generic categories of material, such as local legend, which were underrepresented in the SRFA itself. Each of these archives was examined at the same time as conducting fieldwork, and was considered as a potential source of informants. The geographical repercussions of the SRFA being located at Exmouth, coupled with the obvious constraints on time, labour and resources, also determined how each of these additional archives was chosen. The same considerations also affected the planning of and execution of fieldwork within this project, and the use of other facilities, such as public libraries. Hence my eventual bias towards the Devon area.

Chapter 2, The Growth of Scholarship Relating to the Theme of Illegitimacy in Folk narrative Genres, charts the development of scholarly thought in relation to this theme as it occurs in folksong and selected prose

² The song "The Foggy Dew", for example, can be dated back to a broadside ballad printed in 1689 under the title The Fright'ned York-shire Damosel, or Fears Dispers'd by Pleasure.

narrative genres. The different approaches of a growing number of scholars in Britain, Ireland and North America are compared and contrasted. For instance, in relation to folksong the insights of a range of studies from the contextual approaches of Neilands and Gammon, to the semiological approaches of Renwick and Kodish, are considered. Ultimately, this chapter critically examines the hypotheses of each scholar with regard to the theme of illegitimacy itself and its significance in terms of attitudes towards illegitimacy both within the text, and within the environments at large in which these narratives were circulated. A greater proportion of this chapter is devoted to the former genre in part one, as studies of relevant folksongs have been far more prolific than those relating to prose narratives. Nevertheless, certain branches of scholarly thought in relation to songs of this theme, were easily transferable to other types of narrative (see Preston).

Chapter 3, Methodology, initially explains how and why the data considered within this thesis was collected from each of the four archives, my own fieldwork and additional published sources - which are more closely examined in Chapter 4. Making explicit the assumptions which underpin this study, a more detailed explanation of how my chosen folksongs and folk narratives are analysed is then given. The various phases of research are viewed in terms of the different strands of ideas which linked them together. Hence, I will be acknowledging other scholars who directly influenced the development of thought in relation to my own work and whose approaches were drawn upon in devising my own methodology. Having defined my use of terms (including "illegitimacy") in relation to my own material, in the final section I will then explain how the data considered in Chapters 6, 7 and 8, is presented.

Chapter 4, A Critical Examination of the Main Sources of Data, focuses upon source material falling into two distinct categories: the four selected archives; the body of data accumulated during my own collecting activities; and additional material obtained from a variety of printed sources. Each of these sources is described and analysed in some detail, evaluating to what extent the data can be seen as reliable, authentic or even representative of folk narrative relating to sexual relationships and illegitimacy. Thus the particular interests and inherent biases of each collector or writer are carefully considered, with a view to evaluating how this may have affected their findings. The motivations and rationale behind my own data collection ^{are} also considered, and a detailed background to all informants contributing material is provided.

Chapter 5, Socio-Historical Context, attempts to reconstruct a relevant historical context for the illegitimacy narratives which are considered in Chapters 6 and 7, exploring the interface between these narratives and selected aspects of experience in both the distant and recent past from 1850-present day. My data-centred approach necessitated that the subject matter of these narratives ultimately determined which particular areas of socio-historical experience were expanded within the discussion. Therefore, whilst less obviously connected subjects, such as social class and female suicide, are sometimes considered in some detail, others, like infanticide, are consigned to a more marginal position. For the same reasons, data relating to the South West of England is, as far as is possible, foregrounded within this reconstruction of attitudes and experience. Material from a variety of disciplines, including oral and women's history, folklore and anthropology, is used to this end. Hence the insights of broadly based historical works about changing sexual behaviour and social custom, are combined with those afforded by more localised studies specifically relating to illegitimacy in the South West (see Shorter, E.P. Thompson and Robin).

Chapter 6, Folksongs, presents the findings in terms of all relevant song data obtained from the sources outlined in Chapter 4, clarifying how each of these songs was selected. A comprehensive list of material is provided in Table B, with plot summaries for each song, or group of song variants. In part two, I will complete a textual analysis of each song, initially examining attitudes towards illegitimacy in terms of stated text alone. This discussion then investigates the creation of meaning in performance, using the insights of singers and audiences in relation to the singing of those same songs since 1970 with a view to establishing their significance in terms of my chosen theme. Finally, the experience of, and attitudes towards illegitimacy, as represented within these songs is related to those same experiences and attitudes within the wider cultural environments of their circulation. Hence, I aim to draw some conclusions about the extent to which a given song communicates attitudes towards illegitimacy in the "distant" past; more contemporary notions about attitudes towards illegitimacy held in the distant past; or attitudes towards illegitimacy since the 1970s.

Chapter 7, Folk Narrative, focuses on attitudes towards out-of-wedlock pregnancy and illegitimate birth in the three different types of prose narrative genres. By focusing specifically on examples which have been in active circulation in the South West during approximately the last thirty years, this analysis attempts to employ a similar time scale to that used in the previous

discussion of folksong. This enables a comparison to be usefully drawn between the experience of, and attitudes towards, out-of-wedlock pregnancy and illegitimate birth as exemplified within two different genres of oral tradition. With recourse to earlier-collected material, particularly that amassed by turn of the century collectors, these more contemporary narratives were viewed from a diachronic perspective.

Chapter 8, Comparison between Attitudes towards Out-of-Wedlock Pregnancy and Illegitimate Birth in Folksong and Prose Narrative Genres,

contrasts attitudes towards illegitimacy, synthesising the separate analyses conducted in the previous two chapters. These categories of material are collectively viewed in terms of attitudes towards illegitimacy implicit within the texts. Songs and prose narratives are also evaluated as evidence of attitudes towards illegitimacy in the distant, rather than recent past and as evidence of contemporary attitudes towards illegitimacy in the historical past, with a view to suggesting why certain narratives promote a particular view of history and what functions this might serve. Finally, this corpus of material is evaluated as evidence of attitudes towards illegitimacy in living memory and experience.

Chapter 9, Conclusion, provides an overview of all the findings earlier discussed and draws some general conclusions about attitudes towards illegitimacy as represented within, and communicated by, both folksong and prose narrative in the South West.

Geographical/Social Background

The South West of England is a triangular-shaped peninsula surrounded by sea, with the Atlantic Ocean on its northern and eastern edges, and the English Channel creating a more sheltered coastline to the South (Devon 108). The topography of the region as a whole is extremely varied, East Devon and Somerset belonging to "lowland" Britain, and Cornwall and the rest of Devon to the highland part (Central, English 2).

The largest area of granite-based moor is located within the Dartmoor region, a designated National Park since 1951, which occupies much of the southern part of Devon (83). This is "a compact 365-square-mile . . . upland lying between the Tamar and the Ex" (Devon 97; "Dartmoor" (TV)). Like Exmoor, this region has a high altitude, being over 1000 feet above sea level in parts (Devon 102-03). The climates of both areas can therefore be extremely inhospitable throughout the winter period, though Dartmoor tends to be wilder and bleaker, the weather

sometimes isolating its communities (Central, English 4; Devon 101-03). Exmoor, having a total of 265 square miles, is the smaller of the region's two national parks (Devon 101). Whilst it straddles the Devon/Somerset border, over two thirds of this region is located in Somerset (Devon 101). A much smaller, bleak area of moor land, Bodmin moor, is located in the eastern part of Cornwall, and like Dartmoor and Exmoor has traditionally been used as rough grazing ground (Central, English 19; Devon 101). The other, more fertile areas of Devon, Cornwall and Somerset, "are not well suited to growing cereals and concentrate mainly on grassland" (Central, English 19; Devon 127).

Compared to other parts of Britain, the South West continues to be a sparsely populated, predominantly rural area (Central, English 13-14, Britain 8-9; cf. W.G. Hoskins 158). One estimate for the more widely defined South West region, in 1978, suggested that only a quarter of its inhabitants were living in towns of more than 100,000 people (Central, English 14; cf. Hoskins 158-59). The region as a whole has few conurbations or large towns, instead having a fairly even distribution of small towns which "play an important social and economic role in the more sparsely populated areas" (Central, English 14). Devon is both the largest of the three counties in terms of its area and population, which tends to be concentrated in the South, particularly in the Torbay and Plymouth districts (Central, English 13-14). By the mid 1990s approximately twice as many people were living in Devon, than in either Cornwall and the Scilly Isles, or Somerset (Central Office, Britain 8-9).

Prior to the twentieth century, the South West continued to be a relatively isolated region. This was particularly true of Cornwall, "the last outpost of Celtic England", which had its own language well into the eighteenth century and continued to be separated from Devon and Somerset by the River Tamar (Reader's Digest 130; Payton 119). The isolation of the South West began to diminish with the advent of the railways. Since the Paddington to Exeter route was established in 1844, the time of travel has been reduced from a five, to a one hour fifty minute journey (Devon 84, 141).³ London to Penzance has now been a mainline passenger route for over twenty-five years. Since the motorway system was developed, Exeter, "the tourism gateway for both Devon and Cornwall", became linked to Bristol by the M5 in the late 1970s, reducing travelling times by up to two hours, the A303/A30 and M3 making the route to London a three hour journey (Devon 31, 164; Hawkins 35, 55). Links also extend to Plymouth and the ferry ports by the A38, though not until 1985 was the dual carriageway completed through to the Cornwall county boundary

³By 1859, the railway also extended across the River Tamar (Reader's Digest 130).

(Devon 31, 164; Hawkins 55-56). Road systems within the South West itself, have also been improved, creating greater accessibility. The North Devon Link, built in the late 1980s, is one such example (Devon 141, 164).

The economic importance of traditional occupations, such as domestic service⁴, tin mining and quarrying, deep-sea fishing, and farming has declined throughout the twentieth century, each employing a much smaller proportion of the population (Hoskins 159; Central, English 18-21; Sayers; Reader's Digest 130; Payton 127; Devon 127, 130). Meanwhile, tourism, which began in the late nineteenth century, has accelerated as a major growth industry (Devon 48, 53, 139; Payton 125-27). The Central Office of Information were referring to the more widely defined South West area, as "Britain's leading region for tourism" by 1978, Devon and Cornwall being exceptionally popular (Central, English 11). Devon, said to be "the most popular destination in this country for British tourists" in 1989, was alone estimated to have "over three million visitors stay[ing] in the county each year" (Devon 85). Hence, in spite of being subject to seasonal fluctuations, as "a multi-million-pound industry", tourism had become "a most important contributor to Devon's economy" (Devon 85). As with both Somerset and Cornwall, the associated redistribution of wealth has had direct repercussions in terms of local services, such as shops and recreational facilities, and employment, generating work particularly in the "ancillary manufacturing and service industries" (Devon 85). Tourism has now become a permanent feature of life on Dartmoor, one estimate in 1987 suggesting that there were up to eight million visitors each year, concentrated in a small number of places ("Dartmoor" (TV)).

Early Collectors of Folk Narrative and Song in the South West Region

The history of folklore collecting in the South West region stretches back at least as far as the early nineteenth century. As Gillian Bennett rightly observes:

The early folklorists were all *insiders* - clergymen, men of letters, publishers, journalists, gentlefolk - middle-class Victorians with time and/or money to devote to their hobby: frankly "bourgeois". Necessarily, they looked at the rural life and country customs they studied with the preconceptions of their time and class. (Traditions 191)

This upper class bent amongst the early folklorists took its toll upon the material they gathered. In relation to their encounters with folksong texts, for example, the collectors found that

⁴ In Devon, this was the largest single occupation prior to the First World War (Hoskins 159).

as *gentlemen* they could not approve the *words*. These were "corrupt" as prudish Victorians saw it, neither "wholesome" nor a "refining influence". They were, in fact, often lewd, crude and rude, full of dialect words, "incorrect" grammar, lines that would neither scan nor rhyme, and - worse still!- shockingly frank about sex. (Bennett, Traditions 192)

The tension created by the opposing values of collector and informant could only be assuaged by the collector sacrificing the words of the songs, which were censored, altered and rewritten. Bennett emphasises that the practice of censorship was applied on a wider scale as "almost identical attitudes and processes are observable in the collections of regional folklore and legends" in which collectors were also unscrupulous about their "improvement" of living traditions (192).

One of the first publications with a major focus on folk narrative from the South West region was produced by **Anna Eliza Bray (1790 -1883)**, who collected information about the area surrounding her home in Tavistock, on the western edge of Dartmoor, with her husband (Dorson 95). The writer Robert Southey (1774-1843), influenced Anna Bray to include aspects of folklore such as traditions, manners, nursery songs, for their added interest, in her three volume work published in 1836. This "did not so much initiate a new kind of domestic history as divert into a new channel literary treatments of [the] legendry" (Dorson 97). Interestingly, Bray's fieldwork suggests that local narratives were undergoing a rapid change in popularity and that certain beliefs and tales had lost their currency by the time she was collecting (Hunt, footnote Popular Romances 21).

An important collection of Cornish folk narratives was later accumulated by **William Bottrell (1816-1881)**. He is praised by **Robert Hunt (1807-1887)**, a fellow collector and colleague, as "a native of St Leven, who possesses a greater knowledge of the household stories of the Land's End district than any man living" (Hunt, Popular Romances 31). Bottrell, like Hunt, was painfully aware that they were collecting in fluid social environments where certain types of traditional narrative struggled to survive. The stories perpetuated by semi-professional droll tellers, for example, were seen to be fast becoming redundant.⁵ Hunt claimed there were just two such droll tellers left in 1829 and that he recorded only a few of their tales.⁶ Having gathered sufficient material,

⁵ Dorson defines the droll teller as "an itinerant minstrel specializing in long, rambling, episodic narratives interspersed with song, which he often adapted to local situations" (323).

⁶In his writing, Bottrell tries to mimic "the rambling narrative-style of old droll-tellers", attempting to translate some of the stylistic qualities of oral speech into a written form (Bottrell, Introduction, i)