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From the Department of English, Faculty of Humanities,
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# THE ENGLISH OCCUPATIONAL SONG

AN ACADEMIC DISSERTATION
which will, on the proper authority of the Chancellor's Office of Umeå University for passing the doctoral examination, be publicly defended in Hörsal E, Humanisthuset, on Saturday, May 23, at 10 a.m.

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University of Umeå
Umeå 1992

## ABSTRACT

## THE ENGLISH OCCUPATIONAL SONG.

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This is the first full-length study in English of occupational songs. They occupy the space between rhythmic work songs and labour songs in that the occupation *signifies*. Occupation is a key territorial site. If the *métier* of the protagonist is mentioned in a ballad, it cannot be regarded as merely a piece of illustrative detail. On the contrary, it initiates a powerful series of connotations that control the narrative, while the song's specific features are drawn directly from the milieu of the performer. At the same time, occupational songs have to exist in a dialectical relationship with their milieu. On the one hand, they aspire to express the developing concerns of working people in a way that is simultaneously representational and metaphoric, and in this respect they display relative autonomy. On the other, they are subject to the mediation of the dominant or hegemonic culture for their dissemination.

The discussion is song-based, concentrating on the occupation group rather than, as in several studies of recent years, the repertoire of a singer or the dynamics of a particular performance. It is broadly based, including songs from over a hundred occupations. Despite widely disparate conditions of society and performance, the representation of work in vernacular song operates not in a naturalistic but a performative way, in the sense that the work process is transformed into a carrier of social and psychological meaning. Occupational songs clearly come into the category of "music of necessity" made to fulfil some specific social function which is achieved in the act of making. In representing work, they tend towards four positions, the figurative, the rebellious, the parodic and the reductive. Popular culture, in the sense of a vernacular form to which no single individual can lay claim, is subordinated to "high" and mass culture, and therefore in many cases these positions are attempts to take advantage of the oral mode to transgress stereotypes set up by both of these dominant discourses. In the case of songs performed by insiders, the representation may appear as metaphor and parody, subverting received ideas, while those by outsiders, for example in the music hall and on many of the broadsides, tend to reduce particular occupations to a number of simple significations.

Keywords: work; metaphor; occupational song; industrial song; women's songs; weaving; mining; the miller; railways

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# THE ENGLISH OCCUPATIONAL SONG

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For we are to bethink us that the Epic verily is not *Arms and the Man,* but *Tools and the Man* – an infinitely wider kind of Epic.

Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* 4. 1 (1843)

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong,
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deck-hand singing on the steamboat deck,
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as he stands,
The wood-cutter's song, the ploughboy's on his way in the morning, or at noon intermission or at sundown,
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of the girl sewing or washing.

Walt Whitman, "I hear America singing" 1-8.

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Keywords: work; metaphor; occupational song; industrial song; women's songs; weaving; mining; the miller; railways

Dust Jacket Illustration: Edgar Degas, Two Women Ironing (*Les Repasseuses*) (Musée d'Orsay, Paris. © Photo R.M.N.)

to my mother

*Contents*

Figures in the Text

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Like the songs which form its subject, the writing of this thesis has been a collaborative enterprise. Professor Christer Laurèn, of the University of Vasa, gave me the impetus to start my work, and provided the framework for its first tentative expression. In performances with Dr John Skinner of the University of Turku, Finland, I first gained an inward understanding of several of the songs that form the basis of my case.

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The Musée d'Orsay, Paris, kindly gave me permission to reproduce Edgar Dégas' "Les Repasseuses," which appears on the cover. They are not, of course, responsible for the implication that the woman on the left is singing rather than yawning. That ambiguity remains within the painting's unresolved play of difference.

Finally, my partner and best critic, Sirkku Aaltonen, has endured my prolonged absences, and absences of mind, during the writing of this thesis with unfailing good humour.

# INTRODUCTION

## I

England, in common with the neighbouring cultures of Scotland, Wales and Ireland, has many thousands of songs that might be called "occupational." Like anything that lives, the term should not be rigidly defined, but the songs occupy the space between rhythmic work songs and labour songs. The sense adopted in this thesis is of *any* means of livelihood which signifies by contributing to the song's narrative or conceptual development. In Saussurean terms, it connotes as well as denotes. In most cases this signifying role operates through a metaphorical field fusing two areas of experience, one of them being work. This study adopts a wider definition than that commonly accepted in the United States, for example, where the term is largely limited to worksongs, which accompany work and mimic its rhythm, and labor songs, which accompany the struggle for human rights in the workplace.

Very few occupations are totally unrepresented in song. Since it is of the nature of traditional song to speak for those who have no voice in "official" cultural expression, some of the sources of livelihood would not find a place in a careers handbook or a trades union congress. Many songs concern prostitutes, smugglers and poachers, and these must be treated as "occupations" along with the rest. The size of this field of song is truly formidable. Of course, no numerical count of songs performed is possible, but judging from published collections, about half the traditional songs in English from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries at least mention the occupation of one of the protagonists.

The songs are not evenly distributed among all forms of work. Even allowing for the fact that fieldworkers have covered some trades such as mining and seafaring more extensively,[1] some types of occupation appear to have generated many more songs than others. The building industry, for example, is known only by a small, fierce group of strike ballads. In general, of course, the best represented are those with the liveliest singing traditions.

The first requirement seems to have been a cohesive and perceptive *audience*. In her empirical study *Performed Literature* (1982), Betsy Bowden has shown how the open-ended nature of oral poetry can lead to radically

[1] Most of these songs are scattered in general collections. The songs of very few occupations have been published separately. They include seafarers (for example, Stan Hugill, *Shanties of the Seven Seas* [Second ed. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984] and many others), soldiers (Roy Palmer, *The Rambling Soldier* [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977]), miners (A. L. Lloyd, *Come All Ye Bold Miners* [Second ed. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1978]) and farm labourers (Roy Palmer, *The Painful Plough* [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1972]). A few collections have been published on record, including the songs of canal navvies and boatmen (*The English Canals*, Broadside Records, Wolverhampton, BRO 118, 1976) and railway workers (*Steam Ballads*, Broadside Records, BRO 121, 1977).

different experiences in performance (55-72). Roland Barthes' comment that "a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination" (171) emphasises that the role of the reader, or in this case the audience, is not one of collaboration but of the actual *construction* of a coherent performance. To give only one example, surrounding cultural preferences are stronger than individual choice in determining which songs are sung, since the "audience" has a multiple relationship with the singer that exists before and after the performance. This operates as much on the individual as the group level. The presence of a policeman or the local vicar would have the same constraining effect in a pub or club today as that of a gamekeeper or recruiting sergeant at the time of the Napoleonic wars, or a gentleman collector in later years.[1]

At the same time, songs are not the expression of a fenced-off group living in stasis but of a participating milieu including both insiders and outsiders. This milieu might be pub or club, hostel or smithy and, as fieldwork has consistently shown, there is no significant difference between the number of songs collected in rural communities and those from conurbations.[2] In either context, there are some settings where each person's function is firmly understood and in place, and others where each worker might feel part of a subgroup in fractured, discontinuous contact with other workers in the same trade. Indeed, since navvies and migrant farm labourers had a rich songbag, a cohesive group of listeners seems to have been a more significant factor in songmaking than, for example, a fixed location or the degree of skill involved in the work itself. Before patterns of consumption overwhelmingly favoured the nuclear family there was a plurality of social formations largely grouped according to working milieu or sources of supply. Many of these, such as the bothies of North-east Scotland (agricultural workers) or the laceworkers' circles of Northamptonshire, became centres of songmaking.[3]

Another reason for the uneven spread of working songs is that some occupations seem to have offered especially favourable conditions for *songmakers*, either in the form of a network of sellers and producers which made it easy for songs to spread beyond the workplace, or a social setting for performing their work. As a result of these specific conditions, many of the makers of occupational songs are known by name, and clearly enjoyed great esteem. The jute millworker Mary Brooksbank, who died in 1978, Tommy Armstrong of

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[1] The practice of changing songs in performance in deference to, or fear of, "strangers" has been frequently noted. See, for example, Roy Palmer, *Everyman's Book of English Country Songs* [London: Dent, 1979] 95.

[2] Henry Burstow, for example, the singer with perhaps the largest known repertoire in England (420 songs) lived in Horsham, a sizable market town and railway junction (Roy Palmer, *Country Songs* 3-4.) See also R. Pedersen and F. G. Andersen, *The Concept of Tradition in Ballad Research* (Odense: Odense UP, 1985) 61.

[3] *The Bothy Ballads* (Tangent Records, London, TNGM 109, 1971); A. E. Baker, *Glossary of Northamptonshire Words and Phrases* (2 vols. London: John Russell Smith, 1854).

Tanfield, "the Pitman Poet" (1848-1920), and Howard Evans (1839-1915) of the farmworkers' union are well-known examples.[1]

A third factor in song production was the activity of the *broadside and popular presses.* When oral culture is being described, printed texts should be evaluated with great care at all periods, including the modern. As the word "outspoken" suggests, orality has a quality of directness and comprehensiveness in expressing ideas that run counter to the authoritative discourse. This directness is unlikely to transfer well to print. As the ballad sheets circulated largely among the skilled workers in the cities, especially London, the output of the presses gives a misleading impression of the singing tradition of certain groups, particularly in the earlier periods when broadside evidence predominates. Carpenters, for example, are often the protagonists of broadsides, but there is only one example from the oral tradition, "The House Carpenter," and there the occupation is purely incidental. Butchers are represented as sexual adventurers in the broadsheets, but apparently not by singers. By the nineteenth century, however, street ballads and popular song collections included many songs that clearly originated from within the occupation groups themselves.

## II

Occupations "signify" in the sense that a singer does not include them at random. They are embedded in a matrix of cultural associations which may be accepted or challenged. Occupational signifiers also, of course, represent the countless hierarchies and relationships inherent in society itself, and therefore form a dynamic, tension-filled element in any performance of a song. These signifiers are not peculiar to songs but are part of a continuum of social reference including proverbs, jokes, caricatures and written literature. They were not only set up on the various sites of *popular* culture. Workers who were self-employed and upwardly mobile, such as tailors and millers, also feature in literary and dramatic works, and there is a certain crossover of signifiers between the oral and written traditions, often through the agency of the broadside, which acted as an interface.

In many cases the signifiers are physical features associated with the trade, like the blacksmith's hammer or the fat miller's thumb of gold which protruded into the grain scoop and so gave short measure. The general currency of these signifiers is shown by a Pepys broadside, "The kind hearted Creature," where a baby's father is identified by collating the characteristics of thirty-four different trades. In such cases each trait is clearly not a feature of individual character but subsumes the features of the whole occupation group.

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[1] For Mary Brooksbank, see Ian Watson, *Song and Democratic Culture* (London: Croom Helm, 1974) 12; for Tommy Armstrong, see Ross Forbes, ed., *Polisses & Candymen* (Consett: Tommy Armstrong Memorial Trust, 1987); for Howard Evans, see Roy Palmer, *The Painful Plough* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1972) 45, 63.

The same is true of assumed moral attributes, ranging from the venal activities of the miller to the sexual abandon of the tinker.

The semiotics of an occupation is neither fixed nor universal. In particular, there is a distinction, albeit a shifting one, to be made between "insider" and "outsider" songs, represented here by a London street ballad of the mid-nineteenth century and a song from Somerset that was widely sung at the same time:

> For the plough boys they are merry lads
> To the fields they'll hast away,
> While the pretty maids are milking,
> Or making of sweet hay.
> "The Saucy Plough Boy" 5-8.

> My wife could set to net and spin and I the land could plough.
> But I find things very different now to ninety years ago.
> When a man have laboured all his life and done his country good,
> He's respected just as much when old as a donkey in a wood.
> "The Honest Ploughman" 21-24.

"The Saucy Plough Boy" is working entirely within the resources of an image of the rural labourer set up in the seventeenth century and earlier (e.g. Day 3. 171). It is the obverse of the persona of the babbling yokel set up in such narratives as the popular "Richard of Taunton Deane," but plays on the same simplified assumptions. The second, blunter and more dogged, is concerned with lived conditions, and above all a *changing* working context.

This thesis is above all concerned with the second type, with "insider" songs which reflect what Ian Watson calls "shared, class-internal experience" (193), rather than with "outsider" songs where the protagonists display simple character traits that are assumed to go with their calling. "Class-internal experience" is expressed in song through protagonists who are at ease with the processes and milieu of the particular trade and express its struggles and concerns. In most cases, of course, this is because the singer and audience are part of that same milieu. The structure of the working community, its general exclusion from high culture and the status accorded to the singer-composer combined to provide an ideal oral milieu in which the songs could express the identity and self-awareness of the group.

Groups which did not have the same cohesiveness, or a strong singing tradition, also became the subjects of songs, but were seen entirely from outside. They include, for example, almost all middle class occupations, in particular the parson and the lawyer. They include many songs featuring women at work, particularly milkmaids, shepherdesses, and the working woman most often portrayed in modern children's songs, the stripper (Opie, *Singing Game* 286). And finally, they include the large class of those per-

ceived as agents of the monied classes, such as bailiffs, gamekeepers, excisemen and recruiting sergeants.

The key distinction, therefore, between insider and outsider groups in this context is firstly, whether the groups performed songs about work, and above all songs specific to their occupation, and secondly whether the songs were made within the group, or by people whose relationship with it was largely one of equality. Joseph Mather of Sheffield and Ewan MacColl are two outstanding examples of the second group.[1] There is overwhelming evidence from all periods that people like to sing about their own way of life, including their means of livelihood. Indications to the contrary from individual repertoires (e.g. Russell 32) can be discounted in the face of the large numbers of occupation-specific songs that have been collected from sailors, weavers and others. The link between work and song repertoire is still a strong one today. Ginette Dunn's study of the songs of a small Suffolk village in the 1970s reveals a gamekeeper being taunted by a poaching song in the presence of many of his poaching adversaries, farm labourers singing "The Nutting Girl" and "The Old Farmer's Servant," and a shepherd singing about a faithful sheepdog (Dunn 58, 62, 77, 224). It seemed so natural to sing about one's livelihood that there are cases of critical and parodic songs being taken up with enthusiasm by their victims. Sabine Baring Gould listened incredulously to a Devon miller singing the satirical "Miller and his Three Sons" (note to *Songs of the West* 4).

The second condition, of inwardness and equality, is most frequently met in geographically concentrated, firmly intermeshed occupation groups like lacemakers and miners. The distinction was not, however, simply one between small/independent and large/organised. Many industries with a continuous singing tradition, such as weaving, had elements of both. Some huge, geographically concentrated industries such as the shipbuilding and engineering industries had few occupational songs (Raven 144). Furthermore, some groups with an otherwise strong singing tradition, such as the navvies who built the canals, have produced few songs specifically about their work.[2]

Like any dualism, the insider/outsider distinction cannot be regarded as a fixed order. It is meaningful within the context of a performance, or an occupation sited in time and space, but it readily deconstructs itself, particularly in cross-gender or cross-media situations. One of the most cohesive of all occupation groups, the pitmen of north-east England, were often the subjects of

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[1] There is as yet no full-length study of the work of Ewan MacColl. Watson devotes a chapter to his songs (179-203). For Joseph Mather, see Martha Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse* (London: Croom Helm, 1974) 22-23, and Jon Raven, *Victoria's Inferno* (Wolverhampton: Broadside, 1978) 153, 157 etc.

[2] Raven 27, Roy Palmer, *Strike the Bell* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP., 1978) 4. In other respects, the Irish labourers who came over in the nineteenth century to build the canal and railway networks were the source of a great infusion of traditional songs into English repertoires.

broadside caricatures written by local tradesmen (Colley 37-38). A Newcastle woman turned the inwardness of a description of the cobbler's working environment into the material for an abusive chant in "The Shoemakker" (*sic*):

> Shoe maker, leather strapper
> Three rows of rotten leather
> Balls of wax and Stinking watter
> Who would have a Shoemakker? (21-24)

Individual songs could change their status in time. They did not have to originate within the occupation group. Since orality never had a fixed membership, many occupations like that of the ploughboy quoted above are seen from both within and without. Thus the miller was represented in the Middle Ages as a grasping middleman who robbed the villagers of the fruits of their toil; later he became the bluff individualist, before finally, as his social status declined, becoming an extension of his own grinding stones in a notable series of erotic ballads. The broadside market was at all times skilled in constructing images of the rural proletariat for its customers, and unsurprisingly, many of these idyllic fabrications, such as "Jim the Carter Lad" and the countless incarnations of brisk young ploughboys, were captured and transformed.[1] In the dialectic between *for* and *by*, ideology maintains its momentum. Songs were adopted into the repertoires of those who were being represented, thereby becoming self-reflexive metafictions. Nevertheless, no matter how detailed the circumstances and mutual relationships, such songs were set up *for* them rather than *by* them.

## III

Most of the evidence of occupational songs before the nineteenth century comes from the popular presses, and our view of their development must be skewed by the special conditions of the printing trade. However, many traces still remain of the stratum of songs that predates the broadsides. Judging from surviving texts, the earliest occupational songs lend support to Emile Durkheim's view that the first cultural expression of the identity and solidarity of a calling was through ritual, giving a significance to work that reached beyond the physical task (20). "John Barleycorn" and "Long Lankin" both describe ritual sacrifices. "John Barleycorn" dramatises the harvesting of grain in terms of the sacrifice of the corn god:

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[1] See, for example, the case of "The Husbandman and the Servantman" (Michael Pickering, "The Past as a Source of Aspiration," *Everyday Culture*, ed. Michael Pickering and Tony Green [Milton Keynes: Open UP, 1987] 39-69).

They ploughed, they sowed, they harrowed him in,
Throwed clods upon his head,
And these three men made a solemn vow
John Barleycorn was dead. (5-8)

The earliest broadsides often feature protagonists who are from the skilled trades that made up the bulk of their readership: "The Rampant Taylor," "The Glory of the Gentle-Craft, Or, A brief account of the Valiant Shoomakers," and so on. The songs rarely show close familiarity with the language or conditions of working life, being content with stereotyped occupational roles. However, many of the songs show signs of having been in and out of the oral tradition, and many more must have had oral analogues. Gradually they came to be more *occupation-specific*, introducing some characteristic signifier such as the dusty conditions of the mill or the sailor's tarry trousers. Later protagonists were identified by the *physical features* of their work – the surroundings, tools of trade, and so on – and these were associated with song roles through the mode of metaphor. Often the signifier would draw on the jargon of the group, or else function as a sexual metaphor, in the form of the miller's grinding stones or the blacksmith's rising hammer. Perhaps because the survival of these songs in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries depended overwhelmingly on the broadside printers, politically radical songs from particular occupations are a rarity. In only a few cases (such as the women spinners) were even the early songs perceived as speaking for the interests of the whole group.[1]

New production relations demanded new relations of *all* kinds. The rise of the industrial song in the late eighteenth century introduced urban themes, and the earlier grievances became focused for the first time in terms of trade union and political struggle. During the nineteenth century, and earlier in some industries like weaving, the sense of group identity became apparent, expressed in song by a growing awareness of the strength that lies in unity. The earliest surviving strike ballads appear at this time, in support of the seamen in 1815 and the Tyneside keelmen in 1822 (Harker, *Songs* 6-10; Palmer, *Sound* 108). At the same time, individual songmakers were beginning to come to prominence. They did not conform in any respect to the romantic image of the unlettered folksinger living in an uncontaminated environment. Joseph Mather of Sheffield and Howard Evans of the National Agricultural Labourers' Union were, like their modern counterparts John Pandrich of Newcastle and Ewan MacColl, articulate, mobile and tireless disseminators of their work.[2] In

[1] See, for example, the early seventeenth century broadside "Whipping Cheare." Later spinners' songs from both the linen and woollen industries, such as the widely-collected "Doffing Mistress," often express resistance to the received view of female workers being more tractable than men.

[2] For Mather, Evans and MacColl, see above. For John Pandrich, see A.L. Lloyd, *Folk Song in England* (London: Granada, 1975) 374.

this century the decline of traditional industries like mining and agriculture has led to a similar loss of songmaking, but the earlier songs have remained in circulation through the efforts of supporters of the Folk Revival of the 1950s and 1960s. Meanwhile, men on oil rigs, women bus drivers, chemical workers and truckies have come to be represented for the first time.[1]

Of course, the development was not as smooth and unproblematic as this account suggests. One example is the weaving industry. "The Joley Weavers" (c.1719), written in a period of prosperity, celebrates the higher standing of the independent textile workers:

> When thai ar at thair laber,
> thai in their homes do sing,
> So merey and so plesant
> as burdes do in the spring. (53-56)

However, an earlier broadside, "The Clothiers Delight," which can be dated to the 1670s, shows a clear sense of a group identity developing as a result of the actions of the wealthy clothmasters, with their unjust truck system. Using a skilful ironic mode, the song features a clothier describing the various ways of cheating his employees:

> When we go to market our workmen are glad;
> But when we come home [i.e. to the workshop], then we do look sad:
> We sit in the corner as if our hearts did ake;
> We tell them 'tis not a penny we can take.
> We plead poverty before we have need;
> And thus we do coax them most bravely indeed.
> And this is a way for to fill up our purse
> Although we do get it with many a curse. (49-56)

The song shows familiarity with the different parts of the weaving process, dealing in turn with the "tuckers" (fullers) and "sheremen" (croppers of the cloth). It also gives an accurate description of current malpractice. Like other contemporary examples on the theme of "All Things Be Dear But Poor Mens Labour," it gives a real sense of shared experience. One reason for the vanguard role of weavers in occupational song was their strong singing tradition which gave rise to songs from *within* the occupation, "insider" songs.

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[1] For example, "The Men o' the North" (*New City Songster* 10 [Beckenham: N. C. S., n.d.] 11); "Lady Bus Driver" (K. Henderson ed., *My Song is My Own* [London: Pluto Press, 1979] 132-133); "The Clayton Analine Song" (S. Richards and T. Stubbs, eds., *The English Folksinger* [London: Collins, 1979] 30); "I'm Champion at Keeping 'em Rolling" (E. MacColl ed., *The Shuttle and the Cage* [London: Workers Music Association, 1954] 7).

Judging from published sources, the corpus of weaving songs is one of the most extensive of all. Most occupations have not been so thoroughly documented, but their development seems to follow a similar pattern. This is not, however, the "natural" progression from kinesis to struggle,

worksongs ——> occupational songs ——> labour songs.
*[rhythm]* *[milieu]* *[solidarity]*

As we have seen, the very earliest occupation songs seem to have been connected with social ritual, and their development is certainly linked with a growing sense of group identity. Their diachronic extension can be illustrated in the development of the songs of a single trade, that of the mason and bricklayer.[1] It is not especially rich in songs, but it has the important characteristics of the genre, a tradition of songmaking, an identifiable audience and representation in the popular press. It also has elements of both insider and outsider status.

Early evidence of a singing tradition is as elusive as any orature that relies for its documentation on printed evidence. Shakespeare refers to bees as "the singing masons building roofs of gold" (*Henry V* 1. 2. 198), and the participation of masons in the oral tradition is strongly suggested by variants in certain broadsides which appear to come from differences in performance.[2] In more recent years there are many references to their activity. Walt Whitman describes them as singing as they prepared for work ("I Hear America Singing" 4), and I have myself recorded the singing of bricklayers and wall-making gangs in settings as far apart as Ireland's Aran Islands and the Troodos mountains in Cyprus.

In line with Durkheim's hypothesis, the earliest known mason's song in England is a ritualistic one. "Long Lankin" (Child 93) describes a sacrificial murder committed in the course of building a castle. It is the most widely-diffused occupational song in Europe, where the structure concerned is more often a bridge. Unlike Greek, Hungarian and Scottish analogues, however, English sets omit both the traditional motif of the walling up of a woman in the foundations (Aarne Thompson Type S261) and the element of revenge for not

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[1] Since masons work with stone, they are technically distinct trades, but their singing traditions are mingled. "The Stone Cutter's Boy," for example, also appears as "The Bricklaying Boy" (Roy Palmer, *Everyman's Book of British Ballads,* London: Dent, 1980, 234).

[2] This is apparent, for example, from trivial differences in the two broadsides "How Mault doth deale" and "How Mault deals." Compare for example, line 119 in each version:

[Malt] cast him into the mortar heape.
[Malt] made him into the morter to leape.

At least one of the broadside texts appears to be the result of transcribing an oral performance.

being paid. In some cases even the key detail of the protagonist's calling is not mentioned.[1]

The growth of ritual contributed to an evolving sense of group integrity. In particular, the mason was distinguished from the labourer at an early period in terms of social status, organisation and pay. This is an important factor in evolving a distinctive "oral identity." By the seventeenth century the mason had become a regular protagonist of broadsides, as a drinker and sexual adventurer. In "How Mault deals with every man," the distinction between mason and bricklayer was maintained: together they attempted to build an oven but, fuddled with drink, "left brick axe and trowell behind" (111). The early broadsides portrayed the bricklayer as seen by outsiders, as a tradesman who could not be trusted but was himself too trusting and therefore easily duped.[2] There is an increasing emphasis on the tools of his trade. The bricklayer became one of the protagonists of the many songs based on the erotic possibilities inherent in implements and raw materials. There was, for example, an obvious wordplay in "stones." "The Frolicksome Bricklayer" is robbed in London by two prostitutes:

> They made him pay dear for his stones being laid.
> The Jocular Jilts with their Cully made sport,
> And told him his Trowell was inches too short. (8-10)

The status of the bricklayers continued to rise through the eighteenth century, and by the beginning of the nineteenth century they were among the best-paid skilled workers, often employing mates (Thompson 264-266). The boom in housebuilding and bridge and viaduct construction in Victorian times should have led to a further rise in their living standards. However, the de-skilling of their trade and the importing of cheap labour led to a rapid decline that is represented variously in song. Since oral culture does not merely reflect changing conditions but also mediates them, reactions varied from resignation to a new militancy. In "Mr Macadam and Co," the protagonist is one of the "new brickies," an Irish hodman working in England. The values expressed are those of an unproblematic support and esteem for his fellow-workers. From the 1860s however, with the increasing power and prestige of the Operative Bricklayers' Union, the songs took up the theme of struggle as the members identified increasingly with construction workers as a whole. "The Bold Construction Men," written by John Faulkner after the 1972 building strike, inscribed the new militancy on a traditional format:

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[1] For example, Ralph Vaughan Williams and A. L. Lloyd, *Penguin Book of English Folk Songs* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959) 60-61. This is one of the reasons why other versions of occupational songs, particularly Scottish and Irish, are drawn on in the course of this thesis.

[2] For example, "[The] Damsel's Complaint for the Loss of her Maidenhead" (broadside c. 1690) and "The Frolicksome Bricklayer" (1693 broadside).

Now all you bold construction men, me song is nearly done;
You chippies and sparks and brickies and spreads, fight on until you've won.
[*carpenters electricians bricklayers labourers*]
Get organised on every side and show them all the way,
If we just stick together, then brave lads we'll win the day. (33-36)

Many of the features of the traditional occupational song still appear here, the "Come-all-ye" format, the internal rhymes, and the informal job-titles. However, in the process of creating an industry-wide anthem, some of the inwardness of the single-occupation song has been lost, and this is characteristic of labour songs as a whole.

Within this development of the songs of the building trade, it will be seen that there are no songs specifically to *accompany* work. Yet the idea that rhythmic worksongs lie behind the occupational song dies hard, and will be considered next.

## IV

This account of the evolution of occupational songs has not included a specific discussion of the rhythmic songs that accompanied work. This is not only because, unlike occupational songs as a whole, they have been quite widely discussed. I believe that they form a distinct genre of their own, and that exaggerated attention to such songs, combined with a preoccupation with origins, has led to a misreading of the nature of occupational songs. Discussion of the question of the representation of work in song has been dominated by critics and fieldworkers who have maintained that what the songs present is the very act of working itself, not merely the representation of it. In an analysis which owes much to Marx's provisional description of culture and ideology as reflexes in the brain of real life-processes, George Thomson showed how work contributed to the rise of poetry, since "human rhythm originated from the use of tools" (15). He summarised his case thus: "The three arts of dancing, music and poetry began as one. Their source was the rhythmical movement of human bodies engaged in collective labour. This movement had two components, corporal and oral" (19). Thomson's approach is a purely functional one, in which worksongs are regarded as "primary" (and by implication, superior) and all other occupational songs as in some ways secondary. This view has been very influential. In her study of oral African poetry, Ruth Finnegan considers that only songs that can be shown to have actually accompanied work are true occupational songs (*Oral Literature* 230), a definition accepted as late as 1977 in Blom's study of Norwegian working

songs. The privileging of worksongs has been further sustained by seeing in them the origins of folk song.[1]

Studies of English traditional song have not generally adopted the strictly functional approach favoured by Thomson and Finnegan. They hardly could, since England is not rich in songs that are known to have actually accompanied work, perhaps as a result of its climate and the fact that industrialisation came early. It is evident that worksongs of the kind Thomson describes are usually sung out of doors. Factory noise, dust, and supervision by employers and their agents, are not congenial to singing. In Thomson's strict sense of songs which provide working rhythm, there is no equivalent to the American prison farm tradition of the southern states. Indeed, only one contextual account of singing activity corresponding to Thomson's description has been preserved in England. Lacemakers in Northamptonshire in the nineteenth century had a repertoire of short catchy rhymes known as "tells" which helped concentration and stopped them from going to sleep during the long night shifts: "the movement of the bobbins is timed by the modulation of the tune, which excites them to regularity and cheerfulness" (Baker I. 378).

Inevitably, efforts have been made to supply the deficiency in documentation with lyrical descriptions of the few scenes where such songs are known to have been sung:

> We once had a wealth of work songs accompanying the sweep of sickles in wheat, the lifting of heavy stones in the quarry, the communal steeping of woollen cloth to shrink it and to fix its dye; rough songs with ramshackle words and recurring refrains, sometimes punctuated with cries. (Lloyd, *Folk Song* 27)

Although early examples are lacking, there is independent confirmation of Lloyd's account from studies of recent years. For some singers, the working milieu was an essential condition for performance:

> Just as I'm setting here I couldn't think of a song, but [if] you walked out of that door and I got a screwdriver in me hand, then I'd start.
>
> Reg Jay, Blaxhall, Suffolk, 1975.[2]

In East Anglia, farmworkers sang as they scythed and ploughed at least until the 1950s (Blythe 23, 43). Separate field studies conducted in recent years in Devon and Dorset have shown that quarry workers draw on a wide variety of chants to synchronise the blows of their mallets (Palmer, *Sound* 85; Richards

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[1] See, for example, Roy Palmer, *Everyman's Book of British Ballads* (London: Dent, 1980) 10.

[2] Quoted in Ginette Dunn, *The Fellowship of Song* (London: Croom Helm, 1980) 147-148.

49). By far the largest group of surviving motion songs is that of sea shanties, which were sung to two quite separate rhythms, the hauling-in of the sails ("halyard shanties") or the heaving of the anchor ("capstan shanties").

However, very few motion songs have survived. Confining myself to purely functional songs of the kind Thomson describes would reduce the corpus of occupational songs, as the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* does, to sea shanties and lullabies (Sadie 6. 184-185). However, it is plain that occupational songs are not primarily sung *at work*, in Britain or perhaps anywhere: "rhythmic work by groups to the sound of work songs or percussive accompaniment is actually not widespread" (Nettl 165). Moreover, a purely functional worksong does not exist. Such an approach as Thomson's sees the songs as passively imitating mechanical features of working life rather than relating it to wider experience or setting up a challenge to those relations through distancing. In fact, even the simplest worksongs are avantgarde in that they dismantle barriers between art and a wider social and political life. The earliest, pre-industrial songs, of which very few survive, have links with ritual ceremonies. We have already encountered one example in "Long Lankin." This fragment of a metalbeating song heard by Charles Dickens in southern England in the early nineteenth century contains an invocation to the smiths' patron, Saint Clement:

> Hammer, boys round – Old Clem!
> With a thump and a sound – Old Clem!
> Beat it out, beat it out – Old Clem!
> With a clink for the stout – Old Clem!
> Blow the fire, blow the fire – Old Clem!
> Roaring dryer, soaring higher – Old Clem!
> *Great Expectations* 123-124.

As Thomson himself shows, such songs have from the earliest times acted as mouthpieces for social criticism. It is known that corn-grinding songs were being adapted for political purposes as early as in classical Athens, where a song survives about the Tyrant Pittakos "grinding" the people (G. Thomson 17). Like many motion songs, the English sawyers' cry "see saw" has made the transition to a cradle rocking song. It is not, however, a bland lullaby but in effect describes redundancy and a wage cut following a time-and-motion study:

> See-saw Margery Daw,
> Jacky shall have a new master;
> Jacky must have but a penny a day
> Because he can't work any faster. (Opie, *Oxford* 297)

The tendency of worksongs to take sides, to interpret as well as describe, puts them inside the tradition of the occupational song, but not end-to-end in the sense that they represent an earlier stage that was superseded. They seem to spring into being when called for, often drawing on existing songs, and lead a much more ephemeral existence than, for example, ballads. They represent a specialisation of the song for functional purposes, and as such show precisely the same tendencies to metaphorical extensions of the work process.

As the bricklayers' songs indicated, the development of occupational songs cannot be assumed to follow the "natural" progression from worksong to figurative occupational songs to labour song. There is instead a less schematic change from a standpoint which has its roots in a holistic view of work as social ritual to a reification of the work process in terms of its tools and routines, with a concurrent growth of group and class identity.

## V

Because of the highly-mediated nature of surviving records of occupational songs, and the evanescent nature of oral performance, a statistical or quantitative approach to occupational song would be inappropriate. Since the field is so large, the thesis makes a selection, both synchronic and diachronic, that corresponds to meaningful contours in the material: the songs of a particular occupation, the growth of a particular song over several centuries, or the songs made in response to a crisis such as the introduction of the factory system. No selection can be innocent. In presenting this thesis, I have made a conscious act of decentring in studying not only the familiar songs of long-established trades like the weavers and ploughboys, but also the newer industries and, in particular, the songs of women at work.

The songs discussed here are based on between four and five thousand recordings and printed texts, from the seventeenth century to the present, where the protagonist's work is specified.[1] Together, they make up the "Primary Sources" listed at the end of the thesis. Because orality is a continuum, a stream rather than a pond, they include music hall and "composed" songs, but they can all be termed traditional in the sense that they have been repeatedly performed to the point where they display variation. The sources include many industrial songs and printed sheets, collections devoted to a single occupation or occupation group such as mining, farm labour and the railways, and a large collection of early broadsides, whose ambivalent relationship with the oral tradition has been clarified in recent years.[2] Where

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[1] These limits should not be rigid ones. Many of the songs from this period, such as "Long Lankin" and "John Barleycorn," clearly derive from an earlier stratum of songmaking.

[2] These include Kathy Henderson, Frankie Armstrong and Sandra Kerr, eds., *My Song is My Own. 100 Women's Songs* (London: Pluto Press, 1982); Jon Raven, ed., *Urban and I ndustrial Songs of the Black Country and Birmingham* (Wolverhampton: Broadside Press, 1977); Martha Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse* (London: Croom Helm, 1974); Roy Palmer, ed., *The Painful Plough* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1972); Roy Palmer, ed., *Poverty*

specific songs are cited, versions with full performance detail are used where possible, so as to minimise dependence on composite and doctored texts. To emphasise their primarily oral nature, all songs referred to are identified in the text only by title, but at least one example of their corporal existence in print or recordings is given at the end in "Songs Cited." Four songs, "The Weaver and the Factory Maid," "Johnny Seddon," "The Poor Cotton Weaver" and "The Lofthouse Colliery Disaster" are printed in appendices.

Very few books have been specifically devoted to occupational songs. There are no musico-sociological studies of England comparable to Hugh Shields' study of North Derry (1981), or repertoire-based structural analyses like those by David Buchan (1972) in the area of the bothy ballads, north-east Scotland. The most extensive and principled work in the field has been done in Africa or on the European mainland.[1]

The record of the songs themselves is also uneven. Some early collectors, particularly in Scotland and the north of England, included occupational songs in their publications.[2] As a result, there is a considerable recorded body of songs by, for example, agricultural workers in the south of England, miners in the Newcastle area and weavers on either side of the Pennines. These three occupations still dominate the field numerically. Other regions and trades are more patchily represented. I have not considered sea shanties or soldiers' songs in any detail. They form perhaps the largest collection of all, albeit in a severely bowdlerised form, but they have been systematically studied by many writers, including Roy Palmer and Stan Hugill.[3] Throughout, reference to Irish, Scottish and North American analogues has been inevitable, because their singing tradition is more pervasive and has been better documented region by region.

The thesis aims to take advantage of the large number of popular songs which have been collected and published, but little discussed. Early collectors

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*Knock* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1974); W. G. Day, ed., *The Pepys Ballads* (5 vols. Cambridge: Derek Brewer, 1987). For the relationship between the broadside and oral traditions, see R. S. Thompson, "The Development of the Broadside Ballad Trade and its Influence upon the Transmission of English Folksongs" (unpublished Ph. D. thesis, Cambridge University Library, 1974).

[1] For example Å. G. Blom, *Folkeviser i arbeidslivet* (Oslo: Oslo UP, 1977) and L. Marty, *Chanter pour Survivre* (n.p.: Fédération Léo Lagrange, 1982); I. Hagher, "Performance in Tiv Oral Poetry," *Oral Poetry in Nigeria*, eds. U. N. Abalogu, G. Ashiwaju and R. Amadi-Tshiwala (Lagos: Nigeria Magazine, 1981) 37-56; Luisa del Giudice, "Erotic Metaphor in the Nigra Ballads," *Scandinavian Yearbook of Folklore 1989* (Uppsala; Almqvist and Wiksell, 1990) 17-41.

[2] These include John Bell, *Rhymes of Northern Bards* (Newcastle, 1812), William Motherwell, *Minstrelsy: Ancient and Modern* (Glasgow, 1827), and Frank Kidson ed., *Traditional Tunes* (Oxford: Taphouse, 1891).

[3] Roy Palmer, *The Rambling Soldier* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), *What a Lovely War* (London: Michael Joseph, 1990); Stan Hugill, *Shanties from the Seven Seas* (Second edition. London: Routledge, 1984). Twenty-nine collections and studies of sea shanties alone are listed by Peter Kennedy in Maud Karpeles, *An Introduction to English Folk Song* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987) 123-124.

were concerned simply with amassing texts. The next stage, associated with Cecil Sharp and Ralph Vaughan Williams, was to disseminate them in versions suitable for the school and the drawing room. Today, the emphasis is quite different. David Buchan has written that "the concern with wedding the textual and the contextual is the major one of the most recent anglophone ballad and song scholarship."[1] In practice, recent scholars have concentrated more on context than text, either on individual singers and their repertoires,[2] or on "singing communities" and the conditions of performance.[3] However, centring of this kind implies a corresponding marginalisation. The foregrounding of the individual singer, or the singer's milieu, leaves other matters aside, so here I wish to examine the relations between the songs themselves. Their wide dissemination both synchronically and diachronically reveals significant configurations of expression and patterns of resistance in songs from widely-differing milieux.

As we have seen, occupational songs were largely ignored by early writers on orality and, despite their great abundance, are often given scant attention even today. This is not for any lack of material. Early broadsides, the single most important source of our knowledge of traditional songs until the nineteenth century, are full of examples. The first collectors, too, were often active in areas where a single occupation dominated and had its own songmaking tradition. For example, the earliest extensive corpus from local oral tradition was collected by William Motherwell from the industrialised weaving village of Kilbarchan, near Glasgow, in 1825-6. For the nineteenth century, important work has been done in socio-cultural studies of recent years like those of E. P. Thompson (1963) and L. Marty (1982).

The publication of collections of occupational songs[4] that gradually began with mining and seafaring led to a gradual recognition of their importance. They were first discussed as a genre in David Craig's *The Real Foundations* (1962) and A. L. Lloyd's *Folk Song in England* (1967), while Ian Watson's *Song and Democratic Culture in England* (1983) gave an important account of industrial song. However, no full-length study of the occupational song as a whole has yet appeared in English. To use a farming metaphor popular with songmakers, I feel that the corn has been gathered in (and often adulterated), a great deal of threshing and winnowing has been done, and the fields have been elaborately surveyed, but very little bread has been produced. This thesis aims to offer at least a few thick slices.

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1 Personal communication, 21 July, 1989.

2 See Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger, *Till Doomsday in the Afternoon: the folklore of a family of Scots Travellers, the Stewarts of Blairgowrie* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1986).

3 See, for example, Michael Pickering, *Village Song and Culture* (London: Croom Helm, 1982) and Ian Russell ed., *Singer, Song and Scholar* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1986).

4 Among the first were George Korson's collections of American mining songs, beginning with *Minstrels of the Mine Patch* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1938).

## VII

The purpose of this thesis is to expose the central role of occupation, in its inclusive sense of the means of livelihood, as a signifier in traditional song. My aim, however, is not to argue, with David Craig and A. L. Lloyd, for the existence of yet another univocal, discrete genre, "occupational song." Songs have no "centre." On the contrary, they are part of a continuum, in time and space, with other social and cultural phenomena, and therefore offer many contradictory positions.

My discussion is song-based, concentrating on the occupation group rather than, as in several studies of recent years, the repertoire of a singer or the dynamics of a particular performance.[1] I aim to show that, despite widely disparate conditions of society and performance, the representation of work in vernacular song operates not in a naturalistic but a performative way, in the sense that the work process is transformed into a carrier of social and psychological meaning. Occupational songs clearly come into Wilfred Mellers' category of "'music of necessity' made to fulfil some specific social, religious or magical function, which function is achieved in the act of making" (231). I will indicate how that function varies according to whether the occupation is seen from inside or outside. In the case of insiders, the representation of work tends towards metaphor and parody, subverting received positions, while songs sung by outsiders, for example in the music halls, tend to reduce particular occupations to a number of simple significations. I will show how occupational song tends towards four positions, the figurative, the rebellious, the parodic and the reductive. Popular culture, in the sense of a vernacular form to which no single individual can lay claim, is subordinated to "high" and mass culture, and therefore in many cases the first three of these positions are attempts to take advantage of the oral mode to transgress stereotypes set up by both these dominant discourses.

In studying change in the occupational song, I have adopted a holistic approach. The two types of variation which result from the internal and the external dynamic are inseparable. A song will acquire new occupational and cultural features as it moves into fresh environments, and these will be incorporated technically into the base structure. The variations are therefore both ephemeral and enduring. Those introduced at only a single performance must respect the internal dynamic of the songs, while those which bring about a permanent change, such as a transformation of roles, survive because they too can be assimilated into the narrative scheme.

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[1] Examples of these more traditional approaches are to be found in *Everyday Culture*, ed. Michael Pickering and Tony Green (Milton Keynes: Open UP 1987): for individual repertoire, Tony Green, "James Lyons: Singer and Story-Teller: His Repertory and Aesthetic," 105-24; for the dynamics of performance, John L. Smith, "The Ethnogenics of Music Performance: A Case Study of the Glebe Live Music Club," 150-172.

Since this study is, like all others, based on texts and recorded performances, it opens with an essential preliminary question, what is the role of the mediator? This applies no less to the modern video recording than to the early printed broadside. Mediation by the dominant culture may occur at the performing, collecting, editing or printing stage, and it may work indirectly, for example through the influence of drama or literary works. Whatever the mediation, it decisively transforms the ballad as sung. On the other hand, print cannot be regarded in simplistic terms. In particular, the broadside market played a vital role in ballad transmission and as part of the immediate struggle for workers' culture.

The second chapter is a study of ways of representing work in song, through performance contexts, hand movements, the use of technical vocabulary, and detail associated with the locality. The act of representation involves a contradiction, the need for a stable set of signifiers and a complementary need to describe new conditions. Because their view of work is holistic, the songs tended to subvert positions promoted by the ruling discourse, that *work* and *play* are discrete categories, for example, or that domestic activities are not "work."

The following chapter is concerned with work as metaphor. One result of the totalising view of work is a tendency for occupations to be seen figuratively as a metaphor for other life experience. This may be achieved through particularity, the accretion of signifiers to particular trades and the association of work effort with sexual activity.

In historical terms, occupational songs show a growing awareness of group cohesion, not in the name of some abstract "oral community" but to speak for a multiplicity of allegiances. In a dialectical relationship that characterises orature in general, the songs are also an impersonal vehicle for expressing personal aspirations and conflicts. In this framework, I will trace in Chapter 4 the development of the consciousness of "women's work." The growth of a new genre of ballads in response to increasingly grim pit accidents shows how even in the practical context of raising money for victims' families, the literal, instrumental truth of the song is overlaid by an expressive, figurative element. Both of these developments can be seen as attempts to set up alternative centres of consciousness which could replace, first orally and then through direct action, the unitary axis of authority.

I conclude with two particular responses to the new order inaugurated by the transformations of the Industrial Revolution. The first is an evolved symbolic scheme which seeks to take on board new economic and social concepts, and thereby control them. This is a process stretching from the ritual sacrifice of the corn god to Marx's theory of surplus value. The second is the representation of rituals of rebellion. By rituals I mean patterns of resistance that could not necessarily be realised in actuality but were "consciousness-raising." They include individual acts of protest or collective action.

Although Paul Zumthor has provisionally mapped out the ground, there is as yet no poetics of orality.[1] I have analysed my raw material in a way that respects the perceived development of the songs themselves. Since song variants are a good pointer to cultural change as well as an indicator of orality, the development of individual songs has been examined in terms of historical change. Diachronic studies expose the inevitability of ideology in interpreting dynamic change in a supposedly static "tradition."

Comparing variant versions of a ballad also identifies the interface of the cohesive structure and elements that may occur once only. Semiology points the contrast. As metaphors indicate, signs do not operate within a single system but many. An insider ballad has a different system of referents from an outsider one, but there is continual exchange between the two.

In discussing the assimilation of cultural material from both the oral culture and the milieu of the dominant ideology, I have used a model of cultural expression that ultimately goes back to two writers, Mikhail Bakhtin and Antonio Gramsci, who both worked in very difficult circumstances in the 1920s and 1930s, and only achieved full recognition later. It should be emphasised, however, that early models of hegemonic and repressed cultures, with a conspiratorial ruling class and a brutalised proletariat, do not account for the full complexity of oral culture. In particular, they neglect the enhanced role of women, whose collective experience is present in song where elsewhere it is marginalised and secondary.

My starting point is Gramsci's position in his *Prison Notebooks* that there is a polarisation between the cultural territories of the dominant and the dominated (57-59). These territories are often characterised in colloquial English as "us" and "them." Occupation is a key territorial site. If the *métier* of the protagonist is mentioned in a ballad, it cannot be regarded as merely a piece of illustrative detail. On the contrary, it initiates a powerful series of significations that control the narrative, while the song's specific features are drawn directly from the milieu of the performer. At the same time, occupational songs have to exist in a dialectical relationship with their milieu. On the one hand, they aspire to express the developing concerns of working people in a way that is simultaneously representational and metaphoric, and in this respect they display relative autonomy. On the other hand they are subject to the mediation of the "hegemonic," or leading, culture for their dissemination. Hegemony does not operate primarily through crude domination but through "direction." This is the way in which the State and everyday culture combine to fashion the beliefs by which we live: the idea that we are "free" when we sell our labour, for example, or that individuals can become happy and wealthy if they work hard enough. The dominated culture can never be free of these

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[1] Paul Zumthor, *Introduction à la poésie orale* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1983). Translated as *Oral Poetry* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).

value systems, although their power can be resisted by an alternative popular culture in which the status quo has little interest, such as traditional song.

Bakhtin, too, emphasised that there could be no unmediated relations, whether between a speaker and his or her language (the monologic utterance), or between cultural content and form (such as the printing of a street ballad). Instead, there is a tension-filled play of tendencies in the language (*heteroglossia*) which operates centrifugally, fracturing authoritative codes and producing new and equally temporary fusions ("From the prehistory of novelistic discourse" 144). This has important implications for the signifying role of occupations in song. Unlike Saussure, "the sign for Bakhtin was less a neutral element in a given structure than a focus of struggle and contradiction" (Eagleton, *Literary* 117). An occupation could be *simultaneously* a piece of social praxis, a metaphor, and a site for parody.

There has been wide recognition of the importance of E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) in documenting the existence of "movement culture," forms of expression common to certain groups at particular historic moments in their development. This, rather than the existence of virtuoso performers or indefatigable collectors, is why occupational songs seem to appear in clusters. Few studies of traditional song have taken advantage of recent writing by multi-media critics, who have raised questions of social and cultural reproduction which have only begun to be addressed.[1] Songs naturally participate in popular and mass culture as a whole. With occupational songs, this includes the ephemera of mass movements, visual representations such as banners and popular prints, and printed literature from petitions and stall ballads to novels. My analysis will attempt to show how all these tendencies are expressed orally. Since oral culture is multivocal in expression and pluralist in content, it cannot be situated unproblematically as non-commercial or anti-authoritarian. In occupational song, a figurative language evolves which draws on the authentic elements of a work process but which may still be used to reinforce patriarchal attitudes towards women, for example. Above all, the parodic treatment of a figure in authority will almost certainly be diluted through the constraints involved in disseminating the song in print. The first chapter considers the long reach of this type of mediation.

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[1] For example, Pickering and Green 1987; Dick Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light* (London: Routledge, 1988).

# 1. THE FAIRING HAND: MEDIATION OF THE OCCUPATIONAL SONG

All the songs that are discussed in this study are at several stages removed from the oral event, the performance. They have been diffused through recordings, printed collections or broadcasts. In the process, the performance has been subject to what John Pepper Clark has called the "fairing hands" of any number of fieldworkers, editors, printers and publishers (Clark xvi). Their role, which includes the construction of a canon of texts, is not neutral. In Mikhail Bakhtin's words, "The speech of another, once enclosed in a context, is – no matter how accurately transmitted – always subject to certain changes."[1] In particular, these changes involve altering the songs in the direction of certain well-understood norms:

> Sound-ideals and musical "taste" are in fact intimately connected with processes of social and cultural reproduction, and these processes . . . depend upon the unequal possession and distribution of "cultural capital." (Michael Pickering, "Recent Folk Music Scholarship" 46-47)

Michael Pickering's account here of the establishment of "sound-ideals" in orature is a reminder of the interventions that lie behind the apparently neutral activity of passing on songs. Any diachronic discussion of the nature of occupational songs must therefore begin by considering the nature of the surviving material, and specifically the charge that it has been subject to economic and cultural control. Dave Harker has succinctly expressed the workings of this kind of mediation:

> A more or less fully conscious ideology is imposed on to cultural activity, and, by systematic omission and selection, plus some judicious over-emphasis or under-emphasis, a wholly inaccurate "analysis" can be produced. (*One for the Money* 20)

In Bakhtinian terms this means that each song *text* is an inevitable field of conflict between the performer and the mediator. The performer, who was originally the controlling force, is not even present at the later "event," the publishing of the text. She or he has become the marginalised Other of the second, decisive encounter.

Occupational songs are vulnerable to the kind of mediation that asserts the values of the dominant discourse, since they correspond closely to Gramsci's formulation of the characteristic stance of traditional song:

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[1] Mikhail Bakhtin [V. N. Voloshinov], *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1986) 401.

> That which distinguishes folksong in the framework of a nation and its culture is neither the artistic fact nor the historic origin; it is a separate and distinct way of perceiving life and the world, as opposed to that of "official" society. (Gramsci 220)

Since traditional song often challenges established norms of gender and class behaviour in this way, its reproduction in a medium controlled by individuals acquiescing in those norms obviously led to a conflict of interest, and often to intervention in the text. In this chapter I shall examine the effect of mediation on occupational songs in two related fields, broadsides and song collecting, and consider how oral images of working have themselves modified, and been modified by, literary texts.

*The broadside trade*

This century has seen a growing debate on "the oral mind." In a study of non-literate peasants in the 1930s, A. R. Luria pointed to their construction and recognition of new conceptual relations not recognised by liberal humanism (Ong 50-56). His work, and that of Parry and Lord among singers in Montenegro, recognised a pluralistic, non-hegemonic way of thinking and expression that challenged the linear modes of print. Their model has not become critical orthodoxy. Jacques Derrida, for example, has rejected the privileging of speech over writing implied by the Western philosophical tradition (69-71). He has little need to worry. The printed word has for six centuries been an important means of passing on and preserving songs. In that time it has to a great extent decided which songs are to survive, and at the same time decisively influenced their range and spirit. Printbound thinking also lies like a Chinese wall across theoretical work on the oral tradition. One example has been models of song transmission. The increasing reliance of singers on printed texts has tended to weaken the tradition of oral recreation and replaced it with a performance technique relying largely on memorial reconstruction. Observing this, many writers on traditional song from Cecil Sharp to A. B. Friedman have proposed a "failing memory" theory of song transmission, which maintains that singers memorise texts or the performances of others. Variants arise as sections of the song, whether a word or a whole section, are forgotten. Since any diachronic study of occupational songs has to rely on printed materials, this section sets out to explore the impact of writing on orality, and to consider the mediation of texts as a consequence of the commercial and culturebound nature of printing.[1]

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[1] Very few songs are known to have evaded printing altogether for any length of time. Those that did, such as "The Brake of Briars," show quite a different, more inward, structural development (see Gerald Porter, "Singing the Changes. Variation in Four Traditional Ballads" [Umeå: University of Umeå, 1991] 2-3, 9-21).

The broadside market acted as both a powerful initiator of new songs and as the mediator of songs from the oral tradition. In both cases the single most important factor was that the song had to be a saleable commodity. In the eyes of the printer, it was bound in the first instance to a *reader* rather than to an audience. The relationship was one-to-one rather than communal. As a result, street ballads have often been considered as having an ambivalent relationship with the oral tradition. Martha Vicinus, for example, claims that industrial street ballads "were not part of a shared, communal art, as were the songs of an oral tradition" (21). To some extent this is true, particularly of the nineteenth century. Songs are continuous and totalising, while sheet ballads are fractured and discontinuous. However, the rapid decline of music-making, and singing in particular, as a universal skill has led writers like Vicinus to exaggerate the barrier between printed songs and their performance. Songs were certainly bought to be performed rather than read, and this applied to all classes. The use of elaborate woodcuts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries certainly suggests that broadsides did not have to be read to be appreciated. The sheets were not fetishised but used to destruction.[1] In the seventeenth century the sight-reading of music may indeed have been more widespread than literacy. Samuel Pepys, who collected nearly two thousand broadsides, was an active musician, and all Catherine Pepys' servants during the period covered by his Diary (1660-9) were able to sight-read.

Thus, although the broadside market was targeted at individual customers, the pattern of consumption was rather different. At all stages, a particular song sheet had an *audience* rather than a readership. It is known that the act of selling broadsides was itself partly an oral performance. From the professional songwriter, the text would be delivered to the press and disseminated through the chaunter, or ballad seller, to individual buyers. In Victorian London, the chaunters were often accompanied by fiddlers and "patterers," who cried up the songs (Quennell 143). They were invariably expected to sing samples of their wares. In rural Ireland as late as the 1950s, a transaction often depended on the seller being able to supply a tune, so that printed songs rapidly entered, or re-entered, the repertoire of singers (Russell 20-21).

Further evidence that this symbiotic relationship between print and orality was to the advantage of the oral tradition is the smallness of the readership. The known market for London broadsides in the seventeenth century was upwards of twenty thousand, according to Raymond Williams (*Long Revolution* 182). Moreover, many of these readers were drawn precisely from those groups that are known to have been active transmitters of occupational songs. Many broadside printers were established in London, and increasingly elsewhere, with the specific intention of serving the new readership among skilled

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[1] Over half of the Pepys ballads, numbering nearly two thousand in all, are unique sheets.

workers, a readership suggested by the occupations mentioned in the song titles: "The Collier Lad's Lament," "The Love-Sick Serving Man," "The London Prentice" and so on. Broadsides became "the dominant literary form current amongst working people, above all in the towns" in pre-industrial times (Harker, *One for the Money* 193). Through them, a particular song could be disseminated through an area, and a social spectrum, much wider than that covered by an individual performer.

This increased circulation, however, was achieved at a price. The most serious charges brought against the broadsides are their tendency to reflect the values of the dominant, written culture, and to alter texts drastically on commercial principles. The tendency of broadside texts to articulate Establishment values was overwhelming, and frequently enforced by law. Control was exercised quite specifically by a system of licensing ballads introduced at the height of the Reformation as a section of the Act for the Advancement of True Religion (1543), and strengthened by the founding of the Stationers Company in 1557. Between that time and the removal of the last restrictions in 1696, all printed ephemera had to be registered and approved:

> The official culture of England was, for over three hundred years, identified with a printed language which inevitably ignored specific distinctions of class, region and gender. It would be the wildest of McLuhanite fantasies to confuse medium and message and suggest that somehow print was intrinsically the property of a male ruling class, but it is a medium in which any differences relating to speech, be they of class, gender or region, do not register in the evident way they do when people talk. (MacCabe 39)

The differences referred to by Colin MacCabe are, of course, the fabric of oral variation, and occupational songs suffered like the rest from their suppression. It is an indication of the potential power of popular song to subvert the ruling ideology that a system of State censorship was set up in England barely fifty years after the introduction of printing. The effect of the licensing system was to erect a wall between the singers and the new reading public by restricting the range of ballads to those that supported the status quo. The broadside trade was never, of course, monolithic, or simply a mouthpiece for Establishment views, but the effect of the restrictions on the popular press was dramatic. Of the seventy surviving London broadsides on the Irish campaign of 1689-1692, all without exception are anti-Catholic and anti-Irish.

We can only infer the consequences of these restrictions on occupational ballads. This title from the Pepys collection indicates one effect of the licensing system: "The Conceited Bellman: or, the Sawcy Servant, Who for want of Sense and good Manners exposed some of his Masters in PRINT" (Original emphasis). Another was to foreground London and its trades at the expense of the rural or unskilled worker: "West-Country Tom Tormented, or, Vexed to

the Heart by the News-Mongers of the Town" and "Downright Dick of the West, or The Plow-man's Ramble to London To see my Lord-Mayor and the rest of the Vine Volk [*sic*] of the City, with what hapned while he there remained."

In the eighteenth century, ballad sheets were less restrained. They were still limited by the threat of libel action and, of course, commercial considerations, but the subject matter was now consumer-led. To at least some extent, the counterpoint of song discourse was now between singer and audience again. By the beginning of the Industrial Revolution skilled, and increasingly unskilled, workers were overwhelmingly literate, and broadsides increasingly came to represent their own aspirations. Moreover, the songs became more occupation-specific: since the subjects of the songs had themselves become part of the broadside "market," technical and social detail related to different trades had to be right or those concerned would refuse to buy the sheet (Watson 74).

The nineteenth century brought some changes in the nature of broadside publishing. Reformers went into the business to popularise their devotional teaching. A small number of publishers, notably Catnach and Such, managed to set up something approaching nationwide distribution for the first time. Neither of these trends represented a threat to the established social structure, but the central role of small presses in spreading the tenets of combination and the new trade unions is also reflected in published songs of the time, such as Luddite songs of 1812 like "The Cropper Lads," or the first strike songs that followed soon afterwards.[1]

As a result, the middle class started to fear the power of the popular press. The comment of the millhand Luke in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), is frequently echoed in the nineteenth century: "they're mostly lies, I think, what's printed in the books: them printed sheets are, anyhow, as the men cry i' the streets" (25). However, it expresses, transparently, the view of George Eliot herself rather than that of the ballad-buying public represented by Luke. Her novel reflects fears which had been growing since the Napoleonic wars. Reactions like these, combined with the increasing competition between publishers, led to a change by the middle of the century. Victor Neuberg writes, with these later London broadsides particularly in mind, that "class and economic antagonisms are indeed played down. . . . The tendency was to romanticise reality – to offer a kind of cultural jingoism" (137). In place of the group identity that was essential for the emergence of occupational songs as such, they promoted an individualism that served established

[1] See E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971) 611; Roy Palmer, *The Sound of History* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988) 108. Palmer's examples from the 1820s are not, however, the earliest known strike songs. The sailors' strike of 1815 gave rise to several broadsides in support (D. I. Harker, *Songs from the Manuscript Collection of John Bell* [Durham: Surtees Society, 1985] 6-10).

Victorian values by setting one worker against another rather than asserting shared concerns.

George Eliot's reference to street ballads and the chaunters who sold them is typical of the nineteenth-century consensus among the intelligentsia. The attitude was particularly strong among early ballad collectors and editors. In a well-known letter, Francis James Child characterised broadsides as a "veritable dunghill" (Beaton 151), although by making extensive use of them in his collection, he implicitly admitted their importance for a diachronic understanding of the oral tradition. Broadsides were attacked because they were unromantic, lower class, contemporary, and not idealistic. Folk poetry was expected to be the antithesis of this (Pinto 15).

The reality was, as we have seen, that broadsides were long an important part of the culture of those like the millhand Luke on the fringes of literacy, and as such, contained a vital and progressive element alongside the purely commercial one. Reference has already been made to the way some of the first strike songs were published on broadsides. The strongest claim for the street ballad has been made by A. L. Lloyd, who sees it as the third stage in a progression leading from popular epic and the traditional narrative ballad to the modern folk revival (*Folk Song* 128). He was one of the first to show the centrality of broadsides in the transmission of nineteenth-century industrial ballads. At the very least, therefore, the strong normative tendency of the broadsides was undermined by the vitality of this new material, particularly outside London.

Broadsides were not only a source of new songs. Their second major interventionist role in the oral tradition was in the alteration of already established songs. Printing as a business enterprise altered songs according to commercial principles, often fatally undermining the oral structure. One sign of remoteness from the conditions of performance was that the refrain was often rewritten as an extra verse, or omitted altogether (Friedman xxii). Drastic shortening took place when the change from folio to quarto format took place in the early nineteenth century. Thus the forty-four stanzas of "The Bloody Miller" (Laws P35) were cut to twelve or less, and "Wil the Merry Weaver" shed about ten stanzas before settling into its nineteenth-century format as "The Weaver and the Factory Maid" (Appendix I). However, here again, broadside editing was often less drastic than changes for other purposes, such as school use or for drawing room performances. Some occupational songs, for example, survive only as concert pieces, which were almost invariably cut by editors to six stanzas (Holloway and Black 2. 6).

There is some evidence that broadsides interfere with the oral process of encoding and re-creation by offering, at least temporarily, a fixed text. In this way they also substitute printbound changes, made for a ready sale, for the process of creative variation which is the defining characteristic of oral transmission. However, the evidence is not as clearcut as earlier critics of the

broadsides have assumed. It is usual to cite the case of one of the earliest songs to mention the protagonist's trade, "Robin Hood and the Tanner" (Child 126). It was collected by Cecil Sharp at the beginning of this century almost word for word the same as in a seventeenth century street ballad, but Henry Larcombe's set cannot be taken as conclusive evidence of the *permanent* fixing of a text. Since even memorial variation is known to be considerable over time, it is impossible to rule out other possible explanations, such as the existence of a later sheet based on the earlier broadside. Sharp himself admits the broadside was reprinted in book form (*English* 17). In a recent full-length study of a specialised form of occupational song, ballads relating to women masquerading as soldiers or sailors, it was found that broadsides do not survive in the oral tradition unless reprinted (Dugaw 86).

The charge of fixing song texts could be levelled with more justification at other media, in particular recordings. In the case of one of the great singing families of Scotland, the Stewarts of Blairgowrie, the price of being regarded by the mass entertainment industry as viable commodities has been high. It has killed the goose that laid the golden eggs:

> Between 1968 and 1972 we succeeded in recording again most of the stories, songs and ballads that we had first recorded [from the Stewarts] in 1960. A comparison of the two sets of recordings shows that, as far as the songs are concerned, scarcely any melodic changes have occurred and the few textual changes are limited to an occasional word. Further recordings made between 1972 and 1979 produced similar results. Furthermore, during the entire period of our recording programme, a stretch of nineteen years, scarcely any new items have been added to the family repertoire. (MacColl and Seeger, *Till Doomsday* ix)

Although the frequent reprinting of a single text in a cheap format may have a similar result, the lively broadside market operated quite differently. In fact, there is evidence from all periods that, because of their symbiotic relationship with singers, broadsides may also develop in ways similar to the oral tradition. "The Fair Maid of the West," a comic tale about a girl who wishes to recover her maidenhead, was a popular seventeenth century broadside. As is often the case with early broadsides, it is multivocal. The male protagonist appears in a variety of occupations from broadside to broadside, including a hatter, a haberdasher and a doctor. When the ballad entered the oral tradition (assuming that it does not predate the broadsides), the occupation settled into that of a soldier and acquired the usual set of occupational markers associated with the military life – a carefree attitude to danger and a callous attitude to the consequences of sexual relationships. Thereafter it developed like any other song. Mediation by print contributed to the development of such songs and actually *encouraged* the process of variation. Many of the published variants, for example, clearly

derive from being transcribed from the performances of different singers. They differ in almost every line, but only two changes, in the price of a hat and in the degree of sexual explicitness, are characteristic of printers' alterations. In other respects, the variants correspond to those arising in oral performance:

> Sweet Sir, said she, a Hat I'd have,
> And let it be as I shall crave,
> One that is rich, and light to wear,
> He then did fit her to a Hair.
> "The Crafty Lass of the West" 17-21.

> *Kind* Sir, said she, a hat I'd have,
> And *pray let me have what I* crave,
> One that is *fit* and light to wear,
> He *straight* did fit her to a hair.
> "The Fair Maid of the West" 17-21. Variants italicised.

In these second-generation broadsides, the rhyme words, narrative movement and protagonist's occupation are stable, while the title, number of stanzas, and closure are variable, as is usual in oral transmission. The case for this having become in every sense a traditional song is further strengthened by its continued vigorous survival as "The Widow of Westmorland's Daughter."

"The Fair Maid of the West" is representative of many occupational songs in the oral repertoire which appear to have *originated* as broadsides. Another extensive example is the group of over twenty songs deriving ultimately from Martin Parker's "Saylors for my Money" (Day 1. 420), with its semi-refrain, "Where the stormy winds do blow." If popular publishing has occasionally induced stagnation in song development by cutting off the free play of oral discourse, it has also initiated and stimulated the oral process by setting up a narrative or commissioning a song with immanent performing qualities. For example, the Yugoslav *guslar* Avdo Mededović took the plot of his 12,323-line epic *The Wedding of Meho* from a cheap songbook read out to him (Lord 78-79).

The broadside market therefore lived in a two-way relationship with its consumers. Robert Thomson estimates that of a total of over a hundred thousand broadsides issued by British presses between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, perhaps one in seven has passed into the oral tradition (23-24). The Lancashire weavers' song "The Poor Cotton Weaver" (Appendix III) may have originated as an early nineteenth century broadside. It appeared on several Lancashire sheets in the 1850s and 1860s with major variants, and only developed features characteristic of oral transmission after being taken up by singers in the Oldham area (Porter, "The Significance" 70-5). Thereafter it continued to develop in the local oral tradition, and was collected from a

singer a century later, still in Lancashire, in a much tighter and more orally expressive form (MacColl, *Shuttle* 4-5). This "oralising" tendency has been detected by Flemming G. Andersen and Thomas Pettitt in a "Goodnight" broadside from the same period ("The Murder of Maria Marten" 132-78).

Conversely, Roy Palmer estimates that between one and two thirds of broadside ballads used traditional material (*Country Songs* 5). As they walked their rounds, chaunters picked up songs to be taken back and printed. Andersen, Holzapfel and Pettitt have demonstrated the specifically oral structures of a broadside text of the Child ballad "Lord Thomas and Fair Ellinor" (*The Ballad as Narrative* 39-58). Many broadsides show clear signs of having been set up in type from oral recitation in the printshop, as in a stall copy of "The Death of Admiral Benbow" which reads "Noah's Ark" for "Nassau" (Pinto 125). Occupational songs like "The Fair Maid of the West" suggest the same practice, as we have seen.

The question of the role of print in the survival of occupational songs clearly cannot be determined on the basis of a simple distinction between print and orality. Broadsides must be considered an important ancillary to the oral tradition. The relationship was a dynamic, two-way one. The fact that the first songs are almost coeval with the invention of printing, that the circulation of printed texts has greatly enlarged the audience, and that most singers have used transcripts as an *aide memoire*, must argue strongly for a positive role. However, the undeniable censorship that has taken place (with an associated loss of structural coherence), the standardisation of song texts, and the coption of a distinct tradition into a commercial enterprise, has greatly impoverished our corpus of songs. Specifically, where print has achieved hegemonic status as the medium of commercial and ruling class interests, it has transformed popular culture into a safe and stereotyped image of its own value-systems. In terms of the degree of mediation, however, broadside printers cannot be shown to have made more radical changes to song texts than the early fieldworkers, who will be considered next.

*The activity of collectors*

The dominant discourse, which is centripetal and tends to the univocal, maintains that the collecting and fixing of song texts ensures their survival in the same way as the filming of remote tribes does. References to "lost" tribes and "uncollected" songs suggest a world in which cultures are static artefacts gathered from closed societies, without true existence until labelled and brought out "into the open." However, field workers in anthropology and orature alike are representatives of the same forces that *threaten* those societies' future. In the context of orature, the nourishing of an oral tradition involves recognising, for example, a different set of standards from those of received aesthetics, which foregrounds the role of the individual artist, the primacy of the text, and the privileging of prose as social discourse. With this

in mind, I will here examine the role of collectors in determining the extent and features of the surviving corpus of occupational songs.

The kind of song collected, the methods of recording, and the weight given to noting different elements in any particular performance, have changed decisively since the first occupational songs in English became known to a literate audience in the sixteenth century. The earliest songs appear as *texts*, either printed or in manuscript, usually without their music or any circumstantial detail.

The first book of song texts to include the melodies came much later, with John Broadwood's *Old English Songs* (1843), and thereafter the emphasis remained firmly on the publication of the music, to the point where Ralph Vaughan Williams, a collector who was scrupulous about noting down tunes with their variants, was little interested in the words, and often noted down only the first verse, filling out the text later from a broadside copy.[1] The audio recording of singers was pioneered by Percy Grainger in the early years of this century. It brought a further shift of emphasis towards the music, but omitted in most cases to provide the context of the singing "event." The video recorder has added a kinetic and performance dimension, but may still fail to establish the social milieu and precise conditions of performance. In all cases, the effect of the presence of a collector who has not usually had time to establish a full position of trust and openness must be an alienating one, while the potent factors of class and gender difference have often been decisive in determining the nature of the songs performed. As G. Legman has shown, male singers were constrained from singing their full repertoire to a genteel lady collector such as Janet Blunt, or even to Cecil Sharp in the presence of the young Maud Karpeles.[2]

Dave Harker mounted a sustained attack on the principles of collectors and editors in a chapter of *One for the Money* (1980), a case that he later elaborated into a full-length book, *Fakesong* (1985). In describing the methods of Cecil Sharp, he encapsulates the way the field of the folksong was a construct rather than a purely descriptive term, and points to the neglect of occupational songs, among others, in Sharp's mediation of the repertoire of his first informant, John England of Somerset:

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1 Editors of all periods have reconstructed "imperfect" oral performances by adding verses from broadsides, lines by other singers, or by straightforward invention. They include Ralph Vaughan Williams himself (Roy Palmer, ed., *Folk Songs Collected by Ralph Vaughan Williams* [London: Dent, 1983] xi), Cecil Sharp (Dave Harker, *Fakesong* [Milton Keynes: Open UP, 1985] 196) and A. L. Lloyd (Ian Russell, ed. *Singer, Song and Scholar* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1986] 139-40).

2 G. Legman, "'Unprintable Folklore?' – the Vance Randolph Collection," *Journal of American Folklore* 103 (1990): 263. Janet Blunt made an extensive collection of rural songs from the Adderbury district in the English Midlands at the close of the nineteenth century while she was lady of the manor (Michael Pickering, *Village Song and Culture* [London: Croom Helm, 1982] 2-7).

> From England's repertoire of a hundred songs, Sharp chose one, "his only jewel." This he labelled a "folksong" and set about finding others like it, ignoring hundreds of songs which were actually current amongst working people in south-west England, even amongst his "folksingers." He proceeded by rejection: no songs from towns of any size, factory workers, or music halls. Instead, he chose suitably remote villages, suitably ancient people (following suitably non-industrial occupations), from whom he selected pieces which fitted his – not their – idea of what constituted a folksong. (*One for the Money* 147-148)

With respect to occupational songs, Harker's presentation of a classic case of exercising hegemony is unanswerable. The mediation was all the more devastating for being unconscious, practised by enthusiasts. There was, for example, an overwhelming consensus among nineteenth century collectors, editors and sociologists that the oral tradition was incapable of further development. Many felt the upheaval of the Industrial Revolution had destroyed oral culture (Sadie 6. 185). Ironically, in view of the vigorous tradition of songmaking among the navvies and footplatemen, Thomas Hardy specifically blamed the coming of the railways (Gittings 20). The editor of what was to become the standard collection of English and Scottish narrative folk song, Francis James Child, was convinced that every ballad had been printed and that no more collecting was needed (Bronson 1. xiii).

The view has frequently been repeated in this century. In 1932, the authoritative *Cambridge History of English Literature* declared ballads to be a "closed account in English literature" (Gummere 396). As late as 1973, oral literature was still being specifically identified with the literature of the late Middle Ages.[1] The only disagreement has been about what caused the death of folksong. Alfred Williams felt the decline of hiring fairs and farm festivals had removed important opportunities for association (Pickering 107). Some writers considered changes in the musical milieu itself, such as the rise of brass bands and hymn-singing choirs, were to blame (Reeves, *Idiom of the People* 1). Robert Gittings felt that the music hall and "penny readings of an improving kind" had brought about a decline in oral performing skill (20). George Deacon added that the emphasis on "correctness" in Victorian glee clubs had brought about the collapse of oral recreation (13). Finally, Ian Watson summed up the consensus by saying that traditional songs were not being forgotten because they were "dying a natural death, but because they were being swamped by an alien, hostile culture" (137).

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[1] *The Oxford Anthology of English Literature,* edited by Frank Kermode and John Hollander (2 vols. New York: Oxford UP, 1973), placed its only specimens of oral literature in its first volume, *Medieval English Literature* (425-443), even though all the texts it printed were collected in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

These elegies on the oral tradition may have been prompted by a scholarly desire for closure in what is an open and pluralistic literary form, but their effect has been to marginalise the songs which are the subject of this thesis. The view that the oral tradition was a phenomenon of the past led to a situation where the songs of new or transformed industries became invisible, since collecting became concentrated on old people in rural areas. Cecil Sharp wrote in 1907, "I have learned it is, as a rule, only waste [sic] of time to call upon singers under the age of sixty" (*English* 119). Finally, the English Folk Dance and Song Society felt able to announce in 1951 that "by common consent there is little song left in England likely to be worth publication" (White viii). At that date, no collection of English occupational songs had yet appeared. A. L. Lloyd's important anthology of miners' songs *Come All Ye Bold Miners* (1952) appeared in the following year, and was only the first of several collections in the field that have been published since.

The main reason for the invisibility of occupational, and particularly industrial, songs to conscientious fieldworkers was that folk song was felt to be primarily a rural genre. In her early study of traditional song, the first work to use the word "folk-song" in its title, Countess Martinengo-Cesaresco was unequivocal:

> As shrines of art, as foci of historic memories, even simply as vast aggregates of human beings working out the tragi-comedy of life, great cities have furnished the key-note to much great poetry. But it is different with the letterless masses. The student of literature, who turns to folk-songs in search of a new enjoyment, will meet with little to attract him in urban rhymes; if there are many that present points of antiquarian interest, there are few that have any kind of poetic worth. . . . loss of individuality means loss of the power of song; and where there is density of population there is generally a uniformity as featureless as that of pebbles on the sea beach. (*The Study of Folk-Songs* 84)

Her opinion of "urban rhymes" was shared by contemporary collectors, who concentrated overwhelmingly on villages and the long-established rural occupations found there. It is reflected in the titles of their collections: *The Besom Maker (and other Country Folk Songs), English County Songs, A Garland of Country Song.*[1] This was in spite of the fact that, both in broadsides and the oral tradition, urban culture has had a virtual monopoly of the creation of new songs since the eighteenth century.

The second obstacle to recognition has been the enduring status of the model set up by nineteenth century editors and collectors. Following the

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[1] Heywood Sumner, *The Besom Maker (and other Country Folk Songs)* (London: Longmans Green, 1888); Lucy Broadwood and J. A. Fuller-Maitland, *English County* [sic] *Songs* (London: Cramer, 1893); Rev. S. Baring Gould and Rev. H. Fleetwood Sheppard, *A Garland of Country Song* (London: Methuen, 1895).

example of Grundtvig in Denmark, Francis James Child's standard collection of English and Scottish ballads established the tragic narrative ballad as the type of the traditional song, and this definition is still very influential in folk song scholarship.[1] In narrative ballads, his collection continues to dominate, and indeed define, the field, providing the corpus for perhaps a majority of theoretical studies of the traditional ballad.[2] Occupational songs which have a plot are often comic or rebellious, and were felt to subvert assumptions of tragic seriousness. Only thirteen ballads in his definitive collection, or about 4% of the total, mention the occupation of the protagonist.[3] A more representative total among narrative songs would be close to 50%.[4]

The performing conditions sought by fieldworkers clearly led to some types of song being privileged over others. Songs were recorded where possible from solitary, unaccompanied individuals in domestic settings. This practice marginalised occupational songs, which were sung above all as group expression in pubs, clubs and workplaces, often to noisy accompaniment.

Finally, early editors such as Francis James Child and Bishop Percy saw amatory and heroic, not working, relationships as the stuff of traditional music. As A. L. Lloyd's collection of miners' songs showed, occupational songs cover a broad range of themes in addition to love relationships, from satire to social comment. Yet in 1958 James Reeves reiterated the view that they are *ipso facto* amatory: "traditional song as a rule is concerned with a man's or woman's occupation not for itself but in the context of lovemaking" (29). The persistence of this view of traditional song has had the effect of leading fieldworkers and editors alike to exclude the bulk of occupational songs as not true folk songs.

Even those occupational songs which did qualify as love narratives were often excluded from early collections because many of them integrated

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[1] Child includes only twenty non-tragic examples out of a total of three hundred and five ballads. Occupational ballads make up a large part of the non-tragic corpus, and the difficulty in finding full texts is a further reason why they have been relatively neglected by performers and scholars.

[2] Standard works on oral literature like M. J. C. Hodgart, *The Ballads* (London: Hutchinson, 1950), David Buchan, *The Ballad and the Folk* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), Alan Bold, *The Ballad* (London: Methuen, 1979) and R. Pedersen and F. G. Andersen, *The Concept of Tradition in Ballad Research* (Odense: Odense UP, 1985) still confine themselves to the Child collection.

[3] These include (with the relevant Child number in brackets) the beggar (17, 279), the blacksmith (44, 98A), the harper (67, 192), the mason (93), the potter (121), the butcher (122), the clerk (281), the milkmaid (290, 291) and the trooper (299). In a number of other ballads, such as "The Miller and the King's Daughter" (10), the named occupation is that of a secondary character.

[4] No meaningful figure can, of course, be given for the number of "different" occupational songs. In my personal index of about six thousand discrete English and Scottish traditional songs, including broadsides, about half mention the occupation of the hero or heroine. The figure for the Pepys broadsides is 31%.

production and reproduction through the mode of sexual metaphor. If male singers felt constraints in singing their full repertoire in the presence of women such as Janet Blunt, the same applied to women singing to male collectors. Many nineteenth century songs have probably been lost because of limits to what could be printed by editors. This meant that many songs were not made available during the period of their greatest incidence. Child, who was scrupulous about printing accurate texts, felt unable to publish them as sung. Four of the already minuscule total of occupational ballads were introduced with various warnings to the reader as to their content. Child describes the widely-sung Chaucerian romp "The Keach in the Creel" as "brutal and shameless almost beyond example" (5. 122). Sargent and Kittredge's one-volume popular edition (1905), planned by Child before his death, omits the four offending ballads altogether.[1] To a lesser extent, the same constraints apply today. Stan Hugill's *Shanties of the Seven Seas* (1961), reissued in 1984, is the standard work on its subject, yet virtually every shanty has been, in Hugill's word, "camouflaged" for publication (xiv). Childrens' songs, an important and neglected source, have been "wholly sanitised" by the leading modern collectors Iona and Peter Opie (Legman 264).

Thus it is not surprising that Harker's list of Cecil Sharp's "refusals" can be extended to include occupational songs. Sharp claimed that few songs are connected with work (*English Folk Song* 97). Industrial songs in particular did not interest him or his collaborator Maud Karpeles, who remarked as late as 1973 that they "seldom reach a high artistic level" (55). It may be said that such songs were ignored by the majority of collectors before about 1950. Even the occupational songs that were collected suffered from drastic editing based on a largely Romantic attitude to orality, and a sensitivity to questions of class, sexual and other taboos. Their published form often falls short of standards recognised today. Details of performance are missing. Dialect and metre have frequently been regularised, and the songs are scattered throughout collections in various categories that do not correspond to any used by the singers themselves: *Songs of Courtship, Crime, Drinking*, and so on.

The case of Cecil Sharp showed that the field of orality was defined more by exclusion than inclusion. Ironically, in view of the way both projects served the dominant discourse, one particular area of prejudice to collectors was the broadsides. Despite the evident extent of the exchange between oral and printed sources at all periods, collectors often considered illiteracy a desired attribute of singers. Songs from such singers were described as "primary orality" and invested with special status (Ong 251). At the same time, there were degrees of acceptable dependence on writing. It was a more serious offence against orality for singers to learn from songsheets and books than from handwritten texts passed from singer to singer within families. As a

[1] The omitted ballads are 279. The Jolly Beggar; 281. The Keach in the Creel; 290. The Wylie Wife of the Hie Toun Hie; and 299. The Trooper and the Maid.

result, singers have often taken great pains to conceal any written or printed sources. The Norfolk singer Harry Cox, whose large repertoire was recorded by a series of collectors from the 1930s until his death in 1971, denied that he ever learnt from print, although many of his songs were close to the broadside texts of the Victorian publisher Henry Such, and he still remembered his mother buying him ballad slips from the market in Norwich (R. Thomson 216; Lloyd, *Folk Song* 227). Yet his clandestine practice of keeping a store of texts does not differ intrinsically from that of singers in the past, beginning with the earliest known repertoire, that of the professional minstrel Richard Sheale from the middle of the sixteenth century (Ashmole MS 48, Bodleian Library).

Since editors were involved in the construction of a particular kind of artistic formation, they intervened decisively where the erotic or social implications of songs might undermine the desired picture of the chaste and harmonious world of the "folk." One early known example of the rewriting of an occupational song in the interests of a particular class position is "The Collier's Bonnie Lassie." It first appears among the poems of Allan Ramsay (1685-1758) and was long believed to be his own composition. Its narrative is an anodyne love story, the antithesis of "The Draggletail Gypsies":

The Coalier has a Daughter,
  And O she's wonder bonny;
A Laird he was that sought her,
  Rich baith in Lands and Money.
The tutors watched the motion
  Of this young honest lover,
But love is like the ocean
  Wha can its depths discover!
    Ramsay 126-127.

Eventually she rejects a lover from her own class in favour of the property, social position and education offered her by the passing laird. Seventy years later, Robert Burns published his independent version of the song. The first half is similar to Ramsay's, but concludes:

She wad na hae a laird,
  nor wad she be a lady,
But she wad hae a collier,
  the colour o' her daddie. (Burns n.d., 401)

The dynamic of this song is diametrically opposed to Ramsay's parable of self-betterment. On stylistic evidence alone, Burns' set is closer to oral performances of the time, but his song can also be related to a large group of occupational songs where the protagonist, male or female, collier, weaver or ploughboy, is shown as socially more desirable than an outsider from another

class or trade. The question was finally settled in 1825 when Allan Cunningham printed a set in two stanzas in his *Songs of Scotland.* The first verse runs:

> The collier has a daughter,
> She's black but O, she's bonnie;
> A laird he was that loved her,
> Rich both in land and money.
> I'm ower young to wed the laird
> & ower black to be a lady,
> But I will hae a collier lad
> The colour o' my daddie.
> "The Collier's Bonnie Lassie" 1-8.

It then became evident for the first time that Burns' concluding phrase, "the colour o' her daddie," was in fact a pointer to the central signifier, a reference to the girl's dark complexion that Ramsay had found unfit to print:

| | |
|---|---|
| She's black but O, she's bonnie. | (Cunningham 1825, line 2) |
| And O she's wonder bonny. | (Ramsay 1728, line 2) |

Ramsay's editing therefore extended to the three key areas of money, class and gender. The conventional middle-class assumption that beauty raises the market value of a girl to the point of social betterment usurped the theme of dignified loyalty to a fellow-collier.

This nullifying of the class basis of social relations was also practised by later collectors. Although he was a Fabian socialist, Sharp changed many songs in this way. In his published text of Mrs Overd's set of "Geordie," it is "the people" who condemn the horse-stealer, rather than the unsympathetic judge as she sang it (Harker, *Fakesong* 196). He rewrote "The Daggletail Gypsies" (Child 200) to eliminate the element of class revenge, and may have similarly changed "Jack Went A-Sailing" by omitting the key opening passage showing how the sailor was pressganged into navy service at the behest of the influential father of the girl he loved (Porter, "Singing the Changes" 35; Sharp and Karpeles 56). In the same way, his censoring of the words of "The Keeper" diluted the social satire by nullifying the parodic element in the song (Reeves, *Idiom of the People* 138-139).

It is possible to offer final proof of Sharp's changes because, exceptionally, the manuscripts of these songs survive among his papers. The difficulty in establishing whether a performed song has been changed is compounded by the almost universal desire, shared even by exemplary editors like Roy Palmer and A. L. Lloyd, to publish "clean" texts. This is a practice which undermines the authority of the singers to determine what a coherent text might be. Most printed occupational songs, therefore, must be regarded as departing signifi-

cantly from their words as sung. The act of recovering lost material is of course endless, and ultimately speculative, in comparison with the original confident act of mediation. One obstacle to restoring suppressed detail in songs is the very strength of the prevailing ideology itself. Changes made in conformity with it are "standard editorial practice," while attempts to restore an authentic reading are "interference," a charge that has been made in connection with "The Greenland Whale." On "Music from the People" (BBC Radio 4, October 5, 1986), Tony Davis of The Spinners asserted that "political elements in the Folk Revival" had sought to change the song in their own interests, to make the captain more interested in profit than in the welfare of his crew. Nevertheless, oral sets presenting the captain in this light have been collected since the beginning of this century:

> Now the losing of that prentice boy
> It grieved our captain sore,
> But the losing of that great big whale,
> It grieved him a damned sight more.
> "The Greenland Whale" (before 1907).

In addition to these attempts to avoid expressions of social conflict and to offer readers tidy "performing" texts, editors routinely changed expressions they considered provocative, blasphemous, inflammatory, or sexually explicit, in approximately equal measure.

"Provocative" expressions included references to the use of force as a remedy for injustices (Porter, "Significance" 74), and even jocular references to crime. The sea shanty "Hanging Johnny" opens:

> Oh they call me Hanging Johnny,
> Away, boys, away!
> They sez I hangs for money,
> So hang, boys, hang. (1-4)

In a school anthology, the first lines were amended to read:

> Oh they call me Smiling Johnny . . .
> Because my smile is bonny . . . (Seeger 415)

Expressions felt to be blasphemous or inflammatory were usually silently reworked. In particular, swear words and satirical portraits of priests rarely found their way into print (Porter, "Significance" 74). Only rarely can the singer's words be recovered at a later date in the way that a cotton weaver's blameless "Egad" was restored.[1] In many cases a substituted rhyme word

[1] See "The Poor Cotton Weaver," Appendix III, line 42.

gives the game away, as in the suppressed reference to Hell in Tommy Armstrong's "The Oakey Strike Evictions":

> Next thare cums th' maistors, aw think thae shud think shem,
> Depriven wives en familys of a comfortable yem [home].
> But wen thae shift freh ware thae liv, aw hope thail gan *te th'well*,
> [for "to hell"]
> Elang we th' twenty candy men, en Johny thit carry's th' bell. (19-22)

The omission of sexually explicit references applies to virtually all songs, but particularly to sea shanties. When the narrator of "Liverpool Judies" wakes up after his thirty-two day binge in New York with "a bloomin' big head and a dose of the pox" (Hugill, *Sea* 84), we are variously told by editors that he has

> an old suit of oilskins and two pair o' socks,
> And a flooring o' bricks *at the foot o' me box.*
> Palmer, *Sea Songs* 212. My emphasis.

or a bloomin' big head, an' *a sea-chest o' rocks.*
Hugill, *Shanties* 306. My emphasis.

or a flooring of brickbats *to ballast me box.*
*Shell Book of Sea Shanties,* quoted by Hugill, *Shanties* 306. My emphasis.

Taken together, these alterations, individually small but repeated countless times, indicate a considerable intervention in the representation in print of performances of occupational songs.

As we have seen, few editors have recognised occupations as having any special significance in the songs they collected and published. However, the elimination of a protagonist's occupation may cause serious narrative disruption in a ballad. One early example is the murder ballad featuring a mason, "Long Lankin" (Child 67). Scottish and Irish analogues clearly give the motivation for his crime as non-payment for work he had carried out (Child 2. 320-42). The ritual element, the motive, and even the fact of his being a mason, have been dropped from the English sets, leaving an imbalance in the narrative structure. The great weakening of dramatic force, with a compensating increase in vague apprehension, that has resulted from dropping the occupational marker can be seen from a comparison of these two openings:

Lambkin, the finest mason that e'er laid a stone,
He built a lord's mansion and for payment got none.
He built it without and he sealed it within,
And he made a false window for himself to get in.
"Lambkin" 1-4 (Ballymoney, Ireland).

Said my lord to my lady as he mounted his horse:
"Beware of Long Lankin that lives in the moss."
Said my lord to my lady as he rode away:
"Beware of Long Lankin that lives in the hay."
"Long Lankin" 1-4 (Berkshire, England).

A. G. Gilchrist has shown how the dropping of the occupational marker in this way may cause a song to lose narrative coherence.[1]

One method of recovering suppressed detail in the songs is through an examination of the rhyme words. In the dramatic context of a performance, they often concentrate the dynamic thrust of a stanza. They are a reliable indicator of regional origin: rhyming "pass" with "lass" locates "The Collier Lass" firmly in Scotland or the north of England. Because rhyme lines are the ones most easily remembered, they are less likely to change in transmission, yet they are the words *most likely* to be altered by editors. Often the words are ones that would be socially unacceptable in print. It is a common performing technique to leave these taboo rhyme words unsung, in the certainty that they can be supplied (and often chanted in unison) by the audience.[2]

The earliest text of "The Poor Cotton Weaver" (Appendix III), referred to earlier as an example of a song that has improved as a result of broadside dissemination, is paradigmatic of all the changes produced in the mediating process. The song follows the decline of a formerly independent weaver, including eviction from his lodgings and virtual enslavement to a middleman, the "mester." One exceptional feature is that it first appears in a novel, *Mary Barton* (1848). Elizabeth Gaskell, who apparently collected it herself, was married to a Unitarian minister and writing for the commercial publishers Chapman and Hall in a decade that had brought England close to civil war. Although she did not modify the strong dialect or the many weaving terms, her changes to the song, deduced by a collation with a slightly later broadside (Bebbington of Manchester, c.1850), were otherwise very far-reaching. In

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1 "Lambkin," *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society* 1. 1 (1932): 1-17

2 This seems to have been the case with "The Oakey Strike Evictions." All printed texts (for example, A. L. Lloyd, *Folk Song in England* [London: Granada, 1975] 355) print the close of the third stanza thus:

Some had ne laps upon their coats, but there wes one chap warse -
Ivory time he had to stoop, *it was a laughable farce.* (my italics)

The physical realism of the passage,and the spelling of the rhyme word make it clear that some such half-line as "you could see his arse" has been suppressed.

common with most other collectors of the time, who regarded folk songs as texts rather than performances, she supplies no melody. It is described merely as being "a kind of droning recitative, depending much on expression and feeling" (73). Elizabeth Gaskell is also typical of her time in giving little indication of the context in which the song was collected. The fact that the whole episode is only loosely integrated into the action of the novel suggests that the circumstances of the performance may approximate to the actual one: it is sung by Margaret, "the young workwoman who lived in the rooms above" (66), and one of the protagonists, "Margit," has a name analogous to the singer's.

The song is therefore presented as a spontaneous expression of the weaving community's sufferings. However, Elizabeth Gaskell entirely omits the only stanzas that describe social conflict, corresponding to stanzas 6, 8 and 9 of the Bebbington broadside. They describe the violence meted out by the bailiffs to the weaver's wife, Margit. She is "stricken sick" by being thrown on to the flagstones, and the bailiffs are ready to break the couple's necks or flay them alive at being cheated of the sequestrated goods (broadside, lines 34-36). As the central stanza of a three-verse episode, this crucially disrupts the oral narrative structure. The eighth and ninth stanzas show the weaver giving in and taking his piece of woven cloth to the master, who offers a derisory price for it. He leaves in disgust, cursing him and his kind, and seeing before him only the unskilled labour of stonebreaking, the fate dreaded by a skilled worker. The result of dropping these three stanzas was to make the weaver's destitution seem causeless and therefore inevitable.

In another verse, Elizabeth Gaskell radically reworks a reference to a parson's indifference to the weaver's plight:

> Our [parish] church parson kept tellin' us long,
> We should have better times if we'd but hold our tongues.
> I've houden my tongue till I can hardly draw breath.
> I think i' my heart he means to clem [*starve*] me to death.
> I know he lives weel
> By backbiting the de'il,
> But he never picked o'er in his life.
> "The Poor Cotton Weaver" 7-12. My lineation.

> Owd Dickie o'Billy's kept telling me lung,
> We s'd ha' better toimes if I'd but howd me tung;
> Oi've howden my tung till oi've near stopped my breath,
> Oi think i' my heart oi'se soon clem to death.
> Owd Dicky's weel crammed,
> He never wur clemmed,
> An' he ne'er picked ower i' his loife.
> Elizabeth Gaskell: "The Oldham Weaver" 8-14.

The parson has disappeared completely, and the accusing line, "I think i' my heart he means to clem me to death," has been replaced by the quietistic, "Oi think i' my heart oi'se soon clem to death." There are contemporary parallels to this practice. The parson's role in the sexual adventures of "The Besom Maker" was edited out of a broadside printed by James Catnach. So great was the interdependence of print and singers' repertoires that he then began to be dropped from oral sets as well (Holloway & Black 2. 46-47; Renwick 96).

At the same time, a determined attempt has been made to cut out strong language, evidently on the grounds of blasphemy. At one point, in an example quoted earlier, she has changed "egad" (= O God!) to the meaningless "edad." In the same stanza she has suppressed a reference to the Devil, although this has involved changing the rhymesound, normally a very stable element in song (Porter, *News That Stays News* 67). Other changes are more subtle. In the second verse already quoted, "clem" has become intransitive rather than transitive, suggesting that starvation is a passive condition rather than a direct result of working conditions of the weavers. As with the dropping of the stanzas describing confrontations, this undermines the militant stance of the song.

Finally, a reference to the use of force as a solution to the weavers' grievances has disappeared. In the final stanza of all other sets, an impressive climax is reached when Margit declares her intention of petitioning the King in London:

> An' if things didn't alter when hoo [*she*] had been,
> Hoo swears hoo would fight, blood up to th'een [*eyes*].
> "Poor Cotton Weaver" 57-58.

Elizabeth Gaskell changes this to an entirely passive image:

> Hoo's fully resolved t'sew up meawth an' eend. [?een] (42)

The thrust of the fighting conclusion has been deflected to a quietist one, indeed to a self-inflicted wound.

Although not primarily a collector, Elizabeth Gaskell shares the same aims as other nineteenth century mediators: to open the eyes of the middle class Victorian public to the life and culture of the "Other Nation." As the first novel to use an industrial working class protagonist, and the first to describe a labour dispute in the cities, *Mary Barton* succeeded in this. However, to judge from the one occupational song she prints, she cannot be regarded as a reliable indicator of the cultural expression of that class. On the basis of this and examples by other collectors, it appears that nineteenth-century broadside texts, for all their corruptions and commercial considerations, may be *closer* to the conditions of oral performance than the versions printed in contemporary collections.

As the case of "The Poor Cotton Weaver" shows, a special aspect of the dissemination of occupational ballads lies in their interrelationship with written literature. Recent criticism, paying attention to intertextuality, readerliness and the Death of the Author, has fundamentally reappraised our post-Gutenberg world-view (itself a Renaissance, painterly metaphor; William Blake would have written "world-sense"). As the discussion of the broadside market showed, the relationship between a performed song and a printed one has to be seen as a continuum, with only hypothetical poles of pure orality and pure print. The street song, the literary epic, the literary ballad and the popular drama are situated somewhere between these poles.

The relationship between traditional song and written literature seems to have been only cursorily described,[1] perhaps because more studies of traditional song have been written by ethnomusicologists or social scientists than by literary critics. Shakespeare's relation to the oral tradition is only beginning to be understood (Trousdale 1981). Although the classic hegemonic view of culture ranges literature primarily with the forces of the dominant discourse, the ambivalent relationship between writers and high culture has meant that, as with the broadsides, they often take up a position that coincides with that of the dominated. Charles Dickens is the outstanding example of a writer fractured in this way, lionised by the middle class reading public at the same time as he was mounting fierce attacks on their educational, financial and parliamentary institutions.

In the case of long-established trades, the cross-fertilisation between oral and written literatures has lasted for many centuries. It appears, for example, in a shared device, the figurative application of occupational terms to the human body. In Charles Dickens' *Master Humphrey's Clock* (1840-1), Sam Weller's father, an aged coachman, remarks of his general condition, "The axle an't broke yet" (88-89). The son of a railwayman in Jack Common's *Kiddar's Luck* (1951) says, "My religious meditations were beginning to bang into the buffers" (80). These are precisely analogous to the outburst of the Poor Cotton Weaver: "I've woven myself to th'fur end" (48).

The case of the miller is a paradigm of the way the signification constantly shifts between oral and literary representations. His ambivalent status within the rural working community meant that his sphere of activity impinged on the worlds of both the written and the oral cultures. During the early Middle Ages, he was a labourer like any other, subject to the feudal lord, but he became increasingly estranged from the local population. This was partly a

1 A good account is given in the introduction to Vivian de Sola Pinto's *The Common Muse* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965) 17-50. Significantly, Pinto was a literary critic rather than a folklorist.

result of the gradual introduction of the windmill which, unlike the water-mill, was generally situated on high ground some distance away from village and town. The independent and specialised nature of his job gave the miller a socially mobile status, and by the fourteenth century he was increasingly a member of the rising middle class. For many centuries the trade was represented in popular speech by the "thumb of gold" that brought the miller fat profits by protruding into the grain measure. By the nineteenth century, mechanisation of the milling process had turned him into a historically marginalised figure, but the trade has remained a byword for dishonesty. As an Oxfordshire woman recalled of her childhood in the early years of this century, "Ol' Uppy Tup [the Adderbury miller] used to cheat a bit, but my father knew what his weight should be and he used to challenge him, so *he* got his fair share" (Pickering, *Village* 67).

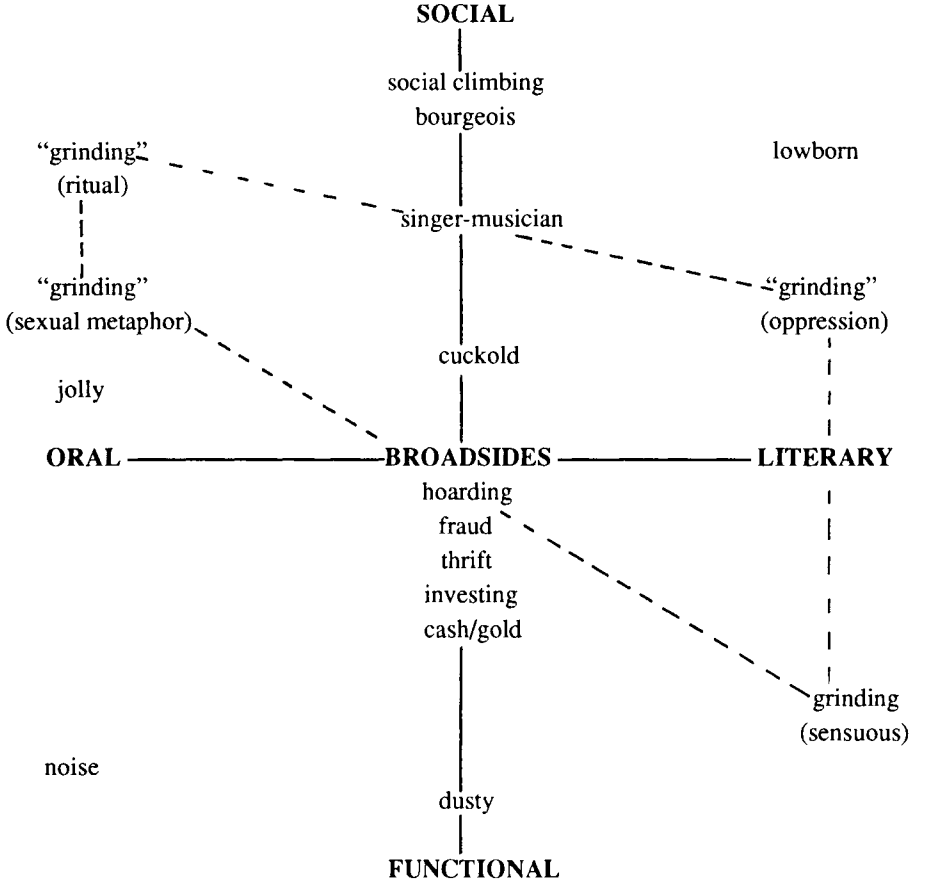
Both of these aspects, the artisan and the unscrupulous tradesman, can be traced in the portrayal of the miller in orature. Figure 1 illustrates the kind of associations to be found in songs about millers. They range from the social, such as his perceived social status, to the functional, represented by the noise and dustiness of his physical environment. It will be seen that representations of the miller are everywhere suffused by the multiple associations of the word "grinding," while the street ballad persistently links capital accumulation with dishonest working practices.

Singers situated the miller's occupation unambiguously within a material culture of production, in an environment of dust and noise. These features were not chosen at random. Dust, for example, the primary signifier of the miller's occupation in both written and oral contexts, featured in songs in an invariable metonymic relation with financial sharp practice. The monotonous daily round was transcended in orality only on the erotic and ritual planes, through metaphorical extensions of the grinding process. Literary analogues, with their different audience, give contrasting interpretations of a similar field of attributes. For example, the purely functional aspects of operating a mill are represented by George Eliot primarily as a sensory experience, with strong erotic overtones, rather than as a productive process. Maggie Tulliver "loved to linger in the great spaces of the mill. . . . The resolute din, the unresting motion of the great stones, giving her a dim delicious awe as at the presence of an uncontrollable force – the meal for ever pouring, pouring" (*Mill on the Floss* 24).

It may be seen from the left hand column of Figure 1 that the main line of the oral tradition, with minimal contact with printed sources, does not associate the miller with primarily negative qualities. He is perceived largely in his feudal role, closer, in Bakhtinian parlance, to the Rabelaisian, or carnival, element of popular culture. In this respect, songs that are strongly established in the oral repertoire often have more in common with Geoffrey Chaucer, who stands midway between the oral and written traditions, than with either

broadsides or the novel. Noise, jollity, sexual activity – and tenderness – are the defining characteristics of the miller of folk song and "The Miller's Tale" alike.[1] Chaucer's description of his pilgrim, a robust figure with a great red beard and a tuft of bristles sprouting from his nose, shows that he too is a churl, not the fool on the hill but closely integrated into village life (*Canterbury Tales* A 552-5).[2] Significantly (since there is no strong tradition of millers as performers) he is also a musician (A 564). He is contemptuous of the Knight's notions of courtly love (A 3917). Moreover, the form of his tale, the fabliau, is a type which is bound up with the oral tradition.

**Fig. 1. "Millerly" attributes in oral and literary sources**




1 "The Buchan Miller," perhaps the most frequently performed miller's song today, is a representative example.

2 All references to Chaucer are to *The Complete Works*, ed. F. N. Robinson, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford UP, 1957).

While the narrator of "The Miller's Tale" is close to the type constructed by traditional song, Symkyn, the miller of "The Reeve's Tale," is closer to that of the printed street ballad.[1] The broadside tradition reflects his changed social role. As Figure 1 shows, the miller is seen above all in economic rather than productive terms in the broadsides. He is, almost without exception, portrayed as rapacious and dishonest in business deals, but practising personal fraud rather than the systematic exploitation of a class. His crimes are specified as failing to give full measure and hoarding grain in hopes of a rise in price. In the seventeenth century "Turner's Dish of Lentten Stuffe" they are represented iconically in vivid physical terms, using the three signifiers of the thumb, dust and the stolen measure of corn:

> The miller with his golden thumb,
> And his dusty necke; If that he grind but two bushels,
> He needs must steal a peck. (37-40)

Hoarding grain is a recurring theme of broadside ballads from the seventeenth century onwards (an early example is "The Present State of England") The ballads closely represent the popular mood, articulating the demands of those who sought to protect themselves against the effects of the practice. Broadsides played an important role in the campaign, keeping alive the tradition of protest to the point where corn rioters in the early nineteenth century, who were spending up to three quarters of their wages on bread, were "informed by the belief that they were defending traditional rights and customs" in forcing the miller to reduce his prices (Thompson 78). Richard Jefferies describes a case of direct action later in the century:

> When the miller's packhorse appeared the cottagers crowded round and demanded the price: if it had risen a penny, the infuriated mob of women would sometimes pull the miller's boy off the horse and duck him in the village pond. (Jefferies 74)

In this respect the broadsides, far from speaking for the Establishment, were at one with the radical tradition of popular protest.

In view of the close links of the fabliau with the oral tale, and the broadside with traditional song, it is remarkable that the miller of popular song is rarely a swindler. This may be a result of the polyvalent links between the miller and his customers, who would have made up the audience of such songs. Since the fixing of corn prices and shifting class loyalties brought the miller into frequent conflict with these customers, the contradiction is a warning against "reading off" social meaning directly from songs.

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[1] For example, he steals half a bushel of corn from the two Cambridge students (A4243-4246).

One exception to this generally positive image is the widely-distributed "Miller and his Three Sons." In attempting to decide which of his three sons is to inherit his business (itself a potent indicator of social class), the miller is swayed by the cynical life-philosophy of the youngest:

> "O father," he says, "I'm your youngest boy,
> And stealing corn's my only joy,
> And before that good meal I'd lack,
> I'd steal all the corn and burn the sack." (19-22)

Songs established in the oral tradition are noticeably gentler to the miller, treating him as a figure of generalised fun or even envy. This explains the penetration of the oral tradition by the literary fabrication "The Jolly Miller," a product of the eighteenth century musical drama that passed into the repertoire of traditional singers. It glorifies the unfettered life of the working miller, not afraid of backbreaking toil, yet always ready for a glass with the squire. The litany of social and personal contentment, however, is strangely undermined by the refrain at the end of every verse, which suggests a *déclassé* role on the fringes of society:

> And I care for nobody, no not I,
> and nobody cares for me. (4)

The basic incompatibility between verse and chorus is not the only dissonance in the oral image of the miller. The difference of stance in the oral and broadside traditions, one broadly sympathetic, the other openly hostile, led to other internal contradictions. "The Horned Miller" develops the theme of the cuckolded miller in an acquisitive milieu. The miller comes by a purse of silver after accidentally putting on the clothes of his wife's lover, a young man about town of independent means. The broadside poet seems by no means clear as to who came off the loser: the refrain, "O the poor horned miller O," is appropriate to his role as a cuckold, but not consistent with his ending up richer by a purse of silver. This may be an example of two ballads being imperfectly fused. It is more likely, however, to be a result of the song being rewritten for the broadside market. This demanded an ideological shift which was incompletely realised. Thus the wife's young lover has succeeded according to the code of *carpe diem*. He is the equivalent of the ploughboy or tinker who might have filled the role in a rural setting. The miller, on the other hand, satisfies the urban commercial ideology embraced by the broadsides: thrift, sobriety, self-improvement and sexual restraint. "The Horned Miller" survives today because of its central paradox, as unresolved today as it was in Puritan times: wealth means happiness, yet "the best things in life are free."

The broadsides with their generally urban viewpoint are preoccupied with economic advantage at the expense of one's fellows. They represent the miller as first and foremost a social climber, corresponding to the actual change in his social status mentioned earlier. Chaucer, once more sensitive to the new forces in his society, had already described a specimen of this "broadside type" in the miller Symkyn who features in his "Reeve's Tale." To raise his class, he has married the illegitimate daughter of the parson, who is therefore responsible for her dowry, a commercial touch typical of the miller's dealings with the aristocracy. In medieval iconic terms, his physical appearance indicates his nature:

> Round was his face, and camus was his nose;
> As piled as an ape was his skulle. (A 3934-5)

Chaucer describes the aspirations of Symkyn with the concreteness characteristic of the folk songs, and does not fail to add the key signifier: "Lo, swich it is a millere to be fals!" (A 4318). The close match of signifiers with the broadside miller strongly suggests a lost stratum of popular song, cognate with oral tales from that time, which preceded the invention of printing and the first printed broadsides.

In his two representatives of the calling, the robust pilgrim and Symkyn, the balloon of social pretension, Chaucer shares with the ballads a common awareness of the miller's social location. The Victorian novel, however, for whom the miller was a favourite metaphor of transition in rural life, shows far less assurance. By the mid-nineteenth century, the profession of miller was near extinction. Broadside publishers had dropped the miller from their regular catalogues of cheating professions, adding the new trades of hackney coachman and gin shop proprietor instead ("A Chapter of Cheats or The Roguery of Every Trade"). Thomas Hardy and George Eliot were therefore being consciously retrospective when they chose mills as the settings for two of their novels.[1] They eschewed strictly descriptive modes in favour of subtle social indicators, but there was a separation of trade and economic function which was never found in the oral tradition. In particular, their representations of the process and the setting used naturalistic signifiers – the noise, the dust, the grinding stones – rather than the attributes of greed or jollity that were already commonplace in the seventeenth and eighteenth century broadsides. Neither of these characteristics suited George Eliot in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860). Part of her project was to describe the desperate efforts of Tulliver to

[1] Both writers use traditional culture as a kind of objective correlative for their theme, such as the skimmington ride in Thomas Hardy's *Mayor of Casterbridge* (224-229). Like Walter Scott in the Border country, Hardy was personally involved in passing on the musical and ballad inheritance of Dorset. Q . D. Leavis has remarked on the use made of traditional culture in George Eliot's treatment of "The Weaver of Raveloe," Silas Marner (30-31).

cling to his social status in the face of irresistible economic imperatives. As a result, Tulliver is portrayed as a businessman, while the signifiers normally associated with the miller are subsumed by the foreman Luke, "a tall, broad-shouldered man of forty, black-eyed and black-haired, subdued by a general mealiness, like an auricula" (24). Hardy's miller in *The Trumpet Major* (1880), set during the upheavals caused by Napoleon's anticipated invasion of England, shows the same dichotomy. The miller is clearly an entrepreneur rather than an artisan. His middle class pretensions are unmistakably shown by his wooing of Widow Garland and his billeting of the soldiery. Unlike Chaucer, who encapsulates the transitional stage of Symkyn's social class in his personal relations, Hardy alludes delicately to the vestigial workman in the structure of the mill itself, which is both a workshop and a dwelling with pretensions:

> Overcombe Mill presented at one end the appearance of a hardworked house slipping into the river, and at the other of an idle, genteel place, half cloaked with creepers at this time of the year, and having no visible connexion with flour. (47)

Moreover, the predominantly middle class audience of the nineteenth century novel ensured that the miller's characteristic features often carried a totally different significance. With regard to hoarding grain, for example, the perspective of Abel Fletcher, the miller in Dinah Craik's novel *John Halifax, Gentleman* (1856), is totally at odds with the street ballad tradition which, as we have seen, allied itself with the undernourished rural population. At one point the narrator, Abel Fletcher's son, comments:

> For several days a week the water-wheel was as quiet as on Sundays; for my father kept his grain locked up, waiting for what, he wisely hoped, might be a worse harvest than the last. (83)

A few pages later, the miller visits his storehouse: "with a meaning but grim smile Abel Fletcher counted his bags, worth almost as much as bags of gold" (89). The traditional metaphor of the thumb of gold achieved its effect by collapsing the semantic boundaries between the commodity, the unit of exchange and human flesh. In displacing the corn in the measure, the miller's fat thumb transmuted it into the same quantity of cash profit. Dinah Craik, however, turns that subversive alchemical process into a lame equivalence where the profit, "almost as much as bags of gold," represents not fraud but "fair reward." The chasm between traditional lore and the dominant discourse, in the form of the genteel novel, could not be more clearly expressed.

These markedly different developments of the signifiers that clustered round the miller's trade can be summed up in the fourfold treatment of the grinding process shown in Figure 1. Inevitably, the term "grinding" dominates

both oral and literary accounts of the miller, but not in an identical way. For oral sources, grinding is never simply a process. It always has a ritualistic or an erotic particularity. The first sees the miller as an almost mystical participant in the production of food, which is also the life process of growth and change. In "John Barleycorn," "three men came out of the west" to kill the spirit of the grain. After many trials, John is brought to the threshing floor:

> They hired men with crabtree sticks
> who cut him skin from bones,
> But the miller he served him worse than that,
> for he ground him between two stones. (15-16. My lineation)

Their efforts fail, however, and he is reincarnated as a cup of flowing ale, literally ready to floor his earlier adversaries:

> John Barleycorn in the nut-brown bowl
> will prove the strongest man. (26. My lineation)

It is typical of the operation of occupational signifiers that the miller's work is seen at first quite concretely. It is only when the grinding is located in a sequence of references which are linked as a narrative that the extended metaphor of the harvest becomes clear. Because the grinding of corn is still seen in terms of its specificity to the production process rather than as the activity of a stereotypical character, "John Barleycorn" represents an expression of the holistic philosophy of human relations with nature.

The erotic signification of "grinding" is similar to its present-day meaning in spoken English. Unlike its slang usage, however, with its exclusively male overtones, traditional song may also have a female agent:

> As I walked out one night, 'twas from my native cot,
> I met Jack Sprat the miller, he was happy with his lot.
> His mill I rattled round, I ground his grits [*millstones*] so clean;
> I eased him of his chink [*money*] in gathering broom so green.
> "Bizzoms" 9-12.

As in "John Barleycorn," the metaphor operates in a literal and figurative mode simultaneously.

Spoken English has another figurative meaning, expressed in the phrase, "grinding the poor." This important extension of the term does not appear in folksongs, which must support the case that millers are represented orally as having common cause with the landless peasant. William Blake, however, always uses the word with this meaning. Urthona, our deformed spiritual nature, turns to the task of milling humanity:

> Then Dark Urthona took the corn out of the Stores of Urizen;
> He ground it in his rumbling Mills. Terrible the distress
> Of all the Nations of Earth, ground in the Mills of Urthona.
> *The Four Zoas* 9. 806-8.

For Blake, the owners of the Albion flour mill on the south bank of the Thames were preying on the sorrows of the other Albion, representing the Eternal Man and England itself:

> "We smell the blood of the English! We delight in their blood on our altars.
> The living and the dead shall be ground in our rumbling Mills
> For bread of the sons of Albion."
> *Jerusalem* 43. 48-50.

In this instance, Blake was at one with the broadside poets, who celebrated the burning of the Albion Mill in 1791 with a rough piece called "The Baker's Glory" (Palmer, *Ballad History* 73).

To sum up, crosscutting between oral and written literature is not random but follows a parameter of function. Working within the dominant discourse, novelists and poets nevertheless often ally themselves with elements of the counterculture, including singers. Writers were forced into a fruitful ambivalence which a writer like Chaucer, on the cusp of the oral-written divide, was quick to recognise. By the nineteenth century, influence from the oral tradition had reached deep into written practice, through quotation and imagery. Formal attitudes, however, remained strangely polarised. While Blake saw the mill as a cold instrument of oppression, Dinah Craik identified it as a site for social advancement. George Eliot, typically, implicitly acknowledged the existence of both stereotypes by inverting them: her mill on the Floss is simultaneously a place of sensual experience and social decline.

The *signifiers*, however, proved much more resistant to change. A single process like grinding flour has developed metaphorical extensions in song, popular speech and prophetic writing, but they have remained relatively distinct from each other. Their particularity is a property of their medium. In the case of songs the signifiers are locked into the transmission structures and cannot be dislodged at will.

Our knowledge of the oral tradition before this century is overwhelmingly dependent on printed sources, but the limitations of this record must be recognised. No account of occupational songs based on printed evidence alone could give a reliable indication of the relative range and type of the songs performed. On the other hand, video and sound recordings have not proved themselves any more free of the fragmenting and appropriating tendencies evident in print, so Marshall McLuhan's call for an alliance between

the oral and the electronic to rout the long-established forces of typography is still premature.[1]

Writing, printing and the electronic media have brought not only changes in communications but changes in consciousness. There can be no simple categorising of these media as "threats to orality," since they represent forms of cultural continuity which cannot be meaningfully disentangled from the continuity of orality itself. Denying the role of print and recordings in the dissemination of songs is to misunderstand the nature of the oral tradition, which is collaborative and social rather than individual. It is bound to avail itself of all available channels for diffusion.

With respect to occupational songs on broadsides, the role of print has been ambivalent. It has provided a permanent, uncontextual record of performances within occupational groups, while at the same time, through the agency of its mediation, acting as a screen between sender and receiver, and even negating the existence of occupational songs as a discrete genre. It is unquestionably true that access to print, and thereby to the opinion-forming public and to institutions like schools and Parliament, was not, and is not, equally available to all. However, chapbooks, broadsides and more recently song collections, parish magazines, local papers and booklets produced by small presses have themselves been part of the transmission process, and often an important stimulus to oral composition.

In the case of interventions by fieldworkers, mediation can only change with the mediators themselves. Even in the nineteenth century, some fieldworkers showed their responsibility towards the culture they were presenting to their readership. Dave Harker cites the exemplary case of John Bell of Newcastle, whose *Rhymes of Northern Bards* (1812) showed a desire to print a large and varied collection without predetermined restrictions of genre (*Fakesong* 62, 72). The texts are largely drawn from oral repertoires but also include manuscripts and a headstone epitaph, with a minimum of interference in the text.

Bell's principles, however, are not universally accepted even today. Collectors have become more scrupulous in their attention to performances, and the singer's perception of a song as coherent is widely respected, but the desire for a "clean" text, without ellipses or dropped stanzas, is still usually decisive with mediators. The published work of important recent editors like

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[1] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (London: Sphere Books, 1967) 87-90. Recordings may "freeze" not only the repertoires of the singers involved, but those of others too. "The Trees They Do Grow High," recorded by Martin Carthy in 1965, was collected ten years later from a woman in Kinross, Scotland (Ailie Munroe, *The Folk Music Revival in Scotland* [London: Kahn and Averill, 1984] 177). The texts are almost identical, and probably closer than any performance based on a printed text could be, since a recording offers limitless access to a quasi-performance.

A. L. Lloyd and Roy Palmer still shows a high proportion of conflated texts.[1] One change, however, is unmistakable. Today, collectors are no longer alien to the performer. They are often from the same class and themselves makers and performers of songs, such as Ewan MacColl, Frankie Armstrong and Sam Richards.

The most consistent and principled attempt to print unmediated versions of traditional English and Scottish songs is undoubtedly Ewan MacColl's and Peggy Seeger's *Travellers' Songs from England and Scotland* (1977), and the high standard of their editing stands as a model for representing oral modes in another medium. Their collection includes many songs that would have been considered fragmentary and incomplete by most editors, who have preferred to publish composite or "clean" texts in the interests of providing a version suitable for performance. These interpolated passages displace the original performance, at best. At worst, they construct a bogus reality in line with the preconceptions of the editor, a practice which this thesis will substantiate on many occasions. Critical efforts in English still fall short of the standards of editors like the Nigerian John Pepper Clark, whose strictures on "the fairing hand" of editors gave the title to this chapter.

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[1] For other examples of this practice, see, Ralph Vaughan Williams and A. L. Lloyd, *Penguin Book of English Folk Songs* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959) 115 ("George Collins") and Gerald Porter, "Singing the Changes" (Umeå: University of Umeå, 1991) 45-57 ("Sir Hugh").

## 2. REPRESENTING WORK

The claim by artists to reproduce, rather than simply to represent, reality has been made since the time of the classical realists. It has given rise to the analogous concept of transparency, where a social context is "read through" a text or dramatic performance (Belsey 113). In historical studies, the concept (though not the term) was frequently applied in tracing the rise of social movements. In this way, songs became an aspect of oral history, as in Macaulay's *History of England* (1848) and the early work of A. L. Lloyd (1944). Where occupational songs were concerned, the idea gained further impetus from the tendency to regard them as having originated from rhythmic work songs. As late as 1975, Peter Kennedy felt able to assume a simple equivalence of song and milieu in a most improbable context by citing the idyllic "A-Beggin' I will go": "Probably the happiest tradesman [*sic*] at this particular time [the early nineteenth century] was the beggar:

For when a beggar's tired he can sit him down and rest." (494)

There are no grounds for believing that there can be a simple one-to-one relationship between the social conditions during the Napoleonic wars, when destitution was widespread, and the singing of a seventeenth century song at that time. This chapter questions the existence of such unproblematic correspondences. It discusses the question of representation with respect to work and workers. It considers how work is traditionally perceived, how it is expressed emblematically, and how it is represented in song through music, gesture, setting and language. Finally, it examines the durability of such representations in song transmission.

Work is central in constructing the paradigms of society. It informs the ceremonies and cultural artefacts of the dominant culture. Blue jeans, the laying of foundation stones, and perpetual motion machines as toys for yuppies all appropriate in their various ways the apparatus, rhythms and forces of the production process. Work is simultaneously an occupation, a resource, a setting, a transformation, a struggle. In representing work, not all of these aspects can be simultaneously evoked, but all are potentially present. Like all perceptions, they are subject to change in balance and composition. Many of the perceptions are embedded in the language itself. For example, the standard Victorian term for industrial workers, "factory hands," considered them as largely disembodied units of labour power. These perceptions are not static. The phrase now frequently used in announcements by local authorities (but never by private companies), "We are an equal opportunities employer," represents a new conception of work as reflecting a heterogeneous society.

English usage has confined the concept "work" within surprisingly narrow parameters. Within its structures, work has been perceived as one element in a series of antitheses. In particular, physical exertion ("hard work")

has frequently been set against natural talent, as in Thomas Edison's formulation, "Genius is one per cent inspiration, ninety nine per cent perspiration." The view of labour as literally "uninspired" goes back to Puritan times. Milton highlights the distinction: "*Either* man's work, *or* his own gifts" (sonnet "On His Blindness," line 10. My emphasis.).

This practice of definition by contraries extends to popular culture, such as proverbs, a traditional form which, through skilful selection by the oracles of established culture in church, school and the media, has become an instrument of cultural hegemony. Proverbially, work is contrasted with play: "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." It may also be seen as the reverse of inactivity: "The devil finds work for idle hands to do." These associations were augmented at the time of the Industrial Revolution by the binary oppositions *work/free time* and *at work/at home*. At the same time certain activities such as social, political and religious obligations, as well as eating, sleeping and caring for one's body, were for the first time set apart as "non-work" activities (Turner 36). Very few forms of cultural expression stand outside this dichotomy. One of the reasons occupational song can be unambiguously classified as "traditional" is precisely because of its holistic, rather than isolationist, view of work. As we shall see, this is largely achieved through the metaphorical extension of work activity.

The catchwords of recent years, "leisure" (from Latin *licere*, to permit) and "free time," therefore have an unexpressed Other, which is unpermitted, unfree, namely work. There is a further refinement in English usage. Not all labour is work. Raymond Williams has shown how work has become synonymous with *paid* labour, so that "my wife is not working" invariably refers, not to an unemployed woman ("My wife is out of work") but to an individual who runs a house and brings up children so that the husband may promote his career (*Keywords* 282).

These antitheses, recent in historical terms, are based on false or simplified perceptions of work as dedicated space, a discrete area fenced off from other life-activities, and from other types of work. On the one hand they fail to take into account the other functions of a workplace such as a well, forge or pithead; on the other they do not see the home or recreation area as places of productive activity. As a result, they are highly unstable categories: the recent and paradoxical expression "leisure industries" is representative of the confusion. They are not only liable to challenge from radical sociology, but from those elements of popular culture that are rooted in actual working conditions. Significantly, the concept of working life as standing in opposition to other life activities is quite alien to those aspects of workers' culture expressed in popular representations such as songs or trade union iconography.

Representations of work in popular culture may avoid the extreme reductionism of the binary oppositions illustrated above while still reflecting hegemonic and male-centred attitudes to labour. A title like "A Woman's

Work is Never Done" rejects the distinction between paid and unpaid labour, yet accepts the concept of work specific to women. The narrative of "Behind the Barley Knowe," on the other hand, where a husband and wife change roles for a day with comic results, simultaneously polices and transgresses the factitious divide between men's and women's work.

As we have seen, there seems to be a broad line of development in occupation-specific culture that is common to many trades and industries. At first, they are seen objectively, as a subject of curious or scurrilous comment. The many early broadsides with titles like "The Jolly Trades-Men" or "A Ballad of All the Trades" are typical of this stage. The work processes are seen from outside as simple phenomena. Later, workers develop their own forms of cultural expression, and the working process is foregrounded. In songs from this stage, the melody often varies to cover a range of the kinetic possibilities of that process, from the erotic to the parodic. At the same time, the act of working itself is often presented in a radically simplified and derivative form, performed by comic stereotypes or popular heroes. The myth of "The Big Hewer" in mining is one example. In time, the representation of work develops a variety and complexity of its own, expressed through wide variations in language, setting and figurative resources. Many examples, such as "Johnny Seddon" and "A Servant of the Company," will be discussed in the pages that follow. Like all developments in traditional song, these stages do not necessarily appear as consecutive in the documentary record, which simply reflects the activity of collectors or the proximity of street ballad publishers.[1]

Railway engineering, a very heterogeneous industry in terms of the composition of its workforce, offers an example of such a change in the perception of labour, a change that took place over a period of more than a century. Early songs that deal with the transformations in working life that the railways brought were produced locally wherever lines were being constructed, but they generally adopt the perspective of the passenger or amazed bystander. One result of this is the decentring of the many work processes involved, as in a Leicester broadside from about 1840, "The Wonderful Effects of the Leicester Railroad." The guiding theme, which acts as closure for almost every stanza, is that of the miraculous properties of steam power:

> You may ride up to London in three hours and a quarter,
> With nothing to drive but a kettle of water. (11-12)

Unlike contemporary weaving and mining songs, which were already well-established, work is portrayed (semi-humorously) as a purely scientific process rather than as a set of social relations. In the best traditions of Victorian

[1] The earliest known set of "John Barleycorn," for example, which dates from 1624, already displays a complex figurative scheme uniting several occupations, and the song has continued to be reworked by singers up to the present.

optimism, human labour is seen as something superseded, or at least invisible. The footplatemen, the driver and fireman, are nowhere mentioned. Instead, the song concerns itself with the displacement of the traditional callings associated with the stagecoach on the old toll road. The complex chain of occupations which serviced the coaching trade, figures which were still featuring strongly in the contemporary novels of Dickens and Thackeray, are associated metaphorically and by juxtaposition with cattle and chaff, part of the rural way of life that was rapidly being superseded:

> No, no, my good friends, now this rail road is finished,
> All coachmen and cattle henceforth shall be banished. . .
>
> The ostlers and innkeepers and such riff raff,
> The rail road will blow them away, just like chaff. (9-10, 25-26)

Political radicalism, which had already become a key marker of the ballads of other industries, is not yet foregrounded. Indeed, poverty and exploitation are explicitly associated with the times that are gone. There is a facetious attack on the wealth and indolence of the bankrupted stage-coach owners, and on "coach horses that eat up more corn in a year / Than would maintain three parts of the labouring poor" (29-30).

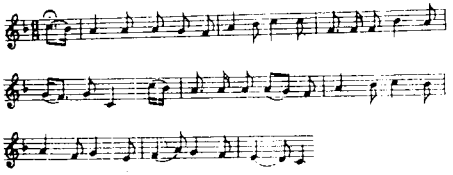
The Leicester broadside lacks specificity. The lack of local detail suggests it is based on a common exemplar, and in fact it is very similar to a broadside issued in Cheltenham at the time, "The Great Western Railroad." It identifies strongly with the Cheltenham broadside's concept of "alteration" (8), the transformation of society that of course also coincided with the interests of the railway companies.

Other representations of the same process were, however, becoming general through the dissemination of a new popular culture associated with the rise of a mobile workforce and the trade unions. The new songs that spoke for them expressed the changing working environment through dynamic variation in, for example, the music. Like language, music in performance acts as a centrifuge, dividing and dispersing the human subject before reassembling him or her in a new set of relations. To neglect the speaking music of the occupational song is to deny this polyvocal quality of the ballad, which is present in all ballad variation. One song that used the full expressive qualities of the music in this way was "Poor Paddy Works on the Railway," which describes an Irish navvy's experiences on various sites, from the Erie Canal in New York State to the Leeds and Selby Railway in Yorkshire. Although these projects were completed in the 1820s, the stanzas generally open with dates set in the 1840s. The song can therefore be dated with certainty to the years of large-scale emigration from Ireland. In Bakhtinian terms, this emigration was the centrifugal force which fractured all the authoritative codes and produced

new and equally temporary fusions. In addition to introducing new features of rebellion to English working class life, it brought new kinds of songmaking to Scotland, England and the eastern seaboard of North America.

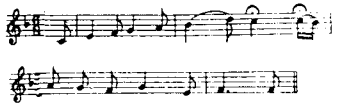
The song exists in several forms and has been claimed as "originally" a music hall song (Hugill 252), a navvies' work song (Lomax 48), or a sea shanty (Alden 1882, quoted in Hugill 252). The music stretches to cover the pace and bravado of sets collected in loco sheds in the North of England (Raven 31-32), the pick-wielding refrain sung by the navvies building the Erie Canal (Fowke and Glazer 84-85), or the rhythmic marching of the shanty sung to the turning of the capstan (Hugill 252-253).

The sequence of events, an Irishman's progress through the navvy camps of industrial England or the Great Lakes, has the marks of a personal narrative:



In Eighteen hundred and forty one,
My corduroy breeches I put on,
My corduroy breeches I put on
To work upon the railway, the railway.
"Paddy Works on the Railway" 1-4.

The bluff individualism, conveyed by the rather florid 6/8 time-signature, is largely alien to the traditional ballad but typical of the songs of the new industries. Individualism demands that a person be securely anchored, in lifestyle and culture, within a group that is itself not threatened. This might have described the rising prospects of the railway footplatemen, but was emphatically not true of the fractured, discontinuous life of the migrant labourer. The song resolves this in the refrain, which is far less ebullient, and indeed gives the song its commonest American title, "Weary of the Railway":

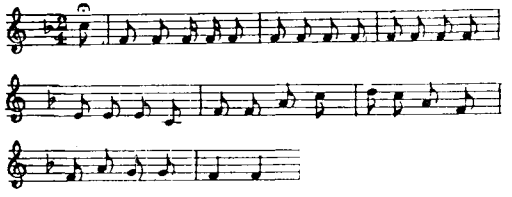


I'm weary of the railway,
Oh, poor Paddy works on the railway.
"Paddy Works on the Railway " 5-6.

As well as introducing a note of ennui and self-pity, the refrain endows the hero with a plurality of self-images by giving him the generic Irish name Paddy and moving to and fro between first and third pronouns. In this way,

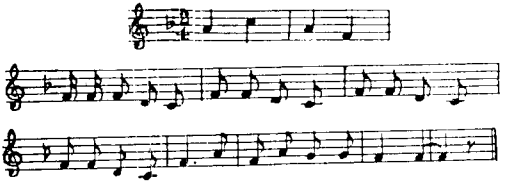
Poor Paddy the individual labourer, "I," the self-reflexive performer, and the Paddies (read "thick Paddies") of the navvy gangs as perceived by the dominant discourse of the day, were simultaneously present. The shift of narrative stance, from type to individual and to type-parody, is not simply an oral trope but a representation of a particular kind of performance which emphasises this dialogic quality. It is particularly characteristic of sets collected in the United States and Canada, where often "Paddy works on the Erie" (Meek 47).

In an English set collected in the loco sheds of Hellifield in West Yorkshire, the same dialogism was achieved through call-and-response, with a soloist leading with the verses and the railwaymen joining in the tongue-twisting chorus.[1] The verse is similar in words to the American-Canadian set, but it is now in brisk 2/4 time and sung as a single phrase:



In eighteen hundred and forty two
From Hartlepool I moved to Crewe
And found myself a job to do
A-working on the railway.
"Poor Paddy Works on the Railway" 26-29.

This led into a new refrain, introduced by a rallentando:



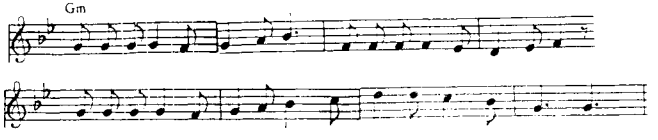
[1] This counterpoint of individual and group is very common in occupational songs. Another form of dialogue in performance is the debate between employer and employed, as in "The Coal-Owner and the Pitman's Wife," or between self-employed and wage-earner, as in "The Husbandman and the Servantman." In such cases the roles were often divided between two singers (A. L. Lloyd, *Come All Ye Bold Miners* [London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1978] 253-255; Michael Pickering and Tony Green eds., *Everyday Culture* [Milton Keynes: Open UP, 1987] 46).

I was wearing corduroy breeches,
Digging ditches,
Dodging hitches, pulling switches
I was working on the railway.
"Poor Paddy Works on the Railway" 11-14.

The lighthearted tone of the multiple rhymes in short phrases is far from the almost elegiac note of the "weary of the railway" refrain. "Paddy" has disappeared, and with it the switch of perspective. In its place there is an easy confidence, almost a parodic quality in the piled-up rhymes, and an inwardness that one associates with the development of group consciousness. In this case the musical evidence suggests that the impetus came from the music hall, which functioned precisely in this way: the workers who packed the galleries were being treated as mass consumers for the first time, but in their very numbers they could derive a sense of having a place to stand.

The two melodies speak antithetically for the constantly changing lives of the digging gangs. With this in mind they were successfully combined by Ewan MacColl in a single, tension-filled performance, and have entered the repertoire of the Folk Revival in this form. MacColl, who collected sets of both melodies himself, was only exercising the right of any song-gatherer. Singers may have more than one melody for the same song, accumulating a "tune kitty" for the moment when they are needed (e.g. Dunn 208). The tune then functions as *masquerade*, offering a momentary disguise for the continuing life of the song in the singer's repertoire, and as such is perceived by singers as a *different* song. The counterpoint of the music of "Poor Paddy" did not yet represent the full extension of the theme of exchange in the labour process.

A third melody, also in 6/8 time, seems to have been the one most popular with solo singers in Canada and the United States. It too has a different refrain:




Fil-lee-me-oo-ree-i-ree-ay
Fil-lee-me-oo-ree-i-ree-ay
Fil-lee-me-oo-ree-i-ree-ay
To work upon the railway.
"Pat Works on the Railway" 5-8.

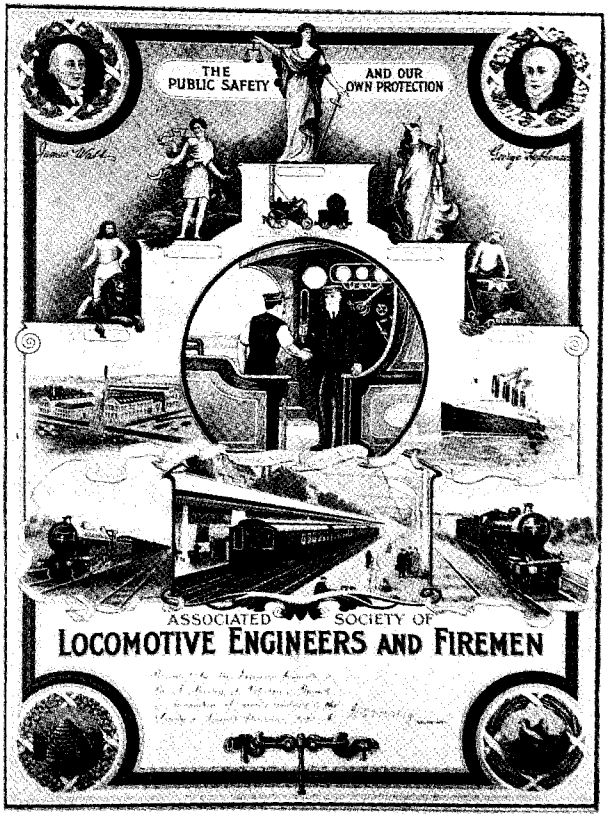
Nonsense choruses of this kind, like "Whack-fol-the-diddle O" and "Tooralooralooralay," are also part of that fracturing of the ballad voice that we have

already seen. They are performative lines of celebration, analogous to the revelry that accompanied the opening of a new tunnel in which navvies had been buried in a rockfall, or the inauguration of a new cut of a canal lined with the graves of workers who had died of swamp fever.

About fifty years after the appearance of "Poor Paddy Works on the Railway," the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen issued an elaborate certificate for services to the union. It remained in use until at least the 1920s. In pyramidal form, it predictably features the likenesses of the fathers of the industry, George Stephenson and James Watt. The pyramid is surmounted by the female figure of Justice, standing in front of a declaration of the Society's aims, "The Public Safety and our Own Protection." Further down the steps appear the stylised forms of Agriculture and Commerce, while below them Hercules and Vulcan strike passive poses. Within the pyramid there are representations of locomotives, a steamer, an Underground train and a factory. In the central roundel, an aged engine driver solemnly shakes hands with his fireman. The accompanying motto is the conventional syndicalist one, "Brothers in Unity for Mutual Help." In the lower corners, a beehive and doves symbolise Industry and Peace.

The theme of the design was for the nineteenth century an entirely new one: the united forces of labour within the context of a new technology. However, from the classical figures to the personifications of labour, the iconography is entirely lodged within the parameters of a patriarchal "high culture." For example, the presence of Hercules, signifying of course "Strength through Labour," also perpetuates the authority of classical learning. The symmetrical and pyramidal form, so reminiscent of the classic hierarchical structure of class society, is closer to a Baroque altarpiece than the forms of a dynamic new technology, as are the whorls and spandrels that frame the individual vignettes. Even the theme of solidarity has a jaded look. The representatives of the new skilled workforce appear to be giving each other much-needed physical support rather than presenting a determined and united front. However, at the very bottom of the certificate, an iron coupling and pin provides the only suggestion of the rise of a new iconography – a figurative reworking of the theme of strength in unity articulated in the central roundel. This image of the linked and the clasped has remained the single most powerful icon of the labour movement, and a topos for songwriters, as in Ewan MacColl's "We are the Engineers": "Two joined banners was our device when our banner first unfurled" (1).

Songs do not generally display the same derivative and reductionist features in their perception of work as the labour banners, although, as "A Woman's Work" and the Leicester broadside showed, they too are at the mercy of conventional wisdom.




Railways trade union membership certificate, c. 1890

More than a century later, however, with a fully developed tradition of occupational songs like "Poor Paddy" behind it, a complete change has taken place. The starting point for singers has become the working woman or man. As its ironic title suggests, "A Servant of the Company," sung by Brian Peters in the 1980s, is the account of the career of a railway worker before nationalisation. From beginning as a nine-year-old cleaner of locomotives to becoming a "top-leg driver" on the London-to-Scotland run, his welfare is subordinated to the needs of the company. Unlike the broadside or the trade union diploma, the song is entirely located within a specific matrix of operational detail:

> Dad passed foreman on the LMS Railway,
> Graduated in the course of time,
> Working like a navvy on the 4-6-4 turn,
> Toiling away on the Buxton line. (9-12)

The specific setting and the use of railway jargon ("the 4-6-4 turn") reflect the increasing *inwardness* of occupational songs in the modern period.

In other respects, too, "A Servant of the Company" differs from earlier occupational songs. One difference is in the way the discourse is imbricated in the narrative, rather than being presented dramatically. As in traditional ballads, occupations are often represented through the interaction of two or three central figures. The plot grows round some conflict arising from the occupations of the protagonists. They may be employer and employee ("The Parson and the Clerk"), or members of different trades or workplaces ("The Weaver and the Factory Maid"). Vladimir Propp identified the role of the hero or heroine as the decisive structural element in traditional tale morphology (5). Since the protagonists are usually not named, it is evident that "role" and "occupation" have become fused, and the direction of the narrative tends to be predicated on the features of one or more particular callings.

Another difference, which cuts across the particularity of the detail, is the detached ideological stance of "A Servant of the Company." As in many recent songs, its language challenges conventional thinking, the clichés which are inscribed by the authoritative discourse.[1] Unlike the icons of trade union design in the certificate illustrated above, the song uses catchphrases only to demonstrate their hollowness. The title itself draws ironic attention to the servile relationship involved in the struggle to "get ahead" (6), while the protagonist's grandiose self-assessment, presented in the form of submerged direct speech, is undercut by the rhetorical question that closes the song:

> Dad was *lord of his own creation*,
> Dad was *king of his own success*,
> He's got to be a driver on the LMS Railway,
> Everybody's heard of the LMS . . .
> [But] who's ever heard of me dear ol' Dad?
> 25-28, 32. My emphasis.

The irony points up the way he has internalised clichés about "the independent worker" without perceiving their inappropriateness to his own case. In this, the song exemplifies the counterhegemonic tendency of occupational songs.

In contrast to the Leicester broadside, originating outside the industry, the great specificity of reference in "A Servant of the Company" is typical of songs where the occupation is seen from inside. The difference is in the

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[1] Pat Cooksey similarly parodied media representations of the coal miners in "Underground Aristocrats," while Leon Rosselson set the shopworn language of property developers alongside vernacular speech in "Perspectives":

> "What do you feel?" said the land to the farmer.
> "Sweat on my brow," the farmer replied,
> "Sun on my skin," said the springtime lover,
> "Ball at my feet," the young boy cried.
> But the man whose eyes were made to measure
> Said, "Proud to invest in a high-yield area,
> Concrete and glass and a stake in the future." (1-7)

degree of inwardness, or *particularity*, shown in expressing the working environment. In many cases, such as the early broadsides, the particularity is a very simple one, extending only to tools or clothing. Occupational song shares this feature with other genres which depend heavily on devices of representation, such as drama:

> *Flavius.* Speak, what trade art thou?
> *First Commoner.* Why, sir, a carpenter.
> *Marullus.* Where is thy leather apron, and thy rule?
> *Julius Caesar* 1. 1. 5-7.

Clothes are such a powerful signifier of occupation that in ballads where women disguise themselves as soldiers or sailors, their changing into uniform is represented as the key transformation, sufficient in itself to prevent discovery. Since apparel is a gender as well as an occupational code, details of the travesty, the change of dress, are often minutely particularised even where the deception is quite transparent:

> She speedily was manly Rigg'd quite from skin to skirt
> Made of her hair a Perriwig & of her smock a shirt.
> Instead of a Quoif a hat she sought, for gown a doublet spoke
> For bodice a waistcoat bought[,] for Pettycoats a Cloke. (Dugaw 132).

With insider songs, of course, a greater particularity is demanded. It is achieved by a series of devices which indicate specific features of working life in song. These include imitative movements, the choice of a specific location, and above all the use of technical vocabulary or jargon.

Like many forms of work, singing is both oral and corporal. Reciters of the Talmud and the *Kalevala* poems are known for their distinctive rocking movements, while the silent, motionless stance of the modern, isolated reader is itself a powerful gesture associated with a specific development in the history of human consciousness.[1] Singers have often introduced mime and rhythmic sounds imitative of work processes into their performance. All occupations have their characteristic kinesis. In some cases the gestures and working movements are sufficiently distinct and well-known to stand for the trade itself. In the first chapter of Walter Scott's novel *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819), for example, the gesture of pulling an imaginary needle from knee to shoulder suffices to represent the tailor's trade without any further identification:

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[1] In England, the moment is caught by Geoffrey Chaucer in his *Hous of Fame* (c. 1379-80): "*domb as any stoon*, / Thou sittest at another book / Tyl fully daswed is thy look." (656-658. My italics)

> "What," said I, drawing my right hand, with the forefinger and thumb pressed together, nimbly from my right haunch to my left shoulder, "you have condescended to resume the paternal arts to which you were first bred – long stitches, ha, Dick?" (9)

In orature, such movements often accompany specific songs, such as the shuffling of feet to suggest the working of a loom, the hammering of clogs, or the clattering imitations of mill machinery.[1] So characteristic are these of the representation of some trades that they might suggest a direct progression from the rhythmic motion of worksongs. However, many of the gestures parody the motion of the *machine* rather than that of the operator, or mimic the non-rhythmic movements of solitary trades. They are representative, not transferred, gestures. Far from being attempts to reproduce the working milieu, they participate in the function of corporal movements as a whole, which is to act as a hypernarrative to the main discourse. This is why gestures often appear to release the singer to attempt ever more daring figurative associations, particularly in the direction of the subversive or the obscene.[2]

The importance of the setting in representations of work is in marked contrast to traditional ballads, which rarely locate the action precisely. If the setting of a Child ballad is specified, it is generally a name of social or atmospheric, rather than topographical, significance, such as "The Bailiff's Daughter of Islington" (Child 105). As "A Servant of the Company" showed, the setting of industrial songs is usually integral and significant, embedding the protagonists meaningfully in space and time. It frequently refers to a locality which is in some way particularised, by dialect, place names or concrete detail:

> To Hibbert and Platts [work]shop then I went i' th'Lackey Moor,
> And fun no little trouble to get in the lodge door;
> And then, by gum, so busy, they wur at it left and right,
> Unstripped in all their shirts, too, I thought they're going to fight.
> "Oldham Workshops" 15-18.

Specificity of this kind is an important aspect of representation in the occupational song. Indeed, Arnold Kettle suggested that the pub song "I Belong to Glasgow" gives a better account of the relations of men and women to their specific urban landscape than James Joyce's *Ulysses* (2. 133). Such songs

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[1] See A. L. Lloyd, *Folk Song in England* (London: Granada, 1975) 308; Ginette Dunn, *The Fellowship of Song* (London: Croom Helm, 1980) 105; Peter Kennedy ed., *Folk Songs of Britain and Ireland* (London: Cassell, 1975) 578.

[2] See, for example, Ian Russell's account of a performance of a parodic version of a song in South Yorkshire, where the gestures rendered the meaning unambiguous: "Parody and Performance," *Everyday Culture*, ed. Michael Pickering and Tony Green (Milton Keynes: Open UP 1987) 90.

would be difficult to adapt to other locations, and this represented a significant breach in the oral tradition by insider songs, a breach which was soon followed by the ballad market. While switches of location had been a favourite expedient of broadside printers in the seventeenth century, they did not suit the more precise and documentary nature of the Victorian commercial song.[1]

Other settings were not specified but particularised by being given the trappings of the workplace. The tendency of singers to pursue immanent meaning led to the construction of settings where the workplace was turned to figurative use. As the mill was the setting for amorous encounters in early ballads, so the kilns and furnaces of the nineteenth-century industrial landscape became the persistent *topos* of the Christian Hell:[2]

> I've walked at neet through Sheffield loyns [*lanes*] –
> Twere same as being i'hell –
> Where furnaces thrust out tongues of fire
> And reared like t'wind on t'fell.
> "The Dalesman's Litany" 25-28.

To a young Sheffield miner after the Second World War, parodying early beliefs in a miner's pact with the devil, the workplace was purely a hell of pain and endurance:

> Don't send your sons down the dark dreary mine,
> They'll be damned like the sinners in hell.
> "The Gresford Disaster" 31-32.

A few years later, Ron Angel drew on the same metaphor in his description of the garish vapours of a chemical works:

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[1] The practice was not entirely abandoned, even in quite circumstantial songs. A celebratory broadside, "The Scenes of Manchester" (c. 1840) was reprinted as "Birmingham Improving Daily" (Roy Palmer ed., *A Touch on the Times* [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974] 62-64).

[2] The explicit association of the new industrial order with Hell is a perception shared by poets as well as singers. Part of the case presented by Los against the industrial system in William Blake's *Milton* is the charge that it is part of Satan's Empire :

> O Satan, my youngest born, art thou not Prince of the Starry Hosts
> And of the Wheels of Heaven, to turn the Mills day & night? . . .
> Get to thy Labours at the Mills & leave me to my wrath . . .
> Thy work is Eternal Death with Mills & Ovens & Cauldrons.
> *Milton* 4. 9-10, 14, 17.

The convergence of William Blake's "dark Satanic mills" (*Milton* 1. 8) with one of the leading symbolic constructs of nineteenth century industrial song indicates that the interverbality of the song may coincide with the intertextuality of the printed word.

> I work and breathe among the fumes that trail across the sky.
> There's thunder all around me and poison in the air;
> There's a lousy smell that smacks of Hell and dust all in me hair.
> "Chemical Workers" 2-4.

It is plain that the suggested identity between the workplace and Hell was part of the subliminal discourse of unorganised dissent to the status quo. Songwriters spoke with an authority derived from an alternative tradition that was coherent and continuous.

Another way of representing work was through the use of its characteristic terminology. Close descriptions of working practices, often involving the use of dialect and detailed terms for machine parts and work processes, act in practice as a selective instrument to narrow the target audience, giving a sense of intimacy, inwardness, and shared experience. Within the song they often have a defining function, both inclusive and exclusive in their specificity. Often a single expression stands for a whole occupation, serving to mark a figure both instrumentally and expressively as an insider. In other cases the lack of skilled experience and a command of the technical language to express it serve equally to identify an outsider. Thus the homilies of the parson in "The Poor Cotton Weaver" (Appendix III) are suspect simply because he has never "picked o'er" [thrown the weaver's shuttle]:

> Our [parish] church parson kept tellin' us long,
> We should have better times if we'd but hold our tongues . . .
> I know he lives weel by backbitin' the de'il,
> But he never picked o'er in his life. (7-8, 11-12)

In one of the few books to integrate working songs into the context of literary and social discourse, David Craig has considered the use of working terms. He considers them to be simple *transcriptions* of working practice, because "the worker has to cope with the stubbornness of materials. He [*sic*] cannot escape into the less solid realm of words, concepts, figures or any of the other *renderings* of reality" (*Real Foundations* 298. Original emphasis).

Analysis of occupational songs, however, shows that terms are used precisely to give access to the "less solid realm of words, concepts, figures." Perhaps a majority of the terms are used figuratively. Since metaphor creation moves from the concrete to the abstract, from the specific to the general principle, jargon words were obvious candidates. Technical terms are for insiders, but when in place in a sequence of operations, their meaning can often be fathomed even by outsiders. When figuratively used, and therefore no longer particularised in a work process, even a dense web of terms can be unravelled. This is most readily seen in erotic songs:

> The cords of my lams, jacks and treadles at length they began to give way.
> The bobbin I had in my shuttle, the weft in it no longer would stay.
> Her lathe it went bang to and fro, my main treadle still kept in tune,
> My pickers went nicketty-nack all the time I was squaring her loom.
> "The Bury New Loom" 13-16.

In this case the stability of the term, which functions in single, not multiple meanings, has been subverted so as to undermine hegemonic categories of work and play.

Whatever the specific function of gesture, setting and jargon, their effect is to increase the particularity of a song. As a result, occupations rarely change in oral transmission. A list of relative variability in song transmission might read:

> *very stable*: sounds - stanzaic pattern - narrative structure.
> *stable*: **occupation** - figurative language.
> *unstable*: melody - gender - supernatural elements - incipit - implicit sexual detail.
> *very unstable*: locality - names of protagonists - titles - closure - explicit sexual detail.[1]

It will be seen that occupations are usually the social detail which varies least in transmission. They are locked into the narrative and figurative scheme in a way that, for example, place names, titles and supernatural elements are not. Of the many thousands of occupational songs examined for this thesis, only about twenty have an unstable occupational marker, and of these, none features actual representations of work. Switching results from two conflicting tendencies, *convergence* as a result of similarities between melodies, or between contiguous occupations,[2] and *divergence* as a result of new conditions making the traditional connotations inoperable. These new conditions include

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[1] This table is based on arguments set out in Gerald Porter, "Singing the Changes: Variation in Four Traditional Ballads" (Umeå, University of Umeå, 1991). For reasons given earlier, the localities of occupational songs may be relatively stable.

[2] For the exchange of verses between Scottish sets of "The Brewer Lad," "The Collier Laddie" and "The Roving Ploughboy-O" as a result of a shared melody, see Porter, "Singing the Changes" 41-43. As the distinction between the collier as transporter of coal and the collier as miner became blurred, a simultaneous crossover of songs took place. As we have seen, the similarity of the mason's and bricklayer's trades led to "The Bricklaying Boy" and "The Stone Cutter's Boy" becoming interchangeable.

extreme geographical displacement,[1] the change from a rural to an industrial setting,[2] and a break between broadside and oral traditions.[3]

Very few songs have been able to pass smoothly from one occupation to another without incongruity. Only two have a wide circulation, "The Young Trooper Cut Down in His Prime" and "Collier Lads," and their fluidity is precisely because they lack the specific gestures, setting and language described above. They have generalised settings and a minimum of specific detail. In its full extension from Essex to Texas, "The Young Trooper" is represented by at least eleven distinct protagonist roles including in England a sailor, a prostitute and a Prime Minister, and in America, a lumberjack, a baseball player and a cowboy. Its many changes in transmission are underpinned by a very stable macro-structure which, exceptionally, hinges on narrative markers which are conceptual rather than occupational.[4]

The other variable-occupation song, "Collier Lads," is widely sung in the north of England. It is one of a number of songs which equate sexual desirability with the universal sense among skilled workers of the uniqueness and attractiveness of their own craft.[5] At the same time, the sum of its versions, seen diachronically, represents in miniature the changes taking place in the relations between seven different occupations as the Industrial Revolution gained momentum. It is known variously as "My Mother Sent me to the Well," "Oh the Bonny Fisher Lad" or "The Collier Lass (or Lads)," and portrays a girl weighing up the eligibility of her various suitors. The set printed here, "The Collier Lass," was not collected until 1952 but suits conditions prevailing at the beginning of the nineteenth century:

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1 Many English occupational songs, such as "Jim the Carter Lad," "Canada I O" and the mining lament "The Blantyre Explosion," were reworked as Canadian logging or Texan cowboy songs (Edith Fowke ed., *Penguin Book of Canadian Folk Songs* [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981] 198-199; *Cowboy Songs, Ballads and Cattle Calls from Texas* 2).

2 "The Farmer's Boy" reappears as "The Lucky Factory Boy," "The Pretty Ploughboy" became "The Pretty Factory Boy," and "Jim the Carter Lad" was reworked as "Joe the Factory Lad." The noticeable instability of "Jim the Carter Lad" (see note above) may be a result of its having originated in the Victorian music hall and been taken into the repertoires of singers of disparate backgrounds.

3 For example, "The Constant Farmer's Son" and "Bruton Town" (a broadside and a song related to an early folk-narrative) had quite distinct developments (see Gerald Porter, "Untangling the Bramble Briar; A Structural Approach" in Heikki Nyyssönen ed., *Working Papers on Structure and Function in Discourse* [Oulu, Finland: Publications of the Department of English, University of Oulu, 1982]: 44-52). "The Weaver and the Factory Maid" had various male and female protagonists on broadsides, including a sailor and a chambermaid, before singers in West Yorkshire settled it into a weaving context.

4 For discussion, see Porter, "Singing the Changes" 17-24.

5 Another well-known example is the sailors' song "Tarry Trousers," where a girl complains:

> My mother wants me to wed with a tailor,
> And not give me my heart's delight,
> But give me the man with the tarry trousers,
> That shines to me like diamonds bright.'(17-20)

My mother sent me for some water
For some water her sent me
And in the well I nearly tumbled
When my collier lad came whistling me.

My mother said if I wed a collier
It will break her tender heart;
But I do[n't] care what my mother tells me,
A collier I'll have for my sweetheart.

Colliers they getting gold and silver,
Nailers getting nothing but brass,
So what wise wench could marry a nailer
Whiles there's plenty of collier lads?

At this stage, colliers were independent operatives still responsible for transporting their coal to the consumers, while the fortunes of nailmakers were in decline as a result of rapid mechanisation. A little later, a new site of conflict was introduced, the factory, and the rival is a weaver, or a bobber who winds the yarn on to the spools. The threat to the livelihood of the independent craftsman posed by the factory system is a recurring theme of occupational songs of this period.[1] It will be seen that the change of occupation here has been performed more or less by simple substitution, a rare phenomenon in occupational songs:[2]

Who'd get married to a two-loom weaver[?]
"Collier Lads" 7.

Who'd be bothered with a naughty bobber[?]
"I'll have a Collier for My Sweetheart" 7.

At the time of the Napoleonic wars, the song passed into military settings as an example of inter-service rivalry:

Sailor Lads gets Gold and Silver
Soldier Lads gets nought but brass
"My Mother Sent me to the Well," lines 9-10.

Finally, in a version that was not collected until 1963, a fisherman is ranked above both:

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[1] See, for example, "The Weaver and the Factory Maid" (Appendix I).

[2] The parallel may be even closer, because the last line of three of the songs has the false rhyme *brass/lads*. It is likely that this replaces a line like "When she could be a collier's lass," which is a closer rhyme.

A sailor aa will never marry
Nor soldier, for he's got nae brass,
But I will have a fisher lad,
Because I am a fisher lass.
"Oh the Bonny Fisher Lad," lines 13-16.

These five sets, separated by nearly two hundred years, have maintained in their variety the economy of representation that is characteristic of the occupational song, one which depends for its force and deeper meaning on an envelope of cultural reference, which includes the context provided by other singing repertoires. At the same time, the song has a complexity of its own. The perspective throughout is a woman's, and by avoiding circumstantial detail like names and places, the song manages to speak simultaneously at an individual and a group level. Like most occupational songs, love and labour are fused. In all sets the arrangement is hierarchic in that the hero is seen in terms of his alleged superior earning power over another, named group. Untypically, the blunt message is that relationships are based on money.

In conclusion, it is clear that it is the inwardness of representations of work, tied to other life processes, that gives the occupational songs their cohesion. In this respect the representations of work outlined here differ in many respects from other art forms expressive of workers' culture. The crucial difference is the way the viewpoint of the established system is displaced – the "otherness" of labouring men by the distinction of the secure individual, and the competitive ethic of the marketplace by the spirit of strength in unity. At the same time the narratives routinely transgress the norms of the ruling discourse, particularly through the literal displacement of authority, the ship's captain by the woman in disguise, the gamekeeper by the poacher, the magistrates by the highwayman, and the recruiting sergeant by the deserter. In this way the arena of debate could be shifted to the song itself, where there was a certainty of winning.

This chapter has suggested that, because of their performing conditions, occupational songs draw on a mass of circumstantial detail peculiar to work processes, and this leads to a high degree of transparency. Moreover, because of a lack of direct comment by the maker, representations in traditional song do not often draw attention to themselves in the way that the authorial intrusions of novelists like George Eliot and Thomas Hardy do, and are therefore more likely to be regarded as "real." The songs have also avoided many of the stylisations, based on a pastiche of systematised signifiers, that are characteristic of much "official" workers culture. However, it is not true to say that working life is expressed in song "as it is." It is represented more figuratively than realistically. The surface is constantly disrupted by metaphors or symbolic modes which extend the frame of reference to points of conflict and change in society, and thereby totalise the song.

## 3. OCCUPATION AS METAPHOR

> Even that vulgar and Tavern-Musick, which makes one man merry, and another mad, strikes in me a deep fit of devotion . . . it is an Hieroglyphical and shadowed lesson of the whole World.
>
> Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici* (1642) 80.

*The accretion of occupational signifiers*

The second chapter has established that work is not literally represented in song. As John Fowles writes, "One cannot describe reality, only give metaphors that indicate it" (139). Rather than being a separate activity, work is perceived in song as a *signifier*, and specifically an instrument for entering and questioning both the mindsets of the individual worker *and* the authoritative discourse. This chapter will examine how the attributes of particular occupations came to be codified so that they played a decisive part in role marking, and how they were represented in a metaphorical relation to other life experiences such as courtship and war. It is primarily concerned with the analogic function of occupations, as the *vehicle* rather than the *tenor* of metaphor, in the terminology of I. A. Richards (Hawkes 61).

An early nineteenth century Irish song, "The Bantry Girls' Lament," encapsulates the process of drawing metaphors from working life:

> Oh, who will plough the field now, or who will sell the corn?
> Oh, who will wash the sheep now and have them nicely shorn?
> The stack that's in the haggard, unthrashed it may remain
> Since Johnny went a-thrashing the dirty king of Spain. (1-4)

In the last line, the specific activity associated with the farm labourer has, by metaphoric extension, a function outside its immediate sphere. The physical working environment could hardly be more concretely evoked than in the reference to "the stack that's in the haggard [*clearing*]," and the fact of Johnny being a thresher has been enlarged from a character trait into a larger system of role.

The incorporation of occupations into figurative contexts is seen developing in the earliest surviving songs, where they have a *representative* quality. In "The King and Miller of Mansfield" (Percy 3. 178) or "The Lord of Lorn and the False Steward" (Child 271), the miller's or the steward's livelihoods were perceived to be as much a locating marker as noble or kingly rank. Bishop Percy's title for the first broadside, "The Ballad of Luther, the Pope, a Cardinal and a Husbandman," shows that occupations were already being seen not as circumstantial detail but as the defining characteristic of an individual,

with the same indicative status as a title or a name.[1] As we saw in the case of the miller, particular occupations are associated not only with certain tools and settings but with character traits and even physical appearance. These occupational signifiers gradually come to pervade the narrative and figurative codes of the song and cannot easily be changed in the pressing conditions of oral performance. The signifiers function as a strongly cohesive force within groups of ballads featuring a particular occupation, and songs containing such markers only rarely appear in the context of other trades. In short, they have the condensing force of metaphor. If a song passes into another area where some aspects of the metaphor have little signifying power, it may lose coherence and decline from a sustained narrative into a string of disjointed episodes, and the occupational element may once more become peripheral. This happened to "The Butcher Boy" in its migration to the United States and back again. In the process, the protagonist became a railroad worker, and eventually the song disintegrated into a series of loosely-associated floating verses.

Particularity was also significantly developed in insider songs that came to be the expression of the occupation group itself, part of a tradition of articulating common concerns in a form which might then be passed on and particularised within the industry. This was a continuing process. The occupational signifiers increased as songs became part of the communal expression of particular occupations, existing in loose association with other forms of cultural expression like sayings and political cartoons.

The gradual accretion of specific signifiers can be traced through a single calling. Tailoring is an example of a skilled trade which in many societies has gathered around it a large body of traditional lore. Songs written about tailors should not be seen in isolation but as part of a continuum embracing proverbs, jokes, caricatures and novels. According to this collective tradition, tailoring is a melancholy and petty calling which is ripe for satire. In the broadsides, tailors did occasionally have successful sexual adventures, but oral sets, at least in England, invariably show them as bunglers and cuckolds in love (see, for example, "The Groggy Old Tailor" and "Harry the Tailor").[2]

The dominant image is one of diminutive stature. The saying "nine tailors make a man" has been explained as being a corruption of *tellers*, the bells rung for a funeral, but the proverb in almost its present form is known

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[1] Thomas Percy, ed., *Reliques of Ancient English Poesie* (1765. Reprint of 1886 ed. by H. B. Wheatley. 3 vols. New York: Dover Publications, 1966) 3.178. The title of the first English broadside ballad is disputed, but this sheet from the Pepys collection is often named as such (by, for example, H. E. Rollins ed., *The Pepys Ballads* [8 vols. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1929-32] 1. ix).

[2] The folklore of individual occupations has been only partially studied in England, but there is an account of tailors in the early nineteenth century in E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971) 282-285. It is a measure of the strength of this traditional lore that Charles Kingsley found it difficult to establish a tailor as a credible and consistent protagonist for his novel *Alton Locke* (1850).

from as early as the seventeenth century.[1] A number of figurative terms were applied to their trade, encapsulated in a passage in George Meredith's novel *Evan Harington* (1861) where a reference to a tailor in aristocratic circles provokes the outburst, "Shop! Shears! Geese! Cabbage! Snip! Nine to a man!" (446) "Cabbage" was the name given to the scraps of cloth which they retained, often dishonestly, for their own use. The "goose," a smoothing iron shaped like the bird's neck, and the measuring rod known as the "yard," gave rise to many ribald verses in the broadsides because of their double meaning:

> O the Taylor, the fine and frisking Taylor,
> The Taylor that gives no good regard;
> He never goes to measure Lace,
> But his Maid, but his Maid, but his Maid holds out his Yard.
> "A Ballad of All the Trades" 25-28.

These expressions cumulatively set up a comical frame for their operations, and by contiguity reduced the tailors' collective stature.

Since the connotations of trades were exploited in song after song, some achieved the status of myths, fully worked out symbolic narratives drawing on a set of signifiers that transcends the individual songmaker. They often coalesced around names like "Jack" for the sailor, "Jim" for the carter, "Jarvis" for the coachman, "Dick" or "Robin" for the ploughboy. These generic names stood in stark contrast to the derogatory and simplistic epithets used by the dominant discourse, such as "Hodge" for the country labourer.[2]

One such symbolic narrative grew around the tailor. At the beginning of the eighteenth century a new epithet, "louse pricking," began to appear in print for the tailoring trade.[3] The expression derives from an elaborate mock-heroic oral tradition in which the tailor engages a louse in combat with the weapons nearest to hand. It survives in a seventeenth-century broadside "The Warlike Taylor or, A true Relation of a great Fight between a Taylor and a Louse, most Heroicly performed in Black-Fryers, at the sign of the three flying Chamber-Pots." The accompanying woodcuts of "Tom ye taler & his wife Ione" with a crab [*sic*] emblematically reproduce the figures of the ballad, while intro-

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[1] Tarlton's Jests C1 (1613): "Two taylors goes to a man." Quoted in John Simpson, ed. *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985) 162.

[2] E.g. "Jim the Carter Lad" on *Jack of All Trades: The Folk Songs of Britain Vol. 3.* Topic 12T 159, 1961, Side B, Band 9; "Jarvis the Coachman's Happy Deliverance from the Gibbet" in John Holloway and Joan Black, *Later English Broadside Ballads* [I] (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975) 139.

[3] See the Oxford English Dictionary IX. 50: "louse."

ducing sexual overtones that are only covert in the text.[1] An oral set from Warwickshire shows the plot in its essentials surviving into this century:

> The tailor were sat at work (*twice repeated*)
> Picked a louse off his shirt.
>
> With his needle he made a sword, (*twice repeated*)
> Stabbed the louse on the board. . . .
>
> With his scissors he made some shears (*twice repeated*)
> Snipped off the louse's ears.
>
> "The Proud Tailor," stanzas 2, 3, 5.

Since there is no perfect fit between creative and interpretive codes, metaphoric narratives of this kind do not unambiguously "represent" something else. The diminutive combat can be understood in more than one way, depending on the listener. There is at least a double play of signification, a positive self-referential one within the internal structure, and a negative one in the extra-referential stance proposed to the audience by gesture and cultural expectations, including of course an assumed familiarity with analogous narratives. In this way the tailor's role was simultaneously undermined *and* reinforced. Therefore squibs of this kind did no lasting harm to their victims. On the contrary, the satire could be "turned," and this happened on several occasions at times when the tailors could speak with a united voice. In the 1690s the tailors retaliated with broadsides like "The Rampant Taylor or, the Nineteen Lasses in Distress," presenting themselves as desirable lovers and making use of the same field of metaphors. A second opportunity occurred in the early nineteenth century, when their numbers had increased to the point where they had become the fifth largest occupation group. At the same time they suffered a decline in status and became absorbed into the mass of garment outworkers. As a result, many became active in the trade union movement and turned the mock-chivalric image to good account by calling themselves "Knights of the Needle" (Thompson 259, 283). Meanwhile, the burlesques continued to appear. Once again, type and parody existed in counterpoint.

Trades that did not develop into "insider" occupations with an independent singing tradition do not seem to have become associated with specific figurative language in the same way. Begging, for example, a necessary occupation in any society that does not provide for its disadvantaged, has never developed a stable complement of signifiers, perhaps because beggars, like the present-day unemployed, do not form a cohesive social group. Significantly,

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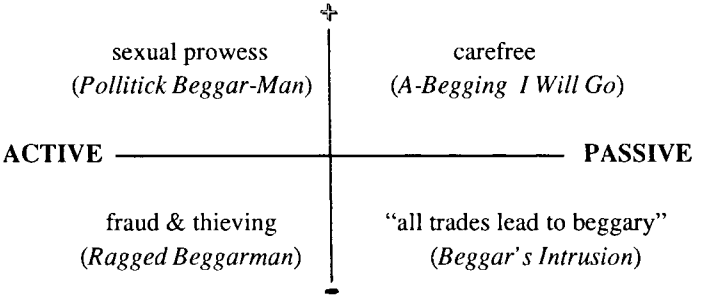
[1] The bawdy tale of "The Crabfish" had been widely-known and reproduced in popular literature since the Middle Ages (A. L. Lloyd, *Folk Song in England* [London: Granada, 1975] 58).

they were more a staple theme of the broadside trade than of the oral tradition, where such songs are virtually limited to "The Jolly Beggar" and "A-Begging I will Go." It is hard to believe that the lines "A man would be daft to be a king / When beggars live so well" (25-26) can ever have been more than a bitter mockery to homeless men and women hounded from parish to parish. Perhaps as a result of this evident distance from the makers of the songs, beggars are associated simultaneously with mutually conflicting qualities (**Fig. 2**). They are envied for their independence and sexual conquests, and despised for their thieving and for occupying the lowest end of the social scale.

**Fig. 2. Positive and negative attributes of beggary in song (+ = positive qualities; - = negative qualities).**




It is clear from Figure 2 that beggars are not part of any stable, fully worked-out metaphorical scheme. Such a development seems to have depended on the songs being firmly established in the oral tradition, where the stability of the figures was part of the way oral transmission worked.

*The development of a metaphorical scheme*

Because of the comparative rarity of motion songs to accompany work in English, it follows that songs could equally well be sung elsewhere. Other social activities would then be the order of the day, and those involved would not necessarily all have been working at the same trade. For them, for the convenience of the singer, and for the added delight of the workers themselves, the trade would be looked at obliquely, often provokingly, through the agency of metaphor.

Through metaphor, work processes are merged with other life experience. This has so long been a feature of English discourse that in some cases figurative language has achieved fusion. The signified has come to cover the signifier and render it invisible, catachretic, a "dead" metaphor. In such cases, there is no longer a free play of meaning. This fossilisation has happened in varying degrees to many terms from one of the longest-established industries, weaving. *Text* has no remaining weaving connotations, while *texture* still does. References to *life's rich tapestry* and its *warp and weft* have become

clichés, but it is difficult to activate the residual weaving context of recent coinages like the *space shuttle* or the *Glasgow shuttle*.

However, it is in the nature of metaphors to create *new* meanings, and therefore new realities. It comes naturally to the literary theorist Terry Eagleton to invert a stale textile metaphor by describing the way deconstruction "reverse[s] the imposing tapestry [of received history] in order to expose in all its unglamorously dishevelled tangle the threads constituting the well-heeled image it presents to the world" (*Against the Grain* 80). The abundance of new meanings that working processes suggest are a consequence of work being itself the source of transformations, the making of metaphors of the natural world. Food is the metaphor of earth, steam power the metaphor of water, the laser the metaphor of light. As Roman Jakobson showed, condensing two meanings together in this way is also one of the primary operations of human language, and by extension, of song (58). Since speech, and orature, is polyvalent and makes use of multiple repetitions and restatements, metaphorical language is an important part of its way of operating. Finally, "way of talking" and "way of life" are closely related (Hawkes 78), so that our means of oral expression continues our functional expression, which includes our occupation. In this way work can be pointedly linked with other aspects of our lives such as the seasonal round, the growth of a holistic view of the human body, or the rites of passage.

Metaphors drawn from work emphasise the enmeshment of life and cultural expression. They deny the imposed opposition between work and "free" time, an opposition which, as we have seen, is a comparatively recent one. The rapid setting up of the railway network, for example, was immediately fused by singers with their other life experience.[1] It seemed natural for the son of a railwayman in Jack Common's *Kiddar's Luck* (1951) to write of his shaken beliefs in terms of his father's occupation: "My religious meditations were beginning to bang into the buffers" (80). Conversely, a nineteenth-century Birmingham broadside on the opening of the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway concluded with a calculated ambiguity on the future conduct of its passengers:

> And now my song is almost done,
> I hope I have offended none,
> May they never off the incline run,
> On the Oxford and Hampton Railway.
> "Pennyworth of Fun!" 53-56.

[1] See Gerald Porter, "Working Up Steam: The Making of a New Metaphor," *Språket som kulturspegel*, ed. K-J. Danell, G. Persson and A. Stedje (Umeå: University of Umeå, 1991) 183-190.

"Incline" here is simultaneously a sloping stretch of track and a tendency to moral transgression. For the first time in English the resources of the word had been extended to give them both literal and metaphorical force, creating a double focus by constantly sliding the signified under the signifier.[1]

A particularly fruitful area was the fusion of the worker with some specific feature of the workplace. In some cases this led to an extended identification with a complex piece of machinery such as a loom or (as above) a locomotive. When an impoverished handloom weaver is turned away by the clothmaster, he exclaims, "I've woven myself to th'fur end" ("The Poor Cotton Weaver" 48). He thereby establishes a subversive identity between himself and the cloth he produces, between agent and substance, and in this way finds a site of potential resistance from which he and his wife Margit can, if necessary, "fight, blood up to th'een" (58).

It is important to emphasise that such transformations, the fusion of the worker with his or her material surroundings, were not confined to song. They were a regular feature of all aspects of the vernacular. The Durham miner Tommy Armstrong expressed his relations with his audience in terms of the valve used for draining water from a mine:

> When you're the "Pitman's Poet" an' looked up to for it, wy if a disaster o[r] a strike goes by wi'oot a song from you they say: "What's wi' Tommy Armstrong? Has someone *drov a spigot* in him an' let oot aal the inspiration?" (Forbes 17. My emphasis)

They dominate the verses on grave headstones, which often use extended metaphors similar to those in occupational songs. An engine driver killed when a boiler exploded in 1844 becomes one with his locomotive:

> My engine now is cold and still.
> No water does my boiler fill.
> My coke affords its flames no more.
> My days of usefulness are o'er, *etc.* (Palmer, *Strike* 35)

In other cases it is the workplace itself that is subsumed into the human body, as in this eighteenth century epitaph on a blacksmith:

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[1] The earliest use given by OED for "incline" used concretely of a geographical feature is 1846 (Second edition. Oxford:Oxford UP, 1989: 7. 800). "Pennyworth of Fun!" must have been published soon after the opening of the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway in 1852.

My sledge & anvil be declined
My bellows too have lost their wind;
My fire's extinct, my forge decayed,
My coals are spent, my iron's gone,
My nails are drove, my work is done.
Eagle and Carnell 248.

Unlike the handloom weaver, however, these examples serve society rather than seek to master it. In the Renaissance, extended metaphors of this kind were a favourite trope to express the wholeness of life. In the second epitaph, the signified (the blacksmith) controls the signifier (his forge and its fittings), and so reflects a structure operating within society itself, the skilled workman's "pride in his tools," which replaces any meaningful say in other aspects of his work relations. The lines on the engine driver show a similar quiescent attitude.

Although metaphors usually start from resemblance and play on difference, figurative language may assume the randomness of the sign, losing any direct sequential connection with the occupation. The symbolic tie forces listeners to construct their own set of relationships. This is particularly true with early occupational ballads, where metaphorical associations, especially in erotic contexts, seem to have been made almost at random. Occupations did not merely function as metaphors themselves. They became the centre of a mesh of associations which functioned as "fixed sets," figures which became for a time exclusively associated with one calling or another. Often these were in fields of primary association, such as materials or colours. There is, for example, a generic quality about the colour references in early colliers' songs which is peculiar to that occupation at that time. The word "collier" was used to describe two or more distinct occupations, the seaman or waggoner who transported the coal, and later the miner himself. As we have seen, songs largely ignored the distinction. Their imagery functions metonymically, associating the collier with particular physical features, and his lover with finery and money. In some cases this corresponds to the physical conditions of handling coal. Unlike the sailor whose tarry trousers led to ridicule in songs and frequent social ostracism,[1] the collier is admired in spite of his grime:

Though he be black he's bonnie.
"The Collier Laddie" (2) 38.

[1] See the popular song "Tarry Trousers," or "Jack Tar." In the Copper family of Sussex, "[Mother] would not even allow Grand-dad to sing 'Jack Tar' because of the line, 'Oh, you're dirty love and you're flirty love and you smell so of tar.'" Michael Grosvenor Myer, "An Unpublished Copper Family Song," *Folk Music Journal* (London, 1989): 5. 623.

With teeth as white as ivory and eyes as black as sloes,
You'll know a jolly collier wherever he goes.
"The North Country Collier" 7-8.

However, his specific working conditions do not explain why the collier invariably has "a bonny blue eye" or "dark blue eyes" (Richards 133; Maguire 1973), or why his girl is particularly associated with gold, in her eyes, her hair, or pressed into her hands:

She'd a sky-blue ribbon in her hair,
And her eyes like gowd were glancin.
"The Collier Laddie" (1) 7-8.

And sky-blue ribbons in her hair
Where gold and jewels were glancing.
"The Collier Laddie" (2) 7-8.

When another suitor, a nobleman, attempts to win her by a crude display of wealth, it is by means of the same signifier:

He shawed her gowd in gowpins [*handfuls*].
"The Collier's Bonnie Lassie" 13.

These are no longer random stylistic devices but social signifiers. The colour in each case here indicates the larger social and economic realities that lie behind each of the protagonists.

Since metaphor draws not only on the immediate environment but on the total resources of a culture, a metaphorical scheme often lay ready to hand, drawing on one of the great narratives of the dominant culture such as a folk hero like Robin Hood or established religion. Christianity was often fused with the working environment. The growth of the trade union movement in the nineteenth century led to the appearance of metaphors based on literary and biblical allusions: employers were represented as Pharaohs enslaving their subject people, and thereby inviting God's judgement, while the blackleg became a Judas (Vicinus 23).

Another powerful set of relationships was what Thomas Carlyle described as the way "cash payment has become the sole nexus of man and man (*sic*)" (2.38). Songmakers were able to enter the system by the use of metaphors that had come to imply the whole world of profit-related activity. One of these was the miller's dusty appearance, which from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth was invariably linked with his shady financial deals:

> The miller with his golden thumb,
> And his dusty necke; If that he grind but two bushels,
> He needs must steal a peck.
> "Turner's Dish of Lentten Stuffe" 37-40.

> Then there's the dusty miller, where's a bigger rogue than he?
> "A Chapter of Cheats" 14.

Within the oral tradition, this association was so powerful that Robert Burns, who disdained every aspect of the commercial world except the excise, felt bound to respect its values in "The Dusty Miller":

> Hey, the dusty miller,
> And his dusty coat;
> He will win a shilling
> Or [*before*] he spend a groat. (1-4)

As David Craig commented, "In all the songs of Burns, which are the biggest single body of peasant songs that we have, there is only one that mingles love, money and trade like ["The Waggoner"], namely 'the Dusty Miller'" (61).

Even simple metaphors of this kind have a tendency to operate as a system, to refer outside themselves to an understood set of relationships. When George Eliot writes that Silas Marner, cut off from his weaver's trade, is like a handle that has no meaning standing apart (25), she is creating a new image, but at the same time she is drawing on a super-metaphor of her time, the Utilitarian thesis of society as a great machine, where each worker fills an allotted place in the productive cycle. G. Lakoff and M. Johnson say that structural metaphors of this kind are "basic to Western industrial societies" (66). They are mutually reinforcing: work relations which might have developed chaotically in response to new conditions, are put in place, and thereby legitimised, by being fused with other life processes. Claude Lévi-Strauss called this *bricolage* and said that it guaranteed the "convertibility of ideas between different levels of social reality" (Hawkes 83, 88).

In occupational song, which starts from a position *outside* the prevailing codes, this "convertibility" in metaphor often works to question the legitimacy of established norms. It achieves this by provocative juxtaposition. When the dead miners of Gresford are described as having "worked out their shift & it's now they must lie / In the darkness until Judgment Day" ("The Gresford Disaster" 23-24), their lives are represented as being ones of unbroken work, with death as their long-awaited "rest." This metaphorical representation of their lifespan as one long working day undermines the binary division of life into work and play. By implanting elements of one in the other, it offers an ordering of reality that compels the listener to take up a critical stance.

The lack of a normative aspect to metaphor is even more pronounced in the large genre of travesty ballads where disguise acts as a metaphor of "captured" role-positions, a construction of gender. The women who usurp men's positions as highwaymen ("Sovay"), sailors ("The Female Cabin Boy") or engineers ("The Maintenance Engineer") imitate or parody a working life that is esteemed in a way that their domestic life is not, but the esteem that they themselves receive is that of the counterculture. In this way the metaphor constructs an alternative discourse which, within the parameters of the song, temporarily suspends the patriarchal order. The usual conventional ending, with traditional roles safely restored, cannot fully resolve this dislocation.

The frequently subversive nature of the metaphorical schemes of songs is emphasised here because doubts have been expressed about the libertarian tendency of traditional songs, and in particular their challenge to equally traditional patterns of male dominance. As Vic Gammon put it,

> it can be argued that songs played a role in the production and reproduction of both gender difference, and the normal assumptions of patriarchal ideology. A number of things such as advertising could be analysed as playing a similar role in contemporary society. (236)

In commenting on Gammon's position, Michael Pickering went further:

> Erotic song not only fascinated because it concentrated on activity occurring at the boundaries of accepted behaviour, but also worked to police those boundaries, to reinforce the patriarchal conventions and norms which regulated sexual activity and gender roles.
> "Recent Folk Music Scholarship" 44.

If this is true of occupational song, it will be most apparent in the case of songs where work is associated with sexual metaphor.

*Erotic metaphor*

In a passage quoted earlier, James Reeves claimed that "traditional song as a rule is concerned with a man's or woman's occupation not for itself but in the context of lovemaking" (*Idiom of the People* 29). This persistent view that folk songs are by definition amatory has had the effect of marginalising the majority of occupational songs. However, it is true that a large group of ballads describe sexual performance in terms of the physical process of working at one's trade. The work process itself becomes a sexual metaphor. In these songs the miller grinds his stones, the milkmaid strokes until the milk comes, the ploughboy eases himself into the furrow, and the blacksmith's hammer rises and falls. Often the name of the occupation alone was sufficient, as with "Cuddy the cooper":

> He fleck'd the Lasses baith high and lau;
> and ay when he cam to coup our Deames tubs
> He coup'd the Maidens agean the waa. (4-6)

Although these songs are known to have been sung for many hundreds of years, they are barely represented at all in printed collections before the middle of this century. Some examples are to be found among the unpublished papers of early collectors, but they have survived largely because they have continued to be sung to the present day, and because they are strongly represented in the broadsides.

My examination of nearly two thousand sixteenth- and seventeenth-century broadsides in the Pepys collection at Magdalene College, Cambridge, shows the extent of the metaphorical association between production and reproduction, and how far the sexualisation of work processes, or the cooption of work to its sexual contexts, had advanced. Many of the detailed descriptions of occupations in seventeenth century popular literature are in the form of sexual metaphor.[1] Such metaphors are almost the rule in ballads where the occupation of the protagonist is described. Sexual encounters are described in terms of more than sixty different trades, with the addition of a few professions associated with the middle classes, like the academic, scrivener and lawyer. The most commonly represented in this way is the sailor, followed by the fiddler, who is unique in that he appears in no other kind of song.[2] Of the professions, the doctor-surgeon is much the most commonly featured, inserting his clysters and wielding his tiny scalpel.

In contrast to the fixed-role type mentioned earlier, there is no unvarying sexual image for each occupation. Metaphor operates within a multiplicity of significations. Thus the soldier is described variously as charging with his half-pike ("Trap, or, the Young Lass"), drilling his girl into a sentry box ("The Gentleman Soldier"), storming a fort ("The Bonny Lass of Bristol"), or having his horse led to the stable ("The Bold Dragoon").

This profile of the oral record is similar to that of the broadside, except that far fewer occupations are represented. Through the sea shanty, the sailor is again overwhelmingly the most common, followed by the fiddler, the ploughboy and the miller.[3] Of the more popular occupations,[4] only the tailor

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1 Thus when William Congreve published a street ballad on the rivalry between a soldier, sailor, tinker and tailor over "buxom Joan," he characterised their sexual performance in terms of their callings (V. de Sola Pinto, *The Common Muse* [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965] 445-446).

2 All of the thirteen broadsides and three songs that I have traced which feature fiddlers involve erotic metaphor, as do the titles of many fiddle tunes. After the sailor, the next most common occupations to display such metaphors in the broadsides are, in counting-rhyme fashion, the tinker, tailor and soldier. They are followed by the farm labourer (above all the ploughboy), the weaver, the cobbler and the miller.

3 Stan Hugill maintains that "the sailor rarely used *double entendre*, such as . . . sexual symbolism" (*Sea Shanties* [London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1977] 125). Since I have found

and butcher fail to produce sexual metaphors in oral sets. In terms of the most performed songs, however, agriculture and metalworking (the blacksmith, plumber and tinker) probably dominate the occupations in both broadsides and orature. This confirms Mircea Eliade's view that the metaphor may have had its origins in rituals of production in the village community.[1] So among the BaNyankole of Uganda, the smith has sexual intercourse with his wife as soon as he gets a new hammer, so that it will perform well.[2] From earliest times, metalworkers have been seen as midwives assisting at the birth of precious alloys and tools (the word is a potent metaphor in many languages). The tools are rendered living by being sexualised. In England, ethnographical evidence is lacking, but terms for machine tools are frequently described as if they have gender and are sexually active (*male and female stud couplings*, for example), an aspect exploited by Harold Pinter in his play *Trouble in the Works* (1959).

These occupations are overwhelmingly represented by men, even where, as in the case of farm labour and retailing, it is known that women formed a majority of the workforce. The only prominent female protagonists in this group are, perhaps inevitably, prostitutes and milkmaids. However, women are very rarely treated purely as objects of sexual pleasure even in these commercial ballads.[3] They are characteristically free and equal agents in the encounter. This often becomes apparent in a crossover of signifiers. Roger deV. Renwick has analysed the structure of the code of sexual encounters in terms of reciprocal poles of dominance and submissiveness (92). There is no doubt that this code does serve as a basic generative structure for ballads of this kind. The song "The Mower," collected many times in recent years, is first recorded in English in 1624 and has analogues in Spanish and French traditional verse. In a metaphor that extends over eight stanzas, lovemaking is seen in terms of gathering hay with a sickle. According to Renwick, a woman who is "subordinate" in terms of lovemaking position will be "superordinate" in initiating the encounter, and in stamina. This is, in fact, the case. It is the man who wields his taring scythe and the woman who is seen as the meadow to be mown, yet she takes the initiative and has greater staying power in the encounter. Renwick does not consider how far these might correspond to

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more sea songs of this kind than in any other occupation (for example, "Bully in the Alley," Cottage for Sale," "Jack the Sailor," "The Fire Ship" and "Tiger Bay" in addition to the examples he mentions), he may mean that they were not as frequently performed.

[4] Apart from the occupations mentioned here, only the blacksmith, carter, cobbler, milkmaid, soldier, tinker and weaver feature in more than one song of this kind.

[1] A. L. Lloyd, *Folk Song in England* (London: Granada, 1975) 196.

[2] Lloyd 196. This is precisely echoed in "Twankydillo": "Here's a health to the pretty maid with the lily-white frock, / Who's a heart that is true and as firm as a rock. / Which makes my bright hammer to rise and to fall . . ." (1-3)

[3] As they are, for example, in the folklore of car windscreen stickers ("electricians do it in shorts") and in rugby songs: "The kind of girl that I would wed would be a referee's daughter, / Oh, she'd blow hard, I'd blow hard," etc.

cultural rather than compositional patterns of behaviour, nor does he take into account the role of women as the *makers* of oral tradition.

Instead of fusion, metaphors depend on just such a balance of similarities and differences, but in this respect they are always changing, tending at one extreme to singular identity (the term) or at the other, to an unthinkable "pure difference." Poetry, with its multiplicity of meanings, tends towards pure difference, which is why in this set of "The Mower," sung in Dorset in 1939, the two milieux of lovemaking and field labour can be simultaneously present:

> She said, "My handsome young man
> if a mower that you be,
> I'll give you good employment
> if you come along with me."
>
> So it was my good employment
> to wander up and down
> With my taring scythe all to contrive
> to mow her meadow down.

Eventually, her field of sprouting grass blunts the mower's tool:

> I mowed from nine to dinner-time,
> it was far beyond my skill,
> I was 'bliged to yield and quit the field,
> and her grass was growing still.
> 5-8, 11-12. My lineation.

The internal rhymes (*scythe/contrive, nine/time, yield/field*) set up a working rhythm which is reinforced by the melody, with pauses on the rhyme words. By dealing delicately with the subject of impotence through metaphor in this way, a song like "The Mower" belies the assumption that erotic ballads are farcical romps. Indeed, by reaching into the world of production, the metaphoric mode ensures that songs about reproduction are *not* predominantly comic.

Even though the body of broadside ballads provides by far the largest number of examples of occupational metaphor in amatory contexts, there is no question of the erotic metaphor being a *creation* of the broadside market. As we have seen, traditional lore has made the association in many different societies from the earliest times, and songs like "Twankydillo" and "The Jolly Tinker" clearly retain that stratum in their present features. Moreover, the trades featured are mostly associated with an earlier period than the broadsides. None of the mechanical occupations of what has been called the First Industrial Revolution, during the reign of Elizabeth I, appear. Doctors are bloodletters and dispensers of quack medicines rather than the professional middle class of Samuel Pepys' time. Carpenters and joiners are common, but

not bricklayers, which suggests a time when wood was still a plentiful building material. All these, and the prominence of the jobbing metal industries mentioned above, belong to a medieval context rather than an early industrial one.

Some occupational songs, however, which are to be found on broadsides and directly from oral sources, reflect in their metaphors a later change in working conditions which corresponds to the transition from self-employed to wage-earner. This process had already begun by the early seventeenth-century and reached a peak in the nineteenth. The defining relationship was no longer the working of raw materials by independent craftsmen, but the operation of a machine as part of a process where labour is divided and bought and sold as a commodity. In terms of the protagonist, this means a transition from tool-user to machine-minder, and the sexual metaphors become correspondingly more extended and complex. The tendency is not confined to industrial processes. In "The Miller's Song," the protagonist's lack of stamina is seen in terms of hydraulic engineering, and it is difficult to distinguish agent, raw material and process. When the miller speaks, it is evident that the lovers have *become* the mill:

> "My stones are up, my water's low,
> My mill is not in tune to go;"
> But they talked of love, till love grew kind,
> And then the mill began to grind,
> With 'is fal the diddle, etc. (11-14)

The eroticisation of the miller with his grinding stones is to be found in other forms of cultural expression in English. The signification is still current in the colloquial language with the slang meaning of "grind," and the common soubriquet of the miller, "Ol' Uppy Tup" (Pickering, *Village Song* 67), maintains the same association between rams and virile men that is found in *Othello*: "An old black ram / Is tupping your white ewe" (1. 1. 88-89). The confident handling of work processes and jargon in "The Miller's Song" suggests that here the miller's working life is being seen from *inside*, despite his known distance from the milieu of the songmakers. The reason may lie in the role of the apprentices and miller's boys who acted as mediators and increasingly took over the function of the working miller as he rose into the middle class.

The same fusion of machine and machine-minder is found in weaving, and this was to be significant for the later development of the occupational ballad. Weaving is of course an ancient trade, and the spinners and weavers were long famed for their singing. Unlike in "The Miller's Song," the handloom weaver not only identifies with his gear but shows a characteristic element of bravado and sexual swagger:

> In Weavering and in Fulling,
> I have such passing skill Sir;

And underneath my Weaving-Beam,
There stands a Fulling Mill Sir;
To have good Wives displeasure,
I would be very loath Sir;
The Water runs so near my Hand,
It over-thicks my Cloath Sir.
"The Jolly Trades-Men" 49-56.

This stage in erotic metaphor, where the lover is seen as an extension of the machinery itself, perfectly represents the synthesis of the worker and the machine that was taking place during the period of industrialisation. Since occupational ballads reached their peak in England in the nineteenth century, it is perhaps surprising therefore that the singers of the great manufacturing towns of the Industrial Revolution did not make more use of the tradition of the erotic metaphor. To my knowledge, the heavy metalworking industries – shipbuilding, steelworking, railway engineering and platewelding – have failed to produce a single example. The same goes for many other occupations where songmaking was widespread. For example, the much-enlarged second edition of A. L. Lloyd's collection of coalmining songs, *Come All Ye Bold Miners* (1978), which draws equally on oral sources, broadsides and "composed" songs, includes no examples.

Only among the weavers do we find a tradition of erotic metaphor which continued to stretch itself to take in the upheaval of the Industrial Revolution. Great numbers of songs were first collected in the weaving areas of Yorkshire and Lancashire at this time, while many traditional songs appeared in a transformed state. "The Weaver and the Factory Maid" is an example of the second tendency. A set collected in Widnes in 1951 and printed in Appendix I has clear analogies with a number of broadsides. These include a seventeenth-century sheet in the Pepys collection, "Wil [*sic*] the Merry Weaver and Charity the Chambermaid," and an eighteenth century one in the Madden Collection, "The Fair Maid's Desire to Learn her ABC," as well as a number of oral sets from the eighteenth century onwards. In the broadsides, a weaver or a sailor gives a fair or pretty maid a lesson in the alphabet after admiring her "two pillars of white ivory,"[1] beneath which "a fountain laid / Which my poor wandering eyes betray'd."[2] Much play is made with the use she makes of the hero's pen or "Fescue" (teacher's pointer). It is a standard piece of sexist role-playing in a teacher-pupil context, where the occupation of the protagonists has any organic relationship with either the narrative or the metaphor. It merely expresses the exclusiveness of the skilled craftsman in terms of sexual prowess, while the girl is a cipher. The generally slack way in which such metaphors are integrated is another reason for regarding the broadside tradi-

[1] "The Fair Maid's Desire" 12, 21-4.
[2] "Wil the Merry Weaver" 21-2.

tion of erotic metaphor as deriving ultimately from the oral. They tend to be introduced, as here, at the sexual climax rather than firmly locked into the narrative scheme, as in "The Bunch of Thyme" or "The Ball of Yarn."

By the mid-eighteenth century, however, the song was becoming irrevocably associated with weaving. It is the sexual images that best indicate the change that has taken place. The conventional, alien image of pillars of white ivory has been replaced with a couplet recalling the white tops of the Yorkshire peaks that feed the fastflowing streams needed for the early textile mills: "When I seen her two breasts hanging so low, / Like two white hills all covered with snow" ("The Weaver" 23-24).

In about 1830, however, an oral set, "T'Owd Weaver," was collected in a part of Yorkshire where textile weaving was the dominant industry. It is in a fragmentary state, and there is reason to believe that the editor, Frank Kidson, made substantial additions to the song as collected. "The Weaver and the Factory Maid" is a fuller set, although not as full as A. L. Lloyd's printed text would lead us to believe (see Palmer, "The Weaver in Love" 273-274). The new state of the ballad clearly shows the crucial transformation that has taken place, from an exclusively amatory state to one where the occupation of the protagonists is all-important. In addition, the narrative has been sharpened to take in the cataclysmic changes of the Industrial Revolution:

> I am a hand weaver to my trade,
> I fell in love with a factory maid;
> And if I could but her favour win,
> I'd stand beside her and weave by steam. (1-4)

The metaphors have changed completely to reflect this new mood. A third character is introduced, the weaver's father, who harks back to the time when weaving was a part of village culture. He evokes as the desired bride for his son the traditional image of a girl dressed in the springtime finery of the Queen of the May, closer to the rural scene than to the woollen towns of Yorkshire.

Finally the phallic pen has been completely superseded. This appears to have happened in several stages, corresponding to the foregrounding of the factory maid. An eighteenth-century Irish broadside, "The Weaver and the Chambermaid," introduced the weaving metaphor of the shuttle, used for passing the thread of the woof between the threads of the warp:

> So I put my shuttle into her hand,
> and bid her use it at her command,
> She took it kindly and used it free:
> So she learnt to weave along with me.

This stanza still retains the teacher-pupil element through the substitution of one phallic symbol for another. "The Weaver and the Factory Maid," on the other hand, transforms the relationship for the first time to an equal one in the context of a shared occupation: "I'd stand in the factory all the day / And she and I'd keep our shuttles in play" (11-12). The shuttle no longer signifies male or female but *activity,* thereby intoducing a holistic world-view: anticipating one of the major advances of the naturalistic novel, love experiences and work are seen as part of the same process. The fusion of production and reproduction is complete.

The shuttle metaphor is a recurring one in songs of the period: "Hand-Loom v. Power-Loom" repeats the whole expression, "keep our shuttles in play" (28). All sets with this metaphor have been collected in areas with large weaving communities. In these areas, specialised broadside presses operated, supplying songs to, and recording material from, the mill towns. These presses developed the erotic possibilities of weaving terms into a subgenre of their own, represented by the complex extended metaphors of "The Bury New Loom," printed by Swindells of Manchester in 1804. Here the shuttle is only one in a sequence of specific machine parts:

> She took me and showed me her loom,
> the down on her warp did appear,
> The lam jacks and healds put in motion,
> I levelled her loom to a hair.
>
> My shuttle ran well in her lathe,
> my tread it worked up and down,
> My level stood close to her breast-bone,
> the time I was squaring her loom. (9-12. My lineation)

Here the protagonists are contained totally within the figurative resources of a specific working process in the same way as the blacksmith and the engine driver quoted earlier.

In modern songs, erotic metaphors are usually used with conscious reference to the tradition. Increasingly, they challenge the patriarchal tendency of erotic songs that Vic Gammon identified. In Sandra Kerr's "Maintenance Engineer," it is the man who is identified with the machine, while the woman is perceived as an engineer within the conventional domestic space by means of metaphors associated with the shopfloor:

> So then we got to talking, I told him how I felt,
> How I keep him running just as smooth as some conveyor belt,
> For after all it's I'm the one provides the power supply,
> (He goes just like the clappers on my steak and kidney pie.)
> His fittings are all shining 'cos I keep them nice and clean,

And he tells me his machine tool is the best I've ever seen. (9-14)

Here Sandra Kerr achieves a parody of the form by inverting the traditional signifiers with conscious irony. The male signifiers associated with running a complex piece of equipment have been transferred to a housewife, while it is the man who is identified with the machine. The familiar phallicism of the tool has been transferred from the dynamic centre of the ballad to the last line, where it is exposed as a piece of pitiable male fetishism by being left in reported speech. All metaphors act as a half-concealed but powerful form of argument in this way, linking two aspects of reality. The occupation of male space asserts an identity while manifesting a division, and leaves an ambiguity which is not fully resolved by the song but extends fruitfully into the milieu of the audience.

The functioning of metaphors so far has been seen as a process of locking an occupation into a series of extended metaphorical sets which are found in song after song and can be assumed to offer songmakers not just a "kitty" of readily-understood allusion, but an underpinning of the whole structure of a song in performance. Occupational metaphors play a crucial role in oral transmission. While they may change or be replaced in broadsides, they function as narrative markers in oral sets, and a change in the occupation of the protagonist is very rare when such metaphors are present. Sexual metaphors in particular act as occupational stabilisers in this way. As the sexual metaphors coalesce in transmission, and become more fully integrated with the theme, they begin to act as narrative markers, "fixing" the occupation of the protagonist. The degree of integration is to some extent a marker of orality. While the broadsides are often satisfied with a simple phallic association – the tailor's needle or the carpenter's drill – in ballads the metaphor often *is* the narrative.[1]

Since many occupational signifiers are not peculiar to songs but are part of a continuum of social reference, there is a certain crossover between the oral and written traditions, often through the mediating agency of the broadside. Novels in particular have interacted in several ways with the oral tradition, and often, with their different audience, give contrasting interpretations of a similar field of attributes. Where oral influences are especially strong, as in the work of Chaucer and the broadside ballads, a close match of signifiers may even suggest a "lost stratum" of popular song.

Moreover, since their particularity is related to the whole process of oral transmission, signifiers are resistant to change. They may have the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, like the collier's high colouring, or the specificity of

[1] There are a number of ballad narratives based on *extended* erotic metaphors. In addition to "The Bury New Loom" and "The Mower," discussed in this chapter, they include "The Miller's Song" and "Grist ground at Last" (miller), "Tiger Bay" (sailor) and "A Fireman's not for Me."

the miller's golden thumb, but they link the occupation inseparably with the internal dynamics of the song. This applies to both insider and outsider songs.

Finally, the very existence of such sustained interventions of closely realised detail from the active working lives of mowers, colliers, millers or weavers has implications beyond the domain of the erotic. A holistic attitude to human relations with nature has been evident in all the occupational signifiers examined in this chapter. In orature, a process, however technically described, is never simply a process. It always has a metaphorical aspect, a ritual, social or erotic particularity. The cry of despair of the handloom weaver, "I've woven myself to th'fur end" (48), shows an integration of life and work that cannot be easily remodelled in the service of a new occupation. This integration underscores the search for group identity that occupational song expresses.

# 4. GROUP COHESION AND DISINTEGRATION

> Le regroupement en communauté y est une nécessité absolue de survie matérielle et psychologique. Le fait que la *chanson* soit le mode d'expression littéraire [*sic*] priviligié en est une preuve (Marty 171).
>
> *Grouping in communities is absolutely necessary for material and psychological survival. The fact that* songs *are the* [textile workers'] *favoured mode of literary expression is proof of it.*

For those without recognition in political, economic or artistic life, occupations provide a point of self-definition, a place to stand. We have seen how these occupations are represented in song above all through metaphor, which draws specifically on processes and changes in the working milieu to engage with other life experiences. In this way songs integrate life and work. Song transmission and concurrent social changes become different aspects of the same process.

This chapter and the next will examine two elements in this transformation, firstly the growing cohesion and self-awareness of the group, and secondly the antithesis of that cohesion, the increasing threat posed by the changing times. Strike and dialect songs are obvious examples of these tendencies. The chapter specifically traces the emergence and focussing of the concept of "women's work" and the growth of a new genre of ballads in response to one devastating aspect of working life, pit accidents. Both of these developments can be seen as attempts to set up alternative centres of consciousness which could replace, first orally and then through direct action, a unitary axis of authority.

*A plurality of allegiances*

"Centres of consciousness" can to some extent be identified with the tightly-knit working and singing community that has so often been described by sociologists and ethnomusicologists. Ballad scholars who had been forced to give up Romantic theories of group song composition by an inspired throng described in their place an analogous social unit which reproduced on the communal level the same inward-looking, almost feudal features:

> These small communities are self-centred and self-sufficient, attached to their own soil by instinctive patriotism, and led by leaders who command their personal devotion. They have a lively intelligence, as their metaphors show. . . . In the best periods the ballad people is homogeneous.
>
> (Entwistle 7-8)

Later sociologists of the industrial landscape (for example, Frankenberg and Robins) have described manufacturing areas in very similar terms. Among the characteristics of these districts were

> strong local institutions and infrastructures; relations of trust based on face-to-face contact; a "productive community" historically rooted in a particular place; [and] a strong sense of local pride and allegiance.[1]

The community-based approach was important for folk song studies because it switched attention away from the individual rural peasant favoured by the early collectors. It concentrated on the singing traditions of *societies*, and included for the first time the inhabitants of milltowns and strongly-localised industrial areas such as Sheffield and southeast Lancashire. Areas like these proved to be the seedbeds of a new kind of occupational song, which sought to express the concerns of the sustaining milieu rather than those of the individual maker. A small number of earlier songs like "John Barleycorn" or "When Jones' Ale was New" described, in almost ritualistic terms, related social activities like the making of ale or the gathering in of the harvest in which the whole community participated, even though nobody took part in everything. The new songs built on this holistic view of work in their treatment of shared concerns such as the introduction of machinery and the length of the working day.[2] Unlike the earlier songs, they seem to have originated in urban or industrial settings.[3] The new occupational songs had an audience that was both receptive to the new themes *and* collaborative in activating an already-existing song repertoire.

Although the community-based approach was important for the pioneer studies of industrial song (such as Lloyd, *Folk Song*, and Watson), one result has been to regard such communities as homogeneous, "organic" and stable social units with more or less autonomous social structures and relations. This view cannot be sustained as a description of the occupational localities that produced songs of the kind discussed in this thesis. In the first place, the communities were subject to constant pressures from outside which brought fundamental changes and even dissolution. In feudal times these included plague and civil war, and in industrial times unemployment and hunger as a result of unrestrained competition and technological developments that were difficult to assimilate. Sometimes, as in the great steel and shipbuilding towns in recent

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[1] K. Robins, "Global Times," *Marxism Today* (Dec. 1989): 20.

[2] See, for example, "The Owslebury Lads" and "Nine Hours a Day."

[3] The accelerated enclosure of agricultural land in the eighteenth century, for example, gave rise to very few songs (Roy Palmer, *The Sound of History* [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988] 40-43).

years, a virtual waste land was created, while large numbers of settled inhabitants had to seek work elsewhere, often in a completely different industry.[1]

Secondly, as we have seen in the case of the weavers, working communities were not in any sense discrete entities but part of an interdependent network. For example, immigration following the Irish potato famine gave new impetus to songmaking in the coalmines (Lloyd, *Folk Song* 333). A seaport like Liverpool was often influenced culturally more by Ireland and the Caribbean than by its own hinterland. Even rural districts, the supposed home of "pure" traditional song, had surprisingly dense lines of communication. These included trade societies, journeymen's clubs and Methodist preaching circuits. A mining village like Lofthouse in Yorkshire had more in common with Gresford in North Wales than with the nearby spinning or agricultural communities of the Yorkshire dales.

This cultural symbiosis greatly helped the singing tradition. In a Scottish context, Alan Bruford has shown that isolated communities, popularly regarded as nests of singing birds, were not richer in song than those with significant immigration (Russell 97). Therefore "community" is best regarded not as a geographical concept but as a plurality of allegiances, constantly forming and reforming in the context of immediate opportunity or threat. Singers and their audiences belonged simultaneously to several communities, defined by gender, location and class, and their songs reflect this. For instance, the new kind of song described above, where individual preoccupations gave way to the expression of much wider conflicts, often made a characteristic appeal outside the locality to an equally specific, but now nationwide, group:

> You factory girls of England now who get such little pay
> The roses from your blooming cheeks hard work has driven away.
> Oft-times to please your masters you're working past your time,
> But if you're late they'll shut the gate and make you pay a fine.
>
> "Nine Hours a Day" 21-24.

Within this nexus, occupation was the central metaphor to express this multiplicity of belonging, and from an early period, orature played an important part in developing a consciousness of new ties. The development of these ties can be traced in "The Weaver and the Factory Maid," which has already been discussed in the context of occupational metaphor. It appears to have entered the communal repertory after more than a century as a broadside (of course, precedence cannot be conclusively proved). It is first known in a seventeenth-century London broadside "Wil the Merry Weaver, and Charity the Chamber-

[1] This is not, of course, only a feature of the modern industrial worker. Dave Harker has shown how Cecil Sharp's first informant John England, the archetypical example of the folk singer in an isolated rural community, was in fact a migrant labourer who learnt "The Seeds of Love" in a turnip field in another county (Dave Harker, *Fakesong* [Milton Keynes: Open UP 1985] 181).

maid." Despite the title, the printed ballad is an unlocalised, unspecific love song with no special ties to the occupations mentioned. In fact, as we saw in the previous chapter, the metaphors suit a schoolteacher better than a weaver and a servant girl, and the publication of an eighteenth century analogue with a sailor as protagonist, "The Fair Maid's Desire to Learn her ABC," shows how fragile the link with weaving was. Gradually, however, as Figure 3 indicates, the song was taken up by the weavers themselves and over a period of more than two centuries increasingly took on specific occupation markers.

The greatest change came with the Industrial Revolution, when the textile industry was transformed to the point where the bluff certainties of "Wil the Merry Weaver" appeared totally anachronistic. A set collected in 1951, printed in Appendix I, reveals the song in a state corresponding to the conditions prevailing at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The seventeen stanzas of "Wil the Merry Weaver" have been cut to seven, but the new ballad shifts through many more rhetorical modes than the broadside – through exposition, complaint, consolation and exhortation – to advance the narrative. The narrative itself has gone far beyond its origins in a seduction sequence. Success in love is now closely identified with a recognition of the forces of social change. To highlight this, a new figure has been introduced, the weaver's father, who speaks for the lost rural world of the independent craftsman.[1] The weaver himself has been decentred; the girl has not only become more prominent but now represents the dynamic centre of the ballad. From being a servant or chambermaid, she becomes a weaver like her lover, and this convergence provides the focus of a new theme. Her workplace is the steam mill rather than the cottage filled with handlooms worked by the lover and his father. This distinction reflects demographic realities: by 1835 only a quarter of operatives in cotton factories were men over eighteen, while half were (mostly unmarried) women and girls (Burnett 34, 49). The factory girls were part of the new urbanised proletariat, and their rising powers of organisation were often the subject of comment at the time: "alarmists may view these indications of female independence as more menacing to established institutions than the 'education of the lower orders.'"[2]

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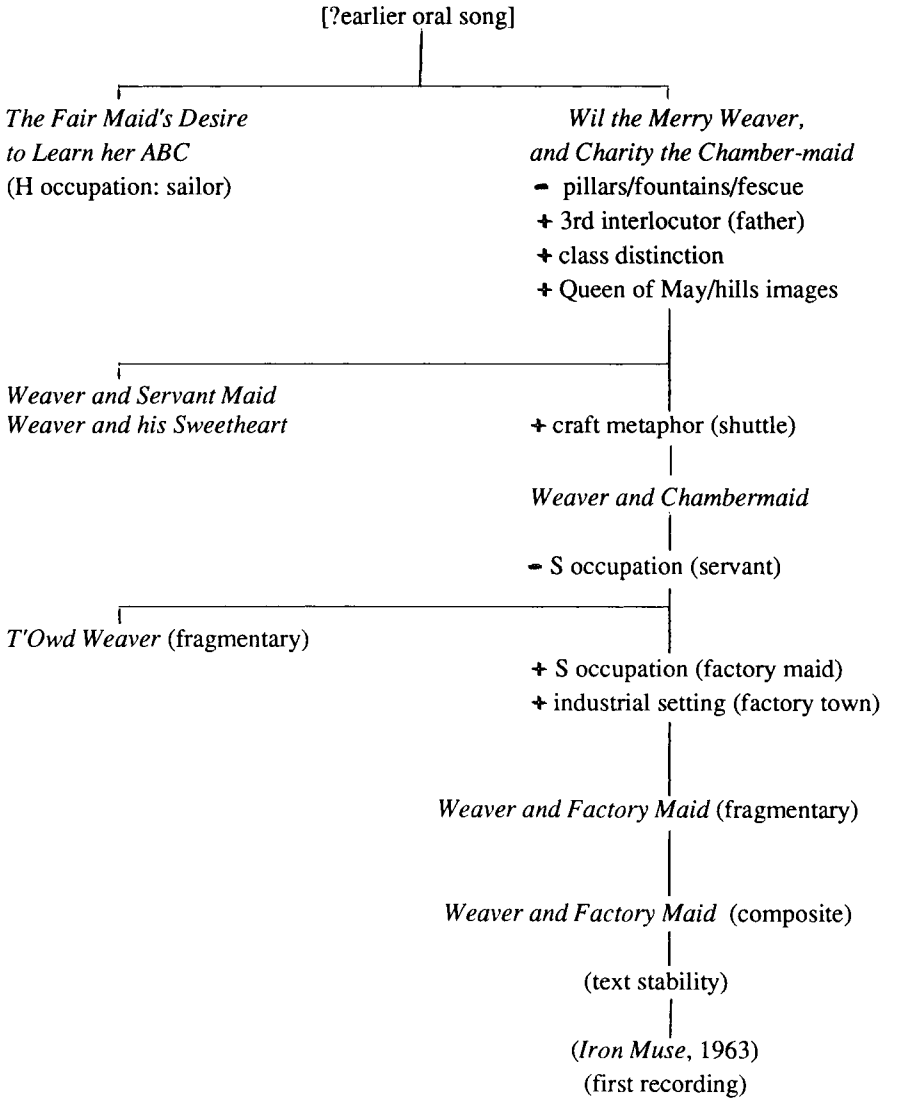
[1] Earlier sets like "The Weaver and the Chambermaid" make it clear that he is the other speaker in the rather elliptical narratives of "T'Owd Weaver" and "The Weaver and the Factory Maid."

[2] As John Wade commented on a strike of 1500 female card-setters in the West Riding of Yorkshire in 1835 (E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971] 454).

**Fig. 3. Relation between surviving sets of "The Weaver and the Factory Maid"**
(H = He, male protagonist; S = She, female protagonist; + = gains signifier; − =loses signifier)




In "The Weaver and the Factory Maid," women are seen as instrumental in destroying the handloom weaver's livelihood. In a reversal of traditional roles, it is the man who is now confined to the domestic setting. The song catches the moment of change and its challenge to traditional roles. It articulates a real fear and insecurity among men. Herbert Heaton describes an old man he met in the West Riding of Yorkshire who had abandoned weaving for

turnip-hoeing in 1880 "rather than go into a factory where he would have to work alongside women" (Buchanan 134). The ballad has made of this fact of social history a source of love conflict where the dialectic has not been displaced but represented in terms of a new class hierarchy:

> The factory maid she is *like a queen*,
> With handloom weavers she'll not be seen. (5-6. My italics)

"The Weaver and the Factory Maid" has changed in other ways to pace the new thrust of the narrative. The conventional images of pillars and fountains have disappeared and the song has taken on a semi-urban quality, consistent with the greater concentration of weavers into communities like Rochdale and Hebden Bridge which had access both to the spinners' yarn and the all-important markets. As the occupation of the protagonists has become more settled, the metaphorical scheme changes to take in elements of the weaving process ("She and I'd keep our shuttles in play," line 10) and the physical environment of the Yorkshire uplands:

> When I saw her two breasts hanging so low
> Like two white hills covered with snow.
> "The Weaver" 23-24.

For the first time, a proud consciousness of the exclusiveness of the craftsman appears. In a detail that is typical of the multi-layered approach of many occupational songs, this consciousness is represented twice. It is first shown in simplified, backward-looking form in the person of the weaver's father but is then realised positively in the son through sexualisation of the tools of his trade. The original erotic allusion to the teacher's "fescue" is replaced by the craft metaphor of keeping shuttles in play. The substitution of an erotic image of mutual activity for one of authority is in line with the foregrounding of the female role. "The Weaver and the Factory Maid" has become part of the sequence of women's songs of sexual preference for the working man.

The introduction of an earlier, hierarchical version of the craftsman's exclusiveness, in the form of the father's intervention, is specifically rejected in favour of an awakening sense of class loyalty:

> if I could but her favour gain
> I'd stand beside her and weave by steam. (3-4)

This loyalty displaces the male adventurism implicit in the traditional sexual roles of "The Fair Maid's Desire to Learn her ABC."

As the ambivalence of the exchange between the young worker and his father suggests, the weaver realises that his traditional independence is more apparent than real. It has to be won, and defended, in one trade after another.

Behind the later sets of the song is the dominance of the Other, the force that was producing the rapid transformations described, setting up the steam mills and reducing the hand weavers to destitution. Such authority could only be challenged from a position of authority, which came from an unambiguous sense of group identity and direction. "The Weaver and the Factory Maid," in the totality of its versions, has begun that process by becoming polyvocal, with three or more embedded speakers, thereby dramatising the *internal* contradictions of an occupation in rapid change. It is not yet, however, in opposition to the forces that lay behind that change. Instead, it represents an uneasy fusion of Romantic egalitarianism and the imperatives of the new times.

*The role of work in women's resistance*

As forms of cultural expression that are largely outside the authoritative discourse, songs like "The Weaver and the Factory Maid" contributed, and still contribute, to the articulation of a consciousness of group identity, with the related concepts of solidarity and struggle. They also challenge the increasing threats to that cohesion posed by deskilling, dangerous working conditions, and attacks on any attempts at organisation. In that way, as Dick Hebdige expresses it,

> a "war of position" is waged between conflicting alliances of "dominant" and "subaltern" class fractions over and within a heterogeneous range of sites, which are themselves shaped by a complex play of discursive and extra-discursive factors and forces. (*Hiding in the Light* 203)

One of these sites lay in the status of women at work, which cuts across traditional occupational loyalties. By challenging the fixity of gender-specific categories such as the army and housework, songs sung by women subverted received notions of what constitutes work, and in the process helped develop a consciousness of the vulnerability of the authoritative discourse. In this sense, the songs show the same "off-centre" quality as industrial songs.

The contribution of women to the development of occupational songs has not been considered independently in this thesis before now. Reference has been made in an earlier chapter to the way women were represented as choosing working men over all other suitors, and the discussion of "The Weaver and the Factory Maid" showed how, from often being considered as mere erotic ciphers in the early broadsides, women were increasingly perceived as fellow workers, or even as competitors, in the workplace. There is therefore no danger of ghettoisation of the subject here since the gender-specific aspect of the songs is only one part of total "presence."

It is only in recent years that women's songs have even been published as a discrete group, and there are as yet few studies of their role in consciousness-

raising.[1] Songs about women's daily work (including unpaid work) have a specific role in developing cohesion and resisting perceived threats from outside. They can be said to be largely functional in that they fulfil a group need, whether expressed or not, to articulate shared concerns. With respect to the work itself, they define its distinctive identity, and then question the permanence of its characteristic formations. Such songs do not assert "traditional values" but help to subvert them.

The subversion can be summarised as a refusal to consent to the values and outlook expressed by a ruling discourse that women had played no part in setting up. It is an important part of a specific project recognised by E. P. Thompson, who showed the importance of the "secret verbal tradition" in transmitting the ideas of the counterculture (539-41; 652-654). In the field covered by this thesis, the tradition can best be traced in the songs of occupations where women were prominent, in the existence of "women's versions" of songs, and in the early foregrounding of domestic labour as a branch of work in its own right.

The viewpoint of women is not merely assumed in occupational song, but is explicitly presented at all periods. This is emphasised here because a conscious act of foregrounding is required to combat the continuing invisibility of women's culture in the dominant discourse.[2] It should be seen in the light of the mediating forces outlined in the first chapter, which have always marginalised songs that challenge patriarchal attitudes. It is now known, for example, that women were active at all stages of the oral transmission process, both making and mediating from the beginning of the documented period. Women are known to have operated in some of the seventeenth-century printshops which published street ballads (R. Thomson 72, 86, 102), and "by the eighteenth century women had become the main repositories of traditional songs, and the major purchasers of romantic broadsides" (Vicinus 9).

There is little hard evidence that any English or Scottish songs were formally reserved for performance by women in the way that the women of the Yakut and Tungus had their own narrative poetry, or Kikuyu women their *kiriri* (Chadwick and Chadwick 3. 188). Analysis of the known performers of "Long Lankin" (Child 93) suggest that this, one of Child's very few occupational ballads, has perhaps the strongest claim in English to being traditionally a "women's ballad," since over eighty per cent of the sets he printed are by

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[1] See, for example, Diane Dugaw, *Warrior Women and Popular Balladry 1650-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989); Kathy Henderson, Frankie Armstrong and Sandra Kerr eds, *My Song is My Own* (London: Pluto Press, 1982).

[2] "Songs from a female viewpoint are relatively uncommon" (Roy Palmer ed., *Folk Songs Collected by Ralph Vaughan Williams* [London: Dent, 1983] 120). Two full-length studies of industrial songs in English relegate discussion of the contribution of women to a single footnote each (Robert Colls, *The Collier's Rant* [London: Croom Helm, 1977] 205; Ian Watson, *Song and Democratic Culture in Britain* [London: Croom Helm, 1983] 133).

women.[1] Most songs, however, could clearly be performed by both sexes indiscriminately, irrespective of the protagonist. It was specifically the *persona* adopted by a singer that could, and did, vary widely, and many of these were female.

One reason for the invisibility of songs from a female viewpoint has been the way women's songs have frequently been regarded by editors as belonging to a catch-all Courtship and Marriage category.[2] In fact there is no such univocal perception of women in song. A classification by occupation would be taxonomically more valid, since it would reveal the way female protagonists range far beyond the amatory in the scope of their activities. It would map the extent of female occupations in song, including the all-important domestic labour. It would reveal the ways women perform as a group, and it would show them displacing men in their traditional occupations.

In many songs women, being the central figures by virtue of their work, are thereby the initiators of the action. Many occupations (about eighteen in all, with a total of over a hundred songs) are *only* represented by female protagonists.[3] These are not simply the traditional service and stitching occupations, but include industrial jobs like jute mill work and chainmaking. Moreover, even in those occupations where women are seen unequivocally in terms of their relations to men, such as the prostitute and the milkmaid,[4] there are songs which give the woman's point of view. No reductive picture of the broadside market can account for the sombre realism of "The Poor Whores Complaint":

> Come listen a while and you shall hear,
> How the poor Whores fares in the winter
> They've hardly got any rags to hide their ware
> Indeed tis a despret thing Sir. (1-4)

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[1] Twelve of Child's sets of "Long Lankin" identify the singer. Ten of these singers were women (2. 320-342). Nearly a century later, Bertrand Bronson's sources gave a figure of over 70% (*Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads*, Vol. 2 [Princeton: Princeton UP, 1962] 428-445). Eight of his singers were male, twenty female.

[2] The repertoire of Anna Brown of Falkland (1747-1810), which includes a wide range of saga and *revenant* ballads, has been described as "all . . . to a greater or lesser extent amatory" by David Buchan (*The Ballad and the Folk* [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972] 84).

[3] The occupations are: besom maker, bus conductor, chainmaker, cook, dressmaker, fishgutter, hosier, jute mill worker, lacemaker, laundry worker, lavender seller, matchseller, midwife, milliner, needle seller, oyster seller, prostitute and stripper. According to Iona and Peter Opie, the last is the most common occupation named in children's songs (*The Singing Game* 286).

[4] Judging by the folk record, the very fact of being a milkmaid was an invitation to sexual harassment. Such songs are constructs of male fantasy rather than occupational songs as such.

A further sign of the importance for women of singing in a way that is expressively their own lies in the existence of double sets of songs.[1] "Nine Hours a Day," quoted earlier, was printed extensively in the 1870s in both male and female versions. The sea song "Our Captain Cried, All Hands!" exists as a set seen from a female perspective, "A Blacksmith Courted Me." It has usually been assumed that the "original" of such songs had a male viewpoint from which a female version has been extrapolated. Examining the signifiers of many of these pairs, however, shows that the debt must often have been the other way. Occupational signifiers, it will be remembered, are very durable in songs, often surviving a change of function, and a stratum of ghost markers may be left. The milkmaid in "The Brisk and Bonny Lass" has been supplanted by a man to reflect changes in employment patterns, but the female signifiers have proved resistant to the change. The urban milkman of the song retains the traditional milkmaid's props of yoke and miking pail, and sings improbably, "Though poor I am contented / I'm as happy as a queen" (7-8).

There is also an extensive group of songs in which women usurp traditionally male occupations: "The Female Highwayman," "The Soldier Maid," etc. Some of these, such as "The Female Cabin Boy," express frankly male fantasies. When Cecilia Costello sang, "It was eating captain['s] biscuits her colour did destroy, / Oh the waist did swell of pretty Nell, the handsome cabin boy" ("The Female Cabin Boy" 7-8), she was performing a role similar to that of a karaoke singer, inscribing a female voice on a fundamentally male discourse. However, many songs do not fit comfortably into a phallocentric world-view, since there is no accompanying male triumph: "In pulling off my breeches to myself I often smiled, / To think I lay with a [hundred] men and maiden all the while" ("The Female Drummer" 19-20).

In these songs women are extending their space. Although women are known to have occasionally smuggled themselves into the armies and navies of earlier centuries, the disguise songs do not operate primarily as records of actual practice but as a challenge to the gender coding of dress, work and terrain. The woman swaggering along the highroad with cocked hat and pistols in search of rich travellers is asserting an identity with known practice while suggesting, by the characteristic title of her song ("The Female Highwayman"), a difference. Even where the dénouement restores traditional gender relations in a flurry of silk and wedding bells, the displacement is highly subversive. It simultaneously upholds and questions male roles.

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[1] Double sets are not, of course, confined to occupational songs: "Gathering Rushes in the Month of May" appears to offer a preliminary narrative to the semi-humorous "Rolled in her Apron," and has the same refrain. The unmarried girl trying to avoid the stigma of a bastard in the first song becomes a con-woman in the second, which is seen from the point of view of the duped man.

This constantly shifting ground between male and female roles is also seen in what might be called pseudo-occupational songs, where dynamic female characters are swallowed up by settings that profess to deal instead with men in their working milieu. This may be effected by the choice of title, or by enclosing the heroine in an annular narrative structure which leaves it to a man to open and close the action. Both of these devices are seen at work in Child 283, "The Crafty Farmer." It is most commonly known today in England as "The Farmer in Leicester," although the person in question appears only in the framing stanzas at the beginning and end and plays no part in the action. An alternative title, "The Highwayman Outwitted," foregrounds the other male character, while the central figure, a canny girl, is not mentioned in any of the titles, and is not named or described in any version, although she controls the action throughout.

A refinement of the pseudo-occupational song is one where the woman's work is subsumed into a man's by being "captured" by a patriarchal metaphorical scheme. One such example is the concept of woman as a sailing vessel, particularly one stowed with gunpowder below decks as a fire ship. "The Fire Ship" has been a popular song for three hundred years, and often takes the form of a sea shanty. The song is an extended metaphor which describes the activities of a prostitute who "fires" the sailor with the pox. As in "The Crafty Farmer," it is she, not the male protagonist, who is the controlling force in the song, and this is confirmed by the earliest broadside set.[1] It is first known in the seventeenth century with a female narrator. "A Hot Engagement between a French Privateer, and an English Fire-Ship," a London broadside dating from 1691, is not an occupational but a *political* song published at a time of hostilities with France. The ballad is narrated by "sea faring Kate," who describes meeting a French sailor on shore and patriotically infecting him with syphilis. The experience is narrated in terms of an encounter between a privateer and a fireship:

> My Sails they are Top and Top Gallon [*sic*],
> a Friggot that's of the First Rate. (3-4)

---

[1] There is some evidence that "A Hot Engagement" is based on an earlier song. The metaphorical association of women with sailing ships is at least as old as Shakespeare. When William Congreve published a street ballad based on a song in his play *Love for Love* (1695) on the rivalry of four men over "buxom Joan," he characterised their sexual performance in terms of their trade. The victor was the sailor, who is naturally also given the best metaphor:

> And just e'en as he meant, Sir,
> To loggerheads they went, Sir,
> And then he let fly at her,
> A shot 'twixt wind and water,
> That won this fair maid's heart.
>
> "Buxom Joan of Lymas's Love to a jolly Sailer" 26-30.

Since the same image of wind and water appears in "A Hot Engagement" (14-16), there must be a strong presumption of a common source.

In the second stanza the same event is seen as a brush with the press gang:

> A French Man came lately to Press me,
> which was not a very hard thing. (5-6)

Later, seafaring Kate becomes metamorphosed into ever more comprehensive features of the scene of the engagement. She portrays herself as simultaneously a fireship and an adjacent stretch of coastline:

> He looked for some hidden Treasure,
> And fell to his doing of Feats,
> But found me a Fire-ship of Pleasure,
> when he enter'd the mouth of the Straits. (21-24)

At the same time, the occupational metaphor slides continually between the political and the erotic. On the cultural level, "A Hot Engagement" shows how an occupational song dense with naval terminology could be adapted, in historical conditions where sea battles had become commonplace, to the conditions of a specific international crisis. However, on the level of gender, it shows the kind of displacement that can take place in songs as soon as they become univocal (in this case where the second metaphorical element, the England/fireship link, had been abandoned). Finally, it is a reminder of the importance for women of singing in a way that was expressively their own, since songs from a female viewpoint may still articulate the fears and fantasies of a male sexual code.

In their paid employment, women developed a distinctive identity in song. From a performative viewpoint, there is a large body of evidence of singing by working women *as a group* throughout the period covered by this thesis. The fullest documentation is for women in the textile industry. As early as the 1530s, Miles Coverdale was complaining of the low nature of the songs sung by spinners and washerwomen (Spufford 14). In "Jack of Newbury," licensed in 1597, Thomas Deloney describes two hundred women singing like nightingales as they worked in a spinning room (20). Duke Orsino says of a song in *Twelfth Night* (c. 1600):

> The spinsters and the knitters in the sun
> And the free maids that weave their threads with bones
> Do use to chant it. (2. 4. 44-46)

In the seventeenth century, Dorothy Osborne described how shepherdesses in Bedfordshire "sit in the shade and sing of ballads," while a passage in Izaak Walton gives a clear indication that women were customarily singing "big ballads" together while working, each taking a part of the melody (Trevelyan

252; Walton 68-69). This practice has a continuing importance today. As we have already seen, English lacemakers are described in Victorian times as singing rhythmic worksongs, a rarely reported phenomenon in Britain. They also sang "big ballads," versions of "Sir Hugh" and "Long Lankin" (Palmer, *British* 11).

One important task which was begun early by means of the broadsides, but still continues today, was one of definition: to get domestic labour accepted as work in its own right. Its invisibility to men was frequently challenged in songs like "Nine Hours a Day" and "Behind the Barley Knowe." In the first, an industrial song about the struggle for a shorter working day has been adapted to include domestic labour as well. In this way the struggle is effectively decentred. There is still support for factory girls, but the emphasis has shifted to a new, totalising position where the men, victims of the factory system, are also seen as acting as the oppressors in another site, the home. In "Behind the Barley Knowe," a farmer changes roles with his wife after claiming that he could do as much work in a day as she does in three. By the end of the day he is bruised and exhausted, while she does a very competent job of the ploughing and still has time to meet her lover "behind the barley knowe." Such songs were usually comic, but their dialogic subtext argues that the home is a place where the battle to keep family and house together was in every way comparable with the manual work generally done by men.

An important weapon in this struggle was song. The earliest occupational song known to be by a woman is "Woman's Labour" (1739) by a charwoman Mary Collier (Dugaw 124), but many earlier songs articulate women's concerns. Broadsides often indicate their new economic influence and independence. One example dating from about 1680 shows a clear consciousness of shared interests with other women. It represents a complaint about the wealthy male customers crowding a tavern:

> Tis poor men that labour and brings them the coyn,
> Which deckt them in Silks and in Laces so fine,
> When may be their wives and their children may lack
> Both food for their bellys and cloaths to their back.
> "Sorrowful Complaint of Conscience and Plain-Dealing" 57-60.

One of the most widespread songs to speak for women was "Woman's Work is Never Done." The first known set of the song is a blackletter broadside issued in 1629 by the London publisher John Andrews. Since every home was also a workshop at this time, the roles of washing, cleaning and child rearing had not yet been clearly staked out, and the song gives much circumstantial detail of the rigours of the daily round. At this stage, the rambling stanzas close on a resigned note:

Maids may set still, go, or run,
But a Woman's work is never done. (5-6)

At the end of the century, the song provoked the usual tribute to popularity, parody. The title of one broadsheet which used the familiar refrain conveys its anti-feminist stance: "The Seven Merry Wives of London or, the Gossips' Complaint against their Husbands, For their Neglect, as they met together in a tavern, over half a dozen bottles of Canary." Since antithesis implies thesis, the parodies actually *advanced* the process of developing women's consciousness, and helped to initiate a new phase. By the eighteenth century the song had become part of the singing tradition of women, as many broadside versions testify, and the title had become proverbial. It remains so to this day.[1] In the process, it became more focused. Its bitter message, largely directed at a husband in a loveless marriage, is that the wife is part of the labour market but not recognised as such. She clearly locates herself in a chain of production:

Carding, spinning I do endeavour,
Never resting till the web is spun;
Then I must go to the weaver,
Woman's work is never done. (21-24)

The song continued to develop in the nineteenth century. By then it was so popular that it provoked a second male riposte, "Poor Man's Labour is Never Done." This is an exercise in self-pity, assuming a stereotypical male position (often mistakenly called "traditional") towards the division of labour in the home. It gave a familiar catalogue of situations where the woman had not fulfilled her "marital duty":

When I come home all wet and weary,
No dry clothes for to put on,
It's enough to make a poor man crazy;
Poor man's labour is never done.

The broadside printer Henry Such, alert to popular taste, printed a new version of "Woman's Work" in the 1850s, but these sets still retain the earlier note of resignation. Today, with the updating of the language and the setting, that resignation has changed to anger:

[1] It was used, for example, by Margaret Thatcher in a speech at Aberdeen, May 5, 1990.

Washing and scrubbing and mending up the clothes,
All the kiddies with their shirts out they will run.
I've already buried five and I have ten more alive,
So I find a woman's work is never done. (9-12)

Besides being an example of the way women used singing as an increasingly effective weapon, the popularity and continual updating of the song "Woman's Work is Never Done" over a period of more than three centuries shows the way in which songs acted as a focus for growing consciousness among women who were physically scattered and not yet organised. By the end of the nineteenth century, this consciousness was being expressed in terms of a nationwide movement. The song of the matchgirls in the East End of London during their pioneer strike in 1889 was printed as far away as Liverpool (Palmer, *Poverty Knock* 35).

There is therefore independent corroboration from the songs themselves of the existence of women's songs at all periods. This would not be self-evident from a simple examination of published sources. The repertoires of women singers or their particular singing traditions are rarely published as a group, or even listed in their entirety.[1] In published texts, the evidence has often been obscured by the absence of performance detail or the tendency, mentioned above, for collectors to group women's songs, occupational or otherwise, in artificial genres such as "Songs of Courtship" or "Protest Songs" that are not recognised by the singers themselves. This mediating tendency, which extends to all fields of traditional song, has been demonstrated by Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger (*Till Doomsday* 165; *Travellers' Songs* 11). Once the occupation is foregrounded, however, the existence of a woman's viewpoint in terms of specific trades, specific versions of songs, and particularly in the very definition of "labour" itself, stands out with startling clarity. When a collection of women's songs was being assembled in the 1970s, it was found that there were "more good contemporary songs on [the subject of work] than on any of the others" (Henderson, Armstrong and Kerr 119).

The need for women to validate different experience from that of the authoritative speaking subject of the male singer was a continuing project. However, men also had a need to assert basic rights and develop a new consciousness in the face of changing conditions. They had long been located and

[1] Two exceptions, both from Scotland, are David Buchan's study of the repertoire of Anna Brown of Falkland in *The Ballad and the Folk* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), and H. Gower's and James Porter's three-part analysis and listing of the songs of Jeannie Robertson (*Scottish Studies* 14 [1970]: 35-58; 16 [1972]: 139-159; 21 [1977]: 35-58). Neither of these, however, gives the texts of the songs themselves, although James Porter is currently preparing an edition of Jeannie Robertson's songs. The largest published repertoire of an English woman singer is that of Caroline Hughes, forty-six of whose songs were reproduced by Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger in *Travellers' Songs from England and Scotland* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977). Even there, however, they were scattered throughout the collection.

to some extent defined by their occupations, but in the nineteenth century a new hierarchy of priorities was set up to displace the old craft pride. One such example was mining, where safety was now being subordinated to the pursuit of profit.

*Identity through solidarity: the mining disaster ballad*

As we have seen, the development of a tradition of weavers' songs was affected by the very early division of labour in the textile industry. Although songwriting among weavers reached a peak in the first half of the nineteenth century, there is little sign in their songs of the tendency towards organisation represented by the Chartists and the early trade unions at that time. The songs of coal miners, on the other hand, show a different development towards political consciousness and united action. This was undoubtedly a result of their specific conditions. A mining community is united not only by occupation but by environment, by speech patterns (known in northeast England as "Pitmatic") and even by geology. We have seen how their song tradition expressed an early sense of identity and craft pride. Moreover, unlike the weavers, they were

> among the first to form an *industrial* union in Britain, a factor which has ironed out hierarchical thinking among miners. They are a classic example of labour process, political organisation and leisure activity forming an organic unit. (Watson 14)

Watson is describing a *process* rather than a state, and the singing tradition of the miners both reflected this growing consciousness and helped to accelerate it. There is an evolving line of pit disaster ballads in England and Scotland which goes back to the middle of the nineteenth century and continues today. Since, in addition to the individual suffering, the whole community suffered from a pit accident, these songs stand at that interface of the personal and the collective which traditional song occupies as its own space. Even in their wide geographical dispersal they share so many features that they can be considered as a homogeneous sequence rather than a genre.

Many early ballads of this kind adopt an elegiac and atmospheric mode which clearly owes much to Irish song. One example which has survived until recent times is "Johnny Seddon" (Appendix II), sung by a miner of Irish origins in County Durham in 1953:

> As I went out in summertime all for to take the air,
> I saw a handsome maiden down by the river clear,
> She wept and she lamented and bitterly she cried,
> Saying: "My curse upon the cruel mine where Johnny Seddon died." (1-4)

As with most traditional song, "Johnny Seddon" looks both ways. With its fossil amatory signifiers, it is closer (even to the point of verbal echoes) to the lyric and expressive manner of songs like "The Collier Lass," discussed earlier, than to nineteenth-century industrial song. The unspecific setting, with a girl weeping by the banks of a river, links it with the tradition of individualistic love songs. However, this pastoral mode, with its banal repetitions in the third line, is deceptively simple. Instead of following a linear episodic development, as in the traditional ballad, the lament has a complex narrative scheme based on infolding. Its *fabula*, the story in sequence, is as follows. A girl dreams of a pit accident in which her lover dies. She is told by neighbours the following day that it had really occurred at the very time she had dreamed it. A passing stroller overhears her story. The song's timeshifts and multiplicity of voices suggest a rapid interplay between the two participating individuals and their sustaining society. Within five short stanzas, it supplies at least two variations of each of Gérard Genette's narrative categories of Order, Duration, Frequency, Mood and Voice (*Figures* III, 285-286).

"Johnny Seddon" is an example of the complexity and in-folding of narrative order identified by Genette (90-105). The song opens at the "end" of the *fabula*, with the frame device of the passing stranger on the river bank. This gives way to a flashback of the pit accident and its accompanying dream, followed immediately by the neighbours (the pit milieu) bringing news of the collapse of the roof. The events follow a short/long time scheme reminiscent of Shakespeare's device in *Othello*. The listener at first hears that the events occurred in the course of a single day. The dream and roof fall are described as having taken place "last night" (9). Other time markers, however, indicate a more considerable time having elapsed:

> Early *the very next morning* my dream was clarified. (13)
> For *once* I loved a collier lad, and he loved me also. (19)
> (My emphasis).

While there is only a single disaster "event" embedded deeply in the narrative frames, it is made more "present" by being narrated three times in ten lines with diminishing intensity, first by the victim (11-12), then by the neighbours (14-16) and finally by the bereaved girl (20).

Genette's attention to the Mood of the narrative concerns the element of distance assumed in "suspending the real" (94). The chosen mode of the song is largely direct speech, and therefore stands at very little distance from the events described. However, the frame narrator does not speak. He is not described and does not participate in the events unless, in describing the maiden as "handsome" (2), he may be said to be lightly involved. He is, in fact, a residual amatory figure from the "As I went out / Come all ye" genre, a role that was dropped altogether from later disaster ballads.

The greatest complexity, however, is found in determining the Voice, since there are four narrators directing five interlocking narratives:

**Fig. 4. Narrative Voices in "Johnny Seddon"**

| | Narrator | Narratee |
|---|---|---|
| Stanza 1. | Frame speaker | Audience |
| 2. | handsome maiden | Frame speaker |
| | *[accident described]* | |
| 3. | Johnny Seddon | handsome maiden |
| 4. | neighbours | handsome maiden |
| 5. | handsome maiden | [Frame speaker?] |

It will be seen that the *sjuzet*, the way of telling the story, apportions roles quite differently from the *fabula*. Neither the frame speaker nor the girl were present at the event they describe, yet they are the controlling forces in its presentation. The frame speaker is an even more marginal figure than the girl, who speaks the conventional closing address to the listener, implied in the person of the passer-by. In short, the multivocal element does not subvert the authoritative discourse. At this stage, the speakers have the same mediating role towards the occupation group as the broadside printers, novelists and music hall artists who equally claimed to speak for them. It was the task of later songwriters in this genre to make them insider ballads in the fullest sense.

Since disaster ballads form a recognisable "line" drawing on the collective resources of their predecessors, the supple narrative schema of "Johnny Seddon" provided an important model when the vague personal note gave way to an expression of shared suffering among a whole identifiable population. "Johnny Seddon" is not localised, but later songs usually have the circumstantial detail characteristic of occupational songs. Because they were also an important way of raising money for the families of the victims, they are not usually written in dialect or technolect. So distinct was the evolved culture of individual villages that in the north-east such technolects were not even transferable from pit to pit, let alone from area to area (Frankenberg 116). If homogeneous communities were the determining factor in song development, there would be an increasing divergence within the genre. This has not proved to be the case, and disaster ballads have developed within remarkably close parameters in the widely-scattered mining areas of England, Wales and Scotland. Two of the determining factors were undoubtedly the available means of transmission and increased union organisation on a nationwide scale, but the creation of a metaphorical and narrative framework that worked uniquely within the mining set of signifiers was also of decisive importance.

While many songs were printed locally and distributed by hand, the obvious commercial appeal of the human drama also interested the nineteenth

century broadside publishers and often helped to ensure a wide sale. At this stage however, there was no attempt to challenge the dominant discourse. Instead, a naive call to the masters for help was often introduced. There is no consciousness of a distinction of class between master and miner in "The Fatal Coal-Pit Explosion at Nitshill" (1851), since both are subsumed into a single pious appeal:

> Draw near, ye brave miners, and coal-masters of Scotia;
> Give ear to the widow and poor orphan's cry,
> And give your assistance to shield and protect them,
> And you will be rewarded by the ruler on high. (33-36)

The subliterary style emphasises that all social relations are still firmly in place. Within fifty years, however, in "The Donibristle Mossburn Disaster" (1901), a shift in consciousness has taken place. The managers have become "they" and are clearly held to be the guilty party:

> Was that not another blunder? My God it was a sin.
> To put a stopping where they did, it closed our heroes in. (15-16)

The accident is held to be the result of something worse than a "blunder," yet the judgement is still left to God. A few years later, conciliation has given way to group anger and a shrewd analysis of relative interests. "The Gresford Disaster" (1934), sung by a young Sheffield miner, does not shrink from apportioning blame:

> The fireman's reports they are missing,
> The records of forty two days;
> The colliery manager had them destroyed
> To cover his criminal ways. (17-20)

It makes it clear that compensation is seen in terms of class interests:

> The owners have sent some white lilies
> To pay for the poor colliers' lives. (27-28)

Disaster ballads declined as pits became more safe after nationalisation in 1947. However, they are still produced for fundraising purposes, or within the framework of the folk revival which began in the 1950s. The revival was not a self-conscious or factitious one but part of a wider movement to reclaim areas of culture that had been marginalised by education and the media. As such it is a continuing project. It has produced a synthesis of possibilities where a member of an occupation group, or someone closely familiar with it, may simultaneously be composer, performer, collector and editor of songs.

One example of this is Ewan MacColl, who first collected "The Gresford Disaster." Another is Sam Richards, the maker of "The Lofthouse Colliery Disaster" (Appendix IV). In 1973 there was a pit flooding accident at the village of Lofthouse in Yorkshire, in which seven miners died. Roger deV. Renwick has examined the various responses to this event, which devastated the small community (185-230). Since the cultural infrastructure of pit villages includes, for example, football clubs and pipe bands as well as song making, his analysis is important in treating the songs as part of a cultural continuum including all the various forms of social expression evinced by the accident (see Porter, "Folk Poetry" 88-91). Of the examples cited by Renwick, the benefit boxing match organised to raise money comes closest to pure representation, uniting the signifiers of pit life and the male community ethos, while the ornamental garden laid out in memory of the victims tends to the purely expressive because of its unlikeness to the referent and the way its characteristic growth and regeneration is offered as a surrogate for the victims.

"The Lofthouse Colliery Disaster" is not cited by Renwick, but it is a song that enlarges and extends the tradition of turning the specific conditions of a disaster to the cause of group solidarity. It does this partly by making conscious use of the verbal and metaphorical resources of the disaster ballad tradition, and by regarding the disaster, not as "providential," but as resulting from certain specific conditions. The whole song is an exercise in intertextuality as an instrument of group expression. The absence of dialect and the appearance of words not in general oral use (*drear*, line 3; *mourn*, line 29) have the effect of placing the song within the multivocal, non-specific wider world. This general audience is the very one to which disaster ballads have traditionally addressed their appeals, and the one to which, since nationalisation of the coal industry, knowledge of the "disused workings" (11), and responsibility for safety, have been collectively entrusted. The passage of days, weeks, months, years and centuries, all of which are mentioned in the song, offers at one level a temporal representation of the length of the miners' and rescuers' ordeal. At another level, the intertextual, we can hear the mutability theme that disaster ballads had subsumed at an early stage:

> March winds blow in the early evening.
> Seven men lost in their prime.
> Who can sleep, who can sit easy,
> Who'll be there to mourn next time?
> "Lofthouse Colliery Disaster" 25-28.

> Oh, let's not think of tomorrow lest we disappointed be.
> Our joys may turn to sorrow as we all may daily see.
> Today we may be strong and healthy, but soon there comes a change,
> As we may see from the explosion that has been at Trimdon Grange.
> "Trimdon Grange Colliery Explosion 1882" 1-4.

Like "Johnny Seddon," the Lofthouse song has a rural setting. It opens and closes with the seasonal round, contrasted with the colliers' permanent darkness. Like the earlier ballad, Richards makes use of all the four elements, in the form of sun, mist, wind and rubble, to present the scene. Richards' immediate model, however, seems to have been Peggy Seeger's song on an accident in Nova Scotia fifteen years earlier:

> The day still comes and the sun still shines,
> But it's dark as the grave in the Cumberland mine.
> "Springhill Mine Disaster 1958" 11-12.

> Day begins and the sun does shine,
> Dark and drear is a world below
> Where colliers work in a Yorkshire mine.
> "Lofthouse Colliery Disaster" 2-4.

In this way Sam Richards has placed "The Lofthouse Colliery Disaster" diachronically within the parameters of the disaster ballad. More importantly, however, the song intervenes synchronically. It conducts an investigation into *causes* as a deliberate challenge to the lengthy and diversive procedures of the official enquiry. Unlike the other Lofthouse ballads (only one of which was collected directly from the oral tradition), there is documentary detail of the kind demanded at such an enquiry:

> Seven men at the Lofthouse Colliery
> Flockton Seam Face South 9B. (7-8)

The specificity of occupational song has led to comparisons with newspaper reports, but as the song shows, this is misleading. A performance of the song is a speech *event* with the aim of raising money, and therefore starts from very different premises. The week-long rescue attempt, for example, which brought Lofthouse briefly to prominence in the national press, is not even mentioned. The emphasis is not on the loss of life but on the threat to the miners as a whole posed by the latent danger of collapse. The song gives an added *functional* element to the time signifiers mentioned above by documenting accumulated cases of negligence over an extended period:

> Eighteen fifty was the year
> When Low Laithes Colliery was closed down,
> Leaving pitshafts, disused workings,
> Leaving tunnels underground.

A hundred years of coalblack water,
Waiting to be a miner's tomb,
Trapped in the silent earth and waiting
A hundred years of rubble and stone. (9-16)

The line "Waiting to be a miner's tomb" is another echo of Peggy Seeger's song: "Long hot days in the miner's tomb" (19). Its literal, instrumental truth is overlaid by the expressive element of the image's literal incongruity: mines are not socially designated as graves. Since the workplace has usurped the functions of another designated space in the community, the cemetery, present social relations are not seen as natural or inevitable, but on the contrary distorted and displaced. This is reinforced, and the conflict sharpened, by the ironic use of a kind of submerged direct speech articulating simultaneously the hegemonic views of the mine managers, the national press, and government circles:

Keep on working, get the coal out,
Safety takes up too much time.
There's seven of those greedy miners
Lying in a sea of grime. (21-24)

The tone links the song with a number of contemporary songs such as "Underground Aristocrats" ironically echoing the views of such "opinion-formers." In "The Lofthouse Collier Disaster," the precise identity of the speaker is deliberately left unresolved.

Finally, the song expands to take in the whole industry. While earlier ballads had treated pit accidents as first a personal tragedy, then widened to include the collective grief of a village, and finally to add an indictment of the colliery managers, Sam Richards draws on the confidence of a nationalised industry, a nationwide union, and a recently-won strike to make a more extensive closure to his song. The future is seen in terms of a possible re-enactment of the disaster elsewhere. The song closes on a note of positive feedback, of questions not resolved within the resources of the poem:

Who can sleep, who can sit easy,
Who'll be there to mourn next time? (27-28)

While formally an original song with a named maker and a demonstrable link with a historical event, "The Lofthouse Colliery Disaster" can be seen as part of the folklore of the event, an element in the complex network of cultural expression. On another level, it can be seen as a variant version, complete with verbal and conceptual echoes, of the totality of mining disaster ballads since 1850. This perspective conveys the importance of such songs in establishing a sense of continuous lived experience in which the too-familiar role of

the working woman and man as valued in their own circle but subservient to the outside world has lost some of its painful force.

All the songs examined in this chapter address the polarities of cohesion won through new-found loyalties and the recurring disruption and loss caused by conditions outside the control of those involved. As I showed in my discussion of worksongs, occupational songs are not functional in the sense of having a simple one-to-one relationship with the act of working itself. However, the act of decentring involved in asserting the centrality of women's work and the social dissolution threatened by unsafe mine workings *is* functional. It is a function which is related to the central concern of workers' culture, that of replacing unitary axes of power by a plurality of discourse formations. These in turn set up alternative nodes of force which can act as the focus of a new, non-hierarchical order.

## 5. FORCES FROM OUTSIDE

We have seen how the "organic community" of working people has never been a very stable or self-sufficient entity, at least during the period from the seventeenth century onwards when the occupational songs that survive were in the making. One reason for this was, of course, the constant impinging of struggles in the world outside, through wars, periodic unemployment, the loss of common land, forced impressment into the navy for those living in coastal areas and, above all, the transformations of society brought about by the Industrial and Technological Revolutions. Taken cumulatively, these changes gradually shattered long-established social structures. By the middle of the nineteenth century they can be said to have produced a new order of unprecedented extent:

> The Industrial Revolution marks the most fundamental transformation of human life in the history of the world recorded in written documents. For a brief period [c. 1770-1850] it coincided with the history of a single country, Great Britain. An entire world economy was thus built on, or rather around, Britain, and [it] therefore temporarily rose to a position of power and influence unparalleled by any state. . . . There was a moment in the world's history when . . . Britain can be described as its only workshop, its only massive importer and exporter, its only carrier, its only imperialist, almost its only foreign investor. (Hobsbawm 13)

The new order called for a response not only from those whose opinions are "recorded in written documents" but from those who had had no say in the process at all. It came in the form of a proliferation of new or remade songs often described generically as "industrial" (by, for example, A. L. Lloyd in *Folk Song* 297). Although they are particularly associated with the rise of new cities like Manchester and Bradford, rural areas of England were also involved. They had their share of new industries, and songs from this period like "The Owslebury Lads" and "Pity Poor Labourers" often show very nearly the same militancy as their urban counterparts:

> the time's fast approaching, it's very near come,
> When *we*'ll have the farmers all under our thumbs.
> "Pity Poor Labourers" 25-29. Original emphasis.

The songs did not usually deal directly with military, political and economic developments in the outside world. As Roderick Beaton puts it, "a world governed by committees and international treaties cannot convincingly be described or evoked by a conservative system of formulaic patterns and recurring themes" (192). Instead, changes were internalised and seen indirectly

in terms of their *effects*. Many songmakers were content merely to reflect the changes in their lives with puzzlement, humour or mockery. Thus the Battle of Waterloo as a military engagement was largely ignored by traditional singers, who described instead the plight of the returning soldiers, and the thin gruel known as "Waterloo porridge" that became a feature of the hard years following the defeat of Napoleon.[1]

This chapter is concerned with two particular responses to the new order. The first was the creation of new symbolic schemes which, in providing a continuing analysis of the underlying meaning of new forces like steam and the introduction of the factory system, helped understand and command them. The next step was for the new order to be countered with what I have called *rituals of rebellion*. By rituals I mean patterns of resistance that could not necessarily be realised in action but were consciousness-raising. They include individual acts of protest or collective action, which was itself based on an emerging social formation, trade unionism. The chapter concludes with a look forward to the period when unions were well-established and able to stimulate and commission their own songs.

The impact of the new times was so varied that there could not be one single response to it, and this chapter will concentrate on cotton weaving, the railways and coalmining. The weavers were the first to experience the full force of industrialisation, and the sufferings of various individuals and localities on either side of the Pennines were the theme of hundreds of songs in the first half of the century. The railway boom of the 1830s and 1840s gave rise to the first songs of an entirely new occupation group, the footplatemen. From 1840 onwards, pitsongs began to appear with greater frequency as the number of miners grew until, in 1911, they overtook agricultural workers to become the largest occupation group (Burnett 26).

Strict chronological development is hard to trace when oral expression is still irregularly mediated through written and printed sources, but the overall development can be plotted. The mining disaster ballads discussed in the previous chapter, for example, can be precisely dated, and they show a growing tendency to symbolism and rebellion. The earliest examples, dating from the 1840s, regard the explosions and collapses as *accidents*, attempting to account for them *within the resources of the group* through tearful resignation ("Johnny Seddon") or fathoming the mysterious ways of fate. Attitudes to mortality coalesce round an evolving symbolic scheme, such as the elemental images of mine-as-tomb, or fire, gas and water. "The Lofthouse Colliery Disaster" is a late example of this. Songs show a shift towards regarding the disasters as culpable, and clearly point the finger *outside* the group ("The Donibristle Mossburn Disaster"). Finally, a few songs such as "The Gresford Disaster"

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[1] For Waterloo porridge, see "The Poor Cotton Weaver" 16; for songs of distress after the battle, see Roy Palmer, *The Rambling Soldier* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977) 252-259: "The Bonny Light Horseman" and "The Tradesman's Complaint."

progress from the idea of contemplating sinners, which is basically a teleological exercise, to that of identifying and punishing those responsible. The implied group is clearly now speaking with one voice. In addition to raising money, they came to make a deeper analysis of the outside threat to their livelihood posed by the disaster. This analysis is generally in the form of a militant version of an official enquiry, showing determination to find the cause and identify the criminally negligent.

In some occupations the changes had begun to be felt much earlier. For example, specialisation of trades became established in the weaving industry in the eighteenth century, making the weavers reliant on both suppliers and markets but also giving them a new group consciousness (Watson 11). The Industrial Revolution brought first mechanisation and then rapid urbanisation and cheap female and child labour. All of these changes were harder to resist precisely because they were, from the point of view of those directly affected, *imported* ideas and practices which had their origin elsewhere. One vital factor from the point of view of songmakers was that the changes came gradually enough for the old and new systems to exist side by side for a long time. The handloom weavers were finally displaced only a century after the first steam looms were introduced (Thompson 211).

Conflicting reactions to these developments are reflected in many songs made at the time. "The Weaver and the Factory Maid" (Appendix I) presents the stages as a dialectical development through the persons of the weaver, his father, and the factory girl. The father stands for the older generation of skilled workers, rooted in tradition ("the Queen of the May" [8]) and celebrating an independence more apparent than real. The weaver himself is ambivalent towards the new technology through a clash between his love and his craft, while the factory girl provides the fullest expression of the vast new social grouping of urbanised factory women described in the previous chapter:

> Now where are the girls? I'll tell you plain,
> The girls have gone to weave by steam;
> And if you'd find 'em you must rise at dawn
> And trudge to the mill in the early morn.
> "The Weaver and the Factory Maid" 20-24.

Such songs, however, still lacked a point of view which would provide a synthesis of the new order. This could only be achieved through an integrated symbolic scheme.

*Evolving a symbolic scheme for industrial song*

The tendency to create life metaphors from working experience is one of the most widespread characteristics of occupational song. In some cases they become a kind of commanding central image that not only offers a means of expression complex enough to express a whole life system, but also one that can function as such in one song after another. In such cases they may be said to have a symbolic role. Symbols of this kind have usually been associated with the traditional rural ballad, treating love and death or the seasonal round. We have already encountered the serial ballads coalescing around figures like Robin the ploughboy and Jack the sailor. This section will consider whether such symbolic sets were realised in the songs that deal with the transformations of the Industrial Revolution. It aims to show how, working with the resources of a much shorter tradition, songmakers enacted complex symbols in the same way as in the traditional songs.

Some of the earliest known occupational songs, from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, already incorporated symbolic elements. The recurring metaphors were sometimes trivial (the sailor's tarry trousers, the mower's taring scythe) yet they had the authority to endure for many centuries as the central metaphorical figures of their respective occupations. Others were more ambitious, and clearly formed part of a set of folk beliefs and activities that stretched far beyond singing as an entertainment. In the early occupational narrative of farm labour, "John Barleycorn," the gathering of the harvest and preparing of the barley is portrayed not only with vivid circumstantial detail but also, through the personification of the grain and the appropriation of rural occupations to the scene of a lynching, as metaphor. It is a ritual enactment of the life cycle comparable to the Passion:

> Some said kill him, some said him drown,
> some wisht to hang him high.
> For those that followed Barley-corn
> they said would Beggars dye.
>
> Then with a Plow they Plow'd him up,
> and thus they did devise,
> To bury him within the Earth,
> and swore he would not rise.
>
> With Harrows strong they came to him,
> and burst Clods on his head,
> A joyful Banquet then was made,
> when Barley-Corn was dead.

He rested him upon the earth,
till rain from Sky did fall.
Then he grew up on branches green,
which sore amaz'd them all. (25-40)

Industrial ballads were not able to draw on the same kind of symbolic tradition as the maker of "John Barleycorn." This lack of a tradition sometimes resulted in songs like Joe Wilson's "The Strike," from the late nineteenth century, which served up undigested economic theory in Geordie dialect:

An' if lang oors industry increases,
Hev they found oot wi' the oors that *they've* tried?
Their capital grows through wor labour,
Wey, it's mair to their shyem, that they'll find. (13-16)

Although the dialect element was new, journeywork of this kind was composed at all periods. However, the lines do suggest the contradiction involved in attempting to represent working conditions as they were *and* express the underlying forces that formed, in David Craig's words, "the real foundations."[1] The new times had to be represented concretely and conceptually. Songmakers had to reify the key forces involved in the industrial transformation of the lives of all manual workers *and* develop a discourse which could express the changes not only as physical phenomena but as concepts. The physical forces were of course highly disparate, including the impact of machinery with its associated integration of new sources of power, notably steam, and the new ordering of the working day. Among the new ideas to be assimilated were labour power and productivity.

One solution was for pre-industrial songs to be adapted. David Craig has described the diachronic development of songs like "The Weaver and the Factory Maid" as "a result of stretching itself to take in the industrial process" (64). He goes on to add, however, that songs were unable to describe the new industrial system because it involved abstractions which had not yet evolved their own symbolism in the way, for example, death and fertility had (82).

The difference from the symbolic order of the pre-industrial songs lies in the songs' more problematic relationship with the dominant ideology, which had long before situated industrial transformations within the discourses of Progress and Prosperity, as "John Barleycorn" had been subsumed into the culture of the drinking song (Kennedy 627-628). We will take a recent example, sung by a weaver Tom Daniel of Batley, Yorkshire, in the 1960s, but clearly rooted in the years of transition at the beginning of the nineteenth century:

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[1] David Craig, *The Real Foundations: Literature and Social Change* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973).

Poverty, poverty knock!
Me loom is a-sayin' all day.
Poverty, poverty knock!
Gaffer's too skinny [= mean] to pay.
Poverty, poverty knock!
Keepin' one eye on the clock.
I know I can guttle [= eat]
When I hear me shuttle
Go: poverty, poverty knock!
"Poverty Knock" 1-9.

Here the new relations are seen in physical terms. The workspace is dominated by the powerloom, the clock and the overseer. However, they also function as metaphors, as symbols of alienation, devices that estrange the weavers from the environment they used to control as skilled worker. The noisy, overdriven loom and the relentless clock, the compulsively-driven worker and the overseer arguing over wages have become representative figures in a scheme that, worked out in song after song, constructs an alternative cultural map of England. The continual play of signification of three elements in the process, the factory bell, the machine, and the superhuman worker, led to their having a complexity of connotation that may fairly be called a symbolic scheme. These elements will be considered in turn.

*a. The Factory Bell*

As Dickens showed in *Hard Times* (1854), the minute and regular observance of routine was an important part of the utilitarian project of creating a compliant workforce in both factory and workhouse. The introduction of factory bells, horns, whistles and sirens was not therefore just an administrative convenience. Together with the related practice of "clocking in" to work, it undermined the right of workers to set their own pace and rhythm. David Craig has himself described this process of estrangement in an analysis of Dickens' *Hard Times*: "Instead of work following the rhythm of close personal relationships . . now the men, women and children must submit to a rigid timetable laid down by a management avid that every minute should be worked to the full" (114). In Protestant thinking, "man's allotted time" was synonymous with his whole lifespan (the inclusion of women was assumed). Under the new conditions time, which had once been the individual's to apportion, was now minutely divided up according to set schedules and policed by a man appointed for the purpose. Songwriters were alert to this contradiction. The singer of "The Factory Bell" emphasised how time had come to be "got" and "kept" like any commodity:

You have just got time to eat & sleep
A man is set your time to keep;
And if you chance to come too late,
You'r [*sic*] mark'd on paper or on slate[.] (9-12).

By dividing the day, the factory owners created a new opposition between work and play, factory time and "free time," and destroyed the traditional perception of the day as a seamless totality. Clocking-in introduced a unit of measurement that was not based on production, and thereby redefined the nature of work. The resulting (false) precision also brought with it an element of surveillance.

Because of this fundamental change, the bell became the central signifier in song of a newly-perceived alienation in the work process. It became the *representative* control:

Every morning just at five,
Gotta get up, dead or alive. . .
Every morning just at six,
Don't that old bell make you sick?
It's hard times in the mill, my love,
Hard times in the mill.
"Hard Times in the Mill" 1-2, 5-8.

The people in question are clearly seen as Other, lumpen and unindividualised:

And all around the slaves do dwell
Who are called to labour by a bell.
"The Factory Bell" 7-8.

Other songs, however, show that the new conditions were gradually assimilated, using them to advantage and setting up new loyalties. A number of songs close with a scene where the girl is called back to her powerloom, and this produces an apparent conflict of signification, since the bell or whistle is now associated with the object of desire:

It's true I did love her but now she won't have me,
And all for her sake I must wander a while
Over high hills and valleys where no one shall know me
Far away from the sound of the sweet factory bell.
"Factory Girl" 25-29.

So fare ye well, I must away, for the last whistle's said its will.
I must go back to my young man who works with me in Campbell's Mill.
"The Maid of Campbell's Mill" 15-16.

As in "The Weaver and the Factory Maid," the "preferred lover" trope which was described earlier has been relocated in a factory. At the same time, the whistle signifier has been "turned." Where it acts as the closure of a song, it may now represent an *attractive* force by association. In terms of the totality of industrial song, it has a dialogic function, already questioning the purely oppressive function of the bell. This dual signification is the first step in the development of a fully-realised symbolic representation of the new order.

*b. The Machine*

David Craig's analysis of industrial song implies that songs sometimes failed to adapt because the new conditions were suddenly introduced and radically different from anything before. He does not sufficiently take into account the gradualness of the change, already referred to in the case of the weavers, which gave time for songs to keep in step: "La mécanisation n'est pas une rupture radicale dans l'évolution du mode de travail, mais la continuation d'un processus à replacer dans le long terme" (Marty 63: *"Mechanisation is not a sudden break in the evolution of ways of working but the continuation of a long-term process of replacement."* My trans.). Marty's observation on the song tradition of the Franco-Belgic weaving industry applies equally to Britain. It was the introduction of an economic order hostile to traditional practice and culture, not the mechanisation and retooling of British industry, that was the decisive, alienating factor of the industrial revolution. Still less did mechanisation stifle occupational songs. North-east England, already industrialised by the middle of the eighteenth century, is one of the richest sources of industrial song, and "it was the mechanisation of the nineteenth century and its results which produced the finest haul of weaving songs" (Watson 11).

Victor Neuberg writes that American singers absorbed machinery into the imagery of their popular literature much more rapidly than the English (129). Neuberg's claim is hard to verify. Steam engines were already in use at the beginning of the eighteenth century in some parts of north-east England, yet the first *surviving* songs to mention them are from nearly a century later. However, few songs of any kind can be clearly dated to the early period, and the broadside presses were still concentrated far from the industrial centres until the end of the eighteenth century.

It may be said that by the 1830s and 1840s, when song documentation first becomes substantial, machines are securely located as adversaries in a nexus of responses to the changing times. In the first instance, the introduction of machinery was often fiercely opposed. Song became as much the instrument of opposition as the Luddite's hammer. In the 1840s, the Midland potters represented the ironically-named Jolly Machine as the thief of their livelihood, and made of their song about its introduction a call to organisation and resistance:

That Jolly's a robber, deny it who can
And brings on distress the most heavy
But how to avert it I'll tell every man
Why, down with his half-crown levy (= *union dues*).
"The Jolly Machine" 17-21.

Machines represented a further loss of control over the working environment. As the whistle or hooter inscribed itself on the very different rhythms of the independent worker's daily round, machinery ensured that the movements of the body were also distorted. The operator became disembodied, an extension of the machine. Not only had the workers become "hands," but songs appeared describing the sufferings of different parts of their bodies as if they were independent entities, such as a dialogue between the belly and the back (Palmer, *A Touch* 188).

This fracturing of the body was a fundamental dislocation to which writers were later to become alert. For perhaps the first time in the development of occupational song, the songmakers were at one with the novelists in their awareness of the implications of the manufacturing process to the presentation of the human image.[1] Conversely, the commercial broadsides frequently represented the machine in human terms. By describing it as "jolly" or "warm," the songwriters made it corporal, usurping the total body that had been given up by human beings:

But then owd Neddy engine, I think he beats the whole,
He's fond o' summut warm, sure, for they feed him up o' coal.
"Oldham Workshops" 21-22.

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[1] For example, Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the Durbervilles* (1891. Ed. P. N. Furbank. London: Macmillan, 1974) 375: "The incessant quivering [of the threshing machine], in which every fibre of her frame participated, had thrown her into a stupefied reverie in which her arms worked on independently of her consciousness." Hardy also follows the anthropomorphic tendency of the songs: he describes a threshing machine as a "red tyrant" and "the insatiable swallower" (*Tess* 365, 374). In America, the machine developed into a literary trope for uncontrolled power, as in this wildly mixed animal metaphor from Frank Norris' *The Octopus* (1901): "the galloping terror of steam and steel, with its single eye, cyclopean, red, shooting from horizon to horizon, symbol of a vast power, huge and terrible, the leviathan with tentacles of steel" (New York: Penguin, 1986) 179. In Dickens, the way the machine assumes the same human attributes as the workforce was most discernible in the rhythm of work. The "quiet, watchful and steady" weaver Stephen Blackpool provided "a special contrast, as every man was in the forest of looms where Stephen worked, to the crashing, smashing, tearing piece of mechanism at which he laboured" (*Hard Times* [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969] 107-108). It was a landscape in which even a mass of human beings could become invisible, while the machinery itself takes on some of the attributes of the human : "Machinery slackened; throbbing feebly like a fainting pulse; stopped. The bell again; the glare of light and heat dispelled; the factories, looming heavy in the black, wet night . . ." (*Hard Times* 118).

In these metaphorical figures, the association was occasionally so successful that signifier and signified became fused, as in the sea shanty about a donkey-engine which has become a children's animal song (Hugill 119-120).[1]

Songs like "Oldham Workshops" acquiesced in the new mechanical order by representing machines as constructs which had the same power to lord it over their minders as the often absent ironmasters. The logical extension of this was a feeling of helplessness before a greater force that was now perceived as chillingly human. This is seen in the characterisation of a mechanical stoker as "The Iron Man" in another song sung by the Yorkshire weaver Tom Daniel. It clearly reflects a common perception of machines as having not only a malevolent consciousness but the power to follow it through:

> Iron Man, please don't send us to our doom . . .
> But an iron girder gave Patsy's head a kick.
> All that's left that we can see is poor old Murphy's pick.
> "The Iron Man" 6, 9-10.

The introduction of machinery therefore led to changed perceptions of the human body and its milieu. Similarly, the use of steam as a source of energy was quickly incorporated into the figurative schemes of such songs as the "Steam Loom Weaver" (c. 1830), which is almost the first metaphorical treatment of steam in English.[2] Since steam was a driving force created by the apparent transformation of one element into another, its use led to a reassessment of the whole cosmic order. At first, steam was represented in the popular broadsides according to the conventional wisdom of the day (the dominant discourse) as a metaphor of transforming power. Even small quantities of the cheapest fuel, water, could achieve prodigious feats:

> You may ride up to London in three hours and a quarter,
> With nothing to drive but a kettle of water.
> "The Wonderful Effects of the Leicester Rail Road" 11-12.

> I reckon soon
> Both sun and moon
> They'll make to go by steam.
> "Oldham Workshops" 30. My lineation.

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[1] The continuing life of this perception in popular culture is apparent from the Nigerian Onitsha pamphlet *Wonders shall never end* (Nedeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprints 9, 1962), which features a watch with bellyache (10-12).

[2] See Gerald Porter, "Working Up Steam: The Making of a New Metaphor," *Språket som kulturspegel*, ed. K-J. Danell, G. Persson and A. Stedje (Umeå: University of Umeå, 1991) 183-190.

These lines suggest the initially *alien* nature of steam to working people. As the unspecified "they" indicates, the release of its powers was a human achievement, but one that was achieved by others, by a group that did not include the songmaker or his/her audience. Steam engineers had come to subsume the qualities of heroic protagonists such as Hercules and, above all, Prometheus, but they were functioning *outside* the milieu in which the songs were composed and performed. They were not yet popular heroes, and most of these songs, originating as broadsides, failed to enter the oral tradition.

The exaltation of steam in popular broadsides of this kind cleared the way for the real, and quite unexalted, displacement of the human body that steam power was bringing about in the textile mills and on the railways. The working environment was changed from one designed to provide the best productive conditions for the workforce to one where a suitable setting for the machine was paramount. One result of this was the employment of children, who could mind and untangle jammed machines while they were still running. The changes were represented culturally through a reductive association between steam and child labour. In FrancesTrollope's *Michael Armstrong* (1840), the first novel to deal with the exploitation of children in the factories, the utilitarian doctor Crockley, the voice of the authoritative discourse, defends the use of sweated labour in the cotton mills:

> Why what's steam. Let them answer me that. Is steam man's making? Isn't it sent by Providence? And what for, I should like to know? Isn't it for the good of mankind? And how is that good to be had, if the nimbleness of children is not brought to bear upon it? (78)

Crockley uses a typical utilitarian argument. Steam had become figuratively associated with children to the point where Andrew Bell could call his system of children's education "the Steam Engine of the Moral World."[1]

The assimilation of this new metaphor into the imagery of contemporary song can be closely documented. A hand-loom weaver in 1834 clearly understood the association between steam engines and child labour when he said grimly, "I am determined for my part, that if they will invent machines to supersede manual labour, they must find iron boys to mind them" (Thompson 340). The synthesis made here was a shared perception which was also represented in song, as this contemporary broadside shows:

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[1] Introduction by David Craig to Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969) 23.

> In London, I've heard there is a machine,
> Invented for making young children by steam:
> Such dear little creatures, full thirty a day,
> For young engineers to supply the railway.
> "A New Song on the Opening of the Birmingham and Liverpool Railway" 27-30.

By the 1840s, writers were ready to draw on this play of imagery, which had been set up in the oral tradition. Charles Dickens, steeped in popular culture, was by 1843 able to assume the signifying tie between the two concepts by referring to the young Pecksniff girls as "having, *in the figurative language of the day*, a great deal of steam to dispose of" (*Martin Chuzzlewit* 57. My emphasis). He is clearly implying that the metaphorical link had only recently been made.

Since one of the primary functions of popular song was to articulate aspects of life suppressed elsewhere, it was only a short step for singers to take "making young children by steam" literally. The process of internalising the new source of energy was accelerated by making it a metaphor of sexual vigour. As we have seen, such metaphors have always been integral to occupational song. Machines, and steam power itself, were seen by singers as a force in sexual encounters.

In the "New Song on the Opening of the Birmingham and Liverpool Railway," the reference to the "machine, / Invented for making young children by steam" (27-28) already offered the possibility of a polyvalent meaning, and the writer of the 1876 broadside "My Grandfather's Days," looking back to the 1840s, felt able to go further and play on the semantic equivalence of "get" and "beget":

> Now we've omnibuses, patent cars and bedsteads upon springs,
> Where children you may get by steam, such pretty little things. (39-40)

Once again, however, it is only in the extended metaphor possible within the shared technical reference of a single industry that the fusion of ideas reaches its fullest expression. The synthesis of worker and machine implied by the use of the handloom was developed as an extended erotic metaphor in "The Bury New Loom" (see page 98). A later broadside, the "Steam Loom Weaver," adapted this to the powerloom, setting up a dense sequence of machine parts which would have given great satisfaction to an operator familiar with the workings of the machine:

Her loom worked well the shuttle flew,
His nickers played the tune nick-nack,
Her laith did move with rapid motion,
Her temples, healds, long-lambs and jacks,
Her cloth-beam rolled the cloth up tight,
The yarn beam emptied soon it's seam,
The young man cried your loom works, light
And quickly then off shot the steam. (33-40. Original punctuation)

The transference is now complete. Unlike the broadsides where "they" were unleashing their new forces on a nervous and passive people, the machine operatives, both male and female, are now the source of dynamic energy. Unlike the songs where the operative was merely an (expendable) part, the machine has now become part of the woman, a steam loom weaver, and is fused with her body.[1] She calls on a man, "an engine driver keen" (6), to put her loom in order, and by their united efforts the work is soon going on apace. Steam functions throughout the song, as an explicit metaphor for orgasm, and the word provides closure for every stanza. As with the factory bell, a new and destructive element in working life has been captured, turned and thereby neutralised within the frame provided by the oral tradition. The analogy with the popular hero, which the elaborate Promethean images of the mass circulation broadsides had failed to bring off, has at last been achieved, and the central dynamic of the Industrial Revolution has been humanised and neutralised. Within the matrices of the song, a woman has occupied the machine, and the lovers jointly supply its driving force.

*c. The Worker as Hero*

The new order was also expressed symbolically through character myths. Occupational song always had its representative figures, who articulated aspirations which were rarely realised in practice. They included Robin the carefree ploughboy, Jone O'Grinfilt the weaver, the "Warrior Women" who served in the army or navy in disguise, and the widespread Tommy Knocker figure who helps miners in their work.[2] In many cases these figures were not

[1] There is evidence of weavers identifying the frame of the handloom with the human body from as early as 1772 (E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971] 324). This same metaphorical fusion occurred later in the nineteenth century, in an occupation with a strong singing tradition, agriculture. Horsedrawn threshing machines were often seen as participants in lovemaking, no doubt because of their rural setting, their continuous vibration and, above all, the presence of that *doppelganger* of male sexual performance, the horse. In 1904, Cecil Sharp collected "The Thrashing Machine" [*sic*], which makes great play with this theme.

[2] For Robin the ploughboy, see W. G. Day, ed., *The Pepys Ballads* (Cambridge: Derek Brewer, 1987) 3. 254, 305 etc; for Jone O'Grinfilt, see Martha Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse* (London: Croom Helm, 1974) 48-51; for women in travesty, see Diane Dugaw, *Warrior Women and Popular Balladry 1650-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989); for Tommy Knocker, see A. L. Lloyd, *Folk Song in England* (London: Granada, 1975) 315.

confined to folk song but were part of a web of local and trade lore. The rise of manufacturing industry, with its rationalist underpinning, was a challenge to the solidity of these role types, and a further test of Craig's claim that the rapid pace of industrialisation left no time for new symbolic sets to be put in place.

In the event, such new symbolic aggregations did occur, underpinned less by the Romantic image of the heroic individual than by models already available to the singer: "The oral memory works well with 'heavy' characters, persons whose deeds are monumental, memorable and commonly public" (Ong 70). These characters took many forms, including the Promethean steam engineer referred to above, but in the mining industry in the northeast of England they coalesced around two distinct "individualist" character stereotypes, the credulous, hard-drinking braggart and the champion worker. They were dependent on the broadsides for their dissemination, yet acquired strong local and popular elements as they grew into local cultures. The first type, the lovable buffoon, formed part of a local tradition of caricature (Colley 53). "Bob Cranky," who first appeared on broadsides in 1806, represents a survival of the inter-occupational rivalry already seen in "Collier Lads." He was so much the antithesis of the self-disciplined, thoughtful worker the unions were anxious to promote that he has recently been described as "the creation of a bunch of petty bourgeois songwriters in Newcastle social clubs."[1]

The other composite figure, existing in several occupations, was a worker of prodigious strength and limitless productivity. In mining he was known by many names such as "The Big Hewer" or "Jacky in the Law Raw":

> My Laddie is a kerving Hewer
> He Hews twenty every Hour.
> "Jacky in the Law Raw" 11-12.

In America John Henry, or Big John, has come to stand for the whole composite class (see, for example, Lomax 151).

Since the Big Hewer and John Henry are evidently part of the workforce, they are not simply a reworking of the old spirit of the mines, as Lloyd suggests (*Folk Song* 315). They are another kind of survivor, men who flourish in conditions where others have been defeated. As Martha Vicinus observes, "the folk hero who smashes all the bullies, drinks yards of ale, dances longer than anyone else, and yet hews more coal, could exist only in a tightly-knit community that shared long hours of work and bursts of holiday-making" (36).

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[1] Dave Harker, *One for the Money* (London: Hutchinson, 1980) 197. In a later paper, Harker suggested that the Bob Cranky type was an instrument in the ritual denigration of one kind of worker by others who were higher up in the working hierarchy, in this case the Tyneside collier by tradesmen and clerks ("The Original Bob Cranky?," *Folk Music Journal* 5. 1. [1985]: 48-82).

In Bakhtinian terms, he represents the dispersal and reassembling of the *human* subject within a new medium, song.

It is no coincidence that the Big Hewer and Bob Cranky reached the zenith of their popularity in song during the second half of the nineteenth century, when union strength in the mines was rapidly growing. They were, to a great extent, constructs, introduced by outsiders to counteract the centripetal forces of the new miners' organisations. Indeed, the Big Hewer myth coincided so strongly with corporate interests that, in simplified form, it became part of Establishment ideology in both the United States and the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s. This extreme example of life imitating art gave legitimacy to the Fordist drive for high productivity and the Stakhanov cult of the "model worker" with its related features in works of socialist realism.

However, the element of popular culture in both figures undermines any simple conspiracy theory of imposing a preconceived pattern on to working-class culture. The beerswilling Bob Cranky was hardly a bosses' stereotypical ideal employee. In traditional song, the Big Hewer was not only a universal role model but also firmly rooted in the dialect and mores of the occupational group. But the role model was highly unstable. As often in occupational song, it functioned simultaneously as type and antitype. Even in the early songs there is a dialectical distance between the super-man and everyday reality. In "The Celebrated Working Man," which became established in Britain after being brought from the United States, the protagonist is seen bragging in the pub, and the actuality of his feats is constantly undermined by the setting:

> I can judge a shot of powder to a sixteenth of a grain.
> I can fill my eighteen tubs, though the water falls like rain.
> An' if you'd like to see me in the porpendicular [*sic*] vein,
> It's when I'm settin' timmers *in the bar-room.* (13-16. My emphasis)

The broadside presses, as we have seen, acted as a kind of clearing house for both dominant and counter-cultures, and in this case, even allowing for the dialogic element, they clearly promoted the image of a self-sufficient individual worker whose interests entirely coincided with those of his employers. The type in this unreconstructed form survived into the 1950s, when Ewan MacColl composed "The Big Hewer" for a Radio Ballad of the same name. Despite the importance of the Radio Ballads in foregrounding everyday working life in different industries, MacColl's song is, untypically, romanticised and cliché-ridden: "Coal dust flows in the veins where the blood should run" (17). His reliance on "Little-One-Just-Born-He-Walked" stereotypes familiar from the mythic cycles of heroes (Ong 22) shows a basic estrangement from the realism of his theme:

> In a cradle of coal in the darkness I was laid, Go Down!
> Down in the dirt and darkness I was laid, Go Down!
> Cut me teeth on a five-foot timber,
> Held up the roof with me little finger,
> Started me time, away in the mine, Go Down! (5-10)

Ironically, recognition of the ambivalent role of the Big Hewer came as a result of the analysis of worker's culture that MacColl had helped to initiate. In recent years the role-type has been specifically questioned, and effectively inscribed in the ranks of exogenic songs, or constructs which ultimately serve the ruling ideology. As "The Celebrated Working Man" showed, a typical oral response to such constructs is parody, a decentring form which flourishes within a cohesive group with a broadly shared repertoire of songs.[1] Donneil Kennedy made a superhuman navvy the subject of comic exaggeration in "O'Reilly and Big McNeill." Dave Mountford's song "The Big Hewer and the Little Marra" (1972), treats the myth dialectically by assuming its presence in the collective memory of his hearers, and then inverting it. His Big Hewer is a threat to the group. He "had ne brains," and harassed his marra (workmate) with his frenzied working rhythm. As a result he strained his heart and died in his prime:

> The skinny little marra went to see him;
> He looked lovely in the front room laid out,
> He looked down and said : Today I've filled one
> And you lad, you've filled nowt, 'cause you're dead. (31-34)

Bob Cranky and the Big Hewer represent fundamentally *male* role-types. "The equation between work and masculinity depends on an exclusion – women. The suppression of sexuality . . . is also a suppression of history" (Campbell 99). This was particularly true in the case of the Big Hewer, since the women at the pitheads were in fact admired specifically for their strength and muscularity (Campbell 99-100).

The comprehensiveness of the exclusion of women from occupational role-types suggests that sexual oppression has a greater historical and social weight than class oppression. Attempts have been made in recent years to reclaim the ground. One such attempt plays on the Big Hewer archetype in a different setting, and, like Dave Mountford's recension, questions the validity of the type as a role-model. "Equal Pay Blues" describes a seamstress in the rag trade who became a byword for speed and productivity:

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[1] The function of parody in vernacular song has been discussed by Ian Russell in "Parody and Performance," *Everyday Culture*, ed. Michael Pickering and Tony Green (Milton Keynes: Open UP, 1987) 70-104.

The goods she made grew such a pile,
They filled the room and the room next door,
And overflowed to the basement floor.
"Equal Pay Blues" 22-5.

This leads, however, not to the traditional reward of a handsome prince, as in "Rumpelstiltskin," but to her being made redundant, with the result that she joins a union and a women's group.

In short, the oral tradition did prove able to adapt to the changing conditions that forced people to abandon their old ways. It constructed new metaphorical sets corresponding to the new forces of *laissez-faire* capitalism. It transformed earlier stereotypes to meet the demands of an urban and industrialised setting, and realised fresh character types in both the heroic and the anti-heroic modes.

*Rituals of Rebellion*

The change from traditional forms, and the creation of new symbolic modes like those outlined above, became even more necessary when the songs were performed not as emotional consolation but in the context of struggle, particularly in areas lying outside the confines of established behaviour. In the nineteenth century, society became increasingly normative, and these norms were enforced by an army of new petty officials like gamekeepers, bailiffs, beadles (an old office whose powers were increased), timekeepers and the police. The imposition of alien social norms represented an enforced change in the lives of ordinary people, changes that were increasingly resisted. Songs became one of the sites of this resistance.

A key factor in those songs which identified the new threat as being exotic, the manifestation of an overwhelming *external* force, was the kind of resistance proposed. In some cases, the change was merely recorded: one song in the Jone O'Grinfilt sequence shows the hero leaving home as a result of the New Poor Law (Vicinus 48). Sometimes it was expressed through songs of individual rebellion (the "protest song"). In others, the songs became anthems of the newfound power of organised labour.

*a. Individual rebellion*

In the 1960s, the variety known as the Protest Song became sanctified as the only true song of rebellion, and the autonomous protest singer, absurdly, has become its only recognised transmitter. This creation of music journalism has had the effect of marginalising singers like Dick Gaughan and Ewan MacColl who work within the parameters of organised movements. In fact, songs of individual protest live in a symbiotic relationship with labour anthems and sponsored recordings. One will often grow into the other, as in the case of

Dick Gaughan's semi-official *True and Bold: Songs of the Scottish Miners*, which was released during the nationwide miners' strike of 1983-4.

Opposition to the new forces in society appeared at first as spontaneous outbursts like "The Baker's Glory," celebrating the burning of the Albion Mills in 1791. In some cases, sites of resistance were represented by the occupations themselves, which were often parodic inversions of the activities of "official" culture:

**Fig. 5. Occupations in relation to the Establishment and the counterculture**

| | **official** | **oral/parodic** |
|---|---|---|
| *eighteenth century* | merchant | smuggler |
| *nineteenth century* | huntsman | poacher |
| | hostess | prostitute |
| *twentieth century* | soldier | deserter |
| | dancer | stripper. |

Since many of the "alternative" occupations were punishable by death or transportation, the very fact that their existence was recognised in song was a subversion of the status quo.

In other cases, particular trades that were undergoing rapid changes generated their own songs. These songs did not attempt to express universal aspirations, as traditional ballads like "Bruton Town" and "The Draggletail Gypsies" (Child 200) had done, but to express the stresses and grievances of a particular occupation. They include the transformations which effectively obliterated the earlier skills, as milkmaids were displaced by milkmen, and blacksmiths and wheelwrights gave way to motor mechanics.

Ballads of individual protest tend to be radical in content, but conservative in form. The established form of a narrative centring on a single protagonist, or the double focus represented by a love relationship, remained the most popular mode. Sometimes they took the form of sequences of songs within a particular trade. One important example of such a series was the cycle of songs in the English Midlands based on the life of an itinerant weaver Jone O'Grinfilt (Vicinus 48-53). The first thirteen were written by Joseph Lees, a Lancashire weaver. They circulated in the early years of the nineteenth century, beginning as a series of patriotic songs in which the hero leaves home in search of a better life. Rapidly, however, the songs evolved from expressing an innocent world-view to chronicling, with increasing anger, the collapse of the skilled cotton weaver's trade in the face of mechanisation and the wage-labour system. The changes are similar to those of successive sets of "The Weaver and the Factory Maid," but with an urban setting of deepening poverty.

"The Poor Cotton Weaver"[1] belongs to the Jone O'Grinfilt cycle. It has already been referred to as an example of a song that suffered a mixed fate in its various nineteenth century printings. It originated in the years of economic depression after 1815, as the wry reference to eating "Waterloo porridge" (16) suggests, and for nearly a century and a half the song appears to have been known only in the Oldham area.[2] The song outlines the sufferings of Jone and his wife Margit as their earnings collapse in the face of competition from the Manchester textile mills. In their straitened circumstances, they have fallen into debt, and their furniture has been sequestered piece by piece, including Jone's looms, the last tokens of his independence. He is forced to return to the putter-out (the cloth-buyer) with his unsold cloth and accept his greatly reduced price.

"The Poor Cotton Weaver" is typical of the industrial protest song, in the sense of an expression of individual resistance. It is the quintessential insider song. In the first place, it is in dialect and *region-specific*.[3] It is also *occupation-specific*, in that it clearly assumes an audience familiar with the life and livelihood of the hand weaver. This appears in references to technical work processes, in images drawn from Lancashire life, and in the way the specific economic relations between the jobbing weaver, the buyer of the outwork and the local retailers are referred to (19-20, 43-52). Working jargon is used as a selective instrument to narrow the target audience in the same way that working *practice* is used as a touchstone for assessing the help and advice offered the weaver. The parson, for example, is excluded through never having "picked o'er," or thrown the shuttle (12).

A further defining feature of the occupation is its situation in a hierarchy of trades. As in "Collier Lads," this is a familiar characteristic of occupational songs. The skilled artisan believes he is faced with the prospect of turning to manual labour to support himself:

> But I'll give o'er this trade an' work with a spade,
> Or go an' break stones upo' th'road. (53-54)

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[1] All line references are to the broadside c. 1860 by John Bebbington of Manchester, reprinted in Appendix III. It was first printed in 1848 in Elizabeth Gaskell's novel *Mary Barton*, but references to "t'King" in some sets show it cannot be later than 1837, the year of the death of William IV. Other internal evidence, such as "Waterloo porridge" and the lack of reference to power looms or the strong working class organisations that arose after the passing of the Reform Bill of 1832, cumulatively support John Harland's statement that it was "written just after the battle of Waterloo" (J. Harland and T. T. Wilkinson, eds., *Ballads and Songs of Lancashire* [Third ed. Manchester: John Heywood, 1882] 169).

[2] Until 1954, all known sets of the song, apart from that in *Mary Barton*, derived from Lancashire broadsides, but Ewan MacColl's printing of an oral set collected by him gave the song much wider currency (*The Shuttle and Cage* [London: Workers Music Association, 1954] 4-5).

[3] Most printed texts of the song are in stronger Lancashire dialect than the Bebbington broadside given in Appendix III.

He knows he is being forcibly transformed from an independent craftsman into one of the new unskilled workforce. Yet since that is the backbone of the new industrial army, he surrenders the élitism of the traditional crafts, and realises the inevitable change:

> I sed to our Margit as we lay upo' t'floor:
> We shall never be lower in this world, I am sure.
> But if we alter, I'm sure we mun mend,
> For I think i'my heart we are both at far end. (37-40)

As if to give another twist to this downward spiral, he is at the same time being humiliatingly subordinated to his social inferiors the bailiffs (29-30). The bailiffs represent a new and persistent theme in the nineteenth century, that of "employers' narks," men who, as agents of the monied classes, are able to assume their powers and privileges by transference. This large group included blacklegs, rent collectors, gamekeepers, those who ran the tommy shops and all the various tallymen who enumerated and checked the results of poor men's labour. They came to inhabit every kind of what might be termed "anti-occupational" songs.[1]

The song has thus convincingly internalised three of the decisive changes in nineteenth-century England society: rapid social mobility, the creation of a new urban proletariate, and the new alliances cutting across the old class divisions. At the same time, new economic priorities have been assimilated into everyday life, often with tough humour. The new principle of profit as the measure of all things leads to a bitter jest when Jone presents his cloth to the putter-out, the "mester," for the second time:

> He said You wur o'erpaid last time you coom.
> I said: If I wur, 'twas for weavin' bout [= *without*] loom. (45-46)

The play of discourse here is also the discourse of play: Jone's retort introduces the absurd, and thereby relocates the argument on new terrain, where the laws of the counterculture rule. In the same way, Jone extends the reach of the dominant culture to the point at which it begins to crack. As the bailiffs ransack the house, he gamely offers himself, and by implication his marketable skill, as a realisable asset:

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[1] For blacklegs, see "The Blackleg Miners" (A. L. Lloyd, ed., *Come All Ye Bold Miners* [London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1968] 263-264); for rent collectors, see "The Drunk Rent Collector"; for gamekeepers, see "(While the) Gamekeepers lie Sleeping" (Peter Kennedy, ed., *Folk Songs of Britain and Ireland* [London: Cassell, 1975] 557); for the tallymen, see "Oakey's Keeker" (Lloyd, *Come All Ye* 55-57). There is a reference to the tommy shop system run by the putter-out in "The Poor Cotton Weaver" 19-20.

The bailiffs looked round as sly as a mouse,
When they saw aw things wur taen out o' t'house.
Says one to the other: All's gone, thou may see.
Aw ses: Lads, never fret, you're welcome to me. (25-28)

The bailiffs' response is to relocate the discourse in the actual, by transfering their attention to the last item of portable property left in the house:

They made no more ado, but nipped up t'owd stoo',
An' we both went wack upo' t'flags. (29-30)

On several occasions, the protagonist comments directly in an aside. Some twenty five years before Marx was to make the equivalence of the surplus value of labour power with capital the cornerstone of his economic theory, the unknown maker of "The Poor Cotton Weaver" suggested it in these lines, as Jone's cloth is finally sold at the new, lower price:

To think we mun work to keep him an' aw th'set
All the days o' my life, an' die in their debt! (51-52)

The change of pronoun from "we" to "my" dramatically intensifies the force of the dawning realisation of the implications of this change. In every respect, the concept of labour power is embodied in the action in a way that the slogans of Joe Wilson's later song "The Strike" are not:

Their capital grows through wor labour,
Wey, it's mair to their shyem, that they'll find. (15-16)

The powerful metaphor in which Jone O'Grinfilt momentarily *becomes* the handloom which is his livelihood,

In the mind as I'm in, I'll ne'er pick o'er again,
For I've woven myself to th'fur end, (47-48)

is an example of the kind of fusion of signifiers which depends on a vigorous tradition of songmaking behind it, a tradition which "The Strike" lacks. The repeated integration of image and idea in "The Poor Cotton Weaver," and the occasional grim humour that both relieves and *analyses* intolerable new economic realities, has affinities with the Victorian novel, as Elizabeth Gaskell realised when she included it in *Mary Barton* as "The Oldham Weaver."

*Organisation*

"The Poor Cotton Weaver" displays unambiguously the forces ranged against the independent craftsman: the "mester," the middlemen, the retailers, even the parson, yet his world-view is still a pre-industrial one centred on the individual. For example, the remedy offered is an appeal to the monarch for justice based on reason and humanity:

> Our Margit declares if hoo'd cloas to put on,
> Hoo'd go up to Lundun an' see the young Queen.
> "The Poor Cotton Weaver" 55-6.[1]

This quietist view, which assumed that wrongs which originated from "outside" could also be redressed by representatives of those same forces, was still general at the time. It is found among mining songs, such as "The Collier Lad's Lament" (c. 1850), which also deals with abuses of the tommy-shop system:

> If the Queen and all the Ministers they all were for to come,
> To live as these poor colliers do, and work underground,
> And undergo the hardships and dangers of the fire,
> I think they'd make the masters pay them better for their hire. (33-36)

Such solutions are based on anachronistic perceptions of the monarch as feudal lord. Indeed, a specific appeal to the King or Queen commonly formed the closure of broadside ballads from the earliest times (for example, Day 1. 538). "The Poor Cotton Weaver," however, offers a significant corollary:

> An' if things didn't alter when hoo had been,
> Hoo swears hoo would fight, blood up to th'een. (57-58)

This alternative of blood revenge, which was apparently suppressed by Elizabeth Gaskell (see p. 51), is also entirely feudal, but it intimates the second site of resistance offered by occupational songs, direct action or rebellion from *within*. With the rise of the trade unions, this soon came to be presented as a call for collective action by the members as a whole, at least in a particular area. This was not the first time singers had claimed to speak for all. As we have seen, "The Clothiers Delight," which can be dated to the 1670s, shows a clear sense of group solidarity. However, there is as yet no sense of *organisation*, a way forward to a new kind of society. To use a Marxist distinction, it treats weavers as a mass of individuals rather than as a class (Engels 2. 120-

[1] Some sets read "big mon" or "great mon" for "young Queen."

121). Their grievances could be dealt with by a combination of carrot and stick in the way that an organised strike could not.

Although there is some evidence that they existed earlier,[1] it is only at the beginning of the nineteenth century that we find songs which demand the right for workers to organise, articulate their own concerns and defend their livelihood. By the time of the Luddite riots of 1812, "historically the last word of the independent craftsman" (Watson 108), songs had become an important means of spreading information under the tight censorship. For the first time, the songs show a consciousness of the power of concerted action:

> Oh, the cropper lads for me,
> And gallant lads they be,
> With lusty stroke the shear frames broke,
> The cropper lads for me . . .
> Press forward every gallant man
> With hatchet, pike and gun!
> "The Cropper Lads" 5-8, 19-20.

The record is fragmentary, because concerted action, or "combination," was illegal, and government spies were everywhere (Thompson 529-540). In particular, songs "that urged violent actions against factory owners or the putter-out . . . often circulated orally, lest the printer or seller be arrested" (Vicinus 44). The clandestine nature of this new kind of occupational song, part of the secret oral tradition referred to on p. 108, is reflected in ambiguities in the texts of printed songs. As Harker has commented (*One for the Money* 202), the apparently innocent exhortation to get out of bed early, embedded in the closing stanza of a weaving song, may conceal a call to insurrection:

> So come all you cotton-weavers, you must rise up very soon,
> For you must work in factories from morning until noon.
> "Hand Loom v. Power Loom" 25-26.

The first surviving purpose-made examples seem to be the Luddite songs of 1811-2, such as "The Cropper Lads," and seamen's songs from the strike of 1815,[2] but many traditional ballads exist with references to contemporary conflicts grafted on to them, the "stretching" process referred to by Craig. A radical message was embedded in songs of ritual significance, such as "The

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[1] Many songs of rebellion from this period survive only in fragments, for example, "With Henry Hunt we'll go, my boys" (Roy Palmer, ed., *Touch on the Times* [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974] 297-298) and a song on the burning of Gorton Mill in 1790 (Martha Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse* [London: Croom Helm, 1974] 44-45).

[2] "The Seamens Complaint" and "The Seamens Garland" are printed in Dave Harker ed., *Songs from the Manuscript Collection of John Bell* (Durham: Surtees Society, 1985) 6-10. Roy Palmer traces the first strike songs to Tyneside in the 1820s (*The Sound of History* [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988] 108).

Droylsden Wakes," or in love ballads like "The Bonnie Pit Lad." This mining song is evidently of eighteenth-century origin, since the hero has all the early conventional signifiers of a carefree nature and skin "black as a sloe" (18). But the milkmaid only pays her conventional tribute to his energy and daring after asking, "Pray do you belong / To the brave Union boys?" (lines 15-16). The song continues:

> Come all you noble gentlemen,
> Wherever that you be,
> Do not pull down their wages,
> Nor break their unity;
> You see they hold like brothers,
> Like sailors on the sea,
> They do their best endeavours
> For their wives and family. (33-40)

This goodnatured appeal to the employers (further evidence of an early date) already stresses the common unity and purpose of the colliers. The theme of "Unity is Strength" was to become one of the central preoccupations of the occupational song in the nineteenth century. Iconically represented in the clasped hands, the slogan has served the labour movement for one and a half centuries.[1] When Ewan MacColl wrote an anthem for the union AUEW in the 1960s, "We are the Engineers," it provided the opening image:

> Two joined hands was our device when our banner first unfurled,
> Hands that know the feel of tools and helped to build a world,
> Two hands became a million hands and fashioned down the years
> The machines that make the world go round. (1-4)

Despite its occasional stereotyped language ("our banner first unfurled," "fashioned down the years"), "We are the Engineers" summarises in its dramatic devices the changes in the industrial song since the early steam and machine ballads. It is rhetorical, more of an anthem than a traditional song. The tone is collective, as in the "we" of the title, and newly authoritative. Machines retain their world-transforming powers, and workers are still perceived as "hands," but both have been newly situated. Machines are no longer autonomous entities or agents of the Other but the last link in a chain of construction that is firmly under the control of those who physically make them. Through the polyvalence of the central metaphor, the engineers are simultaneously "two hands" and "a million" (3).

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[1] The phrase itself is Homeric and has been known in English since the Middle Ages, but it only achieved proverbial status with the rise of the union movement.

MacColl's song addresses the problem of assimilation presented at the beginning of this chapter. He has countered the threat from outside by offering a new occupational identity which, because larger than the experience of any shipyard floor or workshop, is itself "outside," a piece of high ground for the engineers to occupy with pride. The following stanzas bristle with answered challenges:

> We tamed the fire,
> . . . we fought the cruel laws
> And when we lost, we rose to fight again
> For the right to work and live like men.
> . . . we, the youngest engineers, now march to claim our rights.
> "We are the Engineers" 8, 18-20, 29.

Since every engineer stands for all ("We are the Engineers"), the comic and heroic role-types of characters like Bob Cranky and "Big John" have been subsumed into a new identity, although one in which women are still invisible ("live like men").[1] The early muddle about individual and collective resistance seen in "The Poor Cotton Weaver" has been superseded by the new discourse which makes every engineer both the *representative* craftsman and part of a much larger force with the will and the means to defend itself in situations remarkably similar to Jone O'Grinfilt's:

> The rusty lathe and the silent factory mark the hungry years,
> And the grass growing green on the shipyard floor. (24-25)

Most of the examples in this chapter have been drawn from industrial song, which forms a huge resource of oral expression in the years dominated by the growth of heavy industry. The title of an important source of occupational songs, the *New City Songster*, suggests that today the impetus for new songmaking remains, as with the broadsides, in the cities. However, such songs are only part of a large number where the workplace is represented as a place from which to launch a challenge to powerful established interests. For example, the note of growing assurance of group strength, and the synthesis of traditional material and new models, can also be found in rural occupations from the nineteenth century onwards.[2] Not only did they experience the same transformations, but they shared the same perspective of those in the take-off

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[1] The explicit maleness of this image of the engineer was challenged on the other side of the same record by Peggy Seeger in "I'm Gonna be an Engineer," produced by the AUEW (Engineering Section), London, no date. Sandra Kerr's "Maintenance Engineer" achieves parody by applying the same set of male signifiers to a housewife.

[2] Roy Palmer's *The Painful Plough* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1972), for example, includes many examples from nineteenth century agriculture.

industries of the Industrial Revolution. Songs already quoted in this thesis have shown that, in contrast to many of the industrial songs, performers have addressed other sites of conflict, such as women's rights, the service occupations and the misuse of natural resources. In such cases the challenge might be as much to the partriarchal or consumerist attitudes of other workers as to the dominant discourse. This new pluralism indicates the way forward for the *engagé* occupational song in general.

## CONCLUSION

This study, the first of its kind in English, has been carried out in the belief that there is more to occupations and their songs than sublimation or a technical singularity. Over a hundred different trades and professions have been cited in building up a case for regarding these songs as mediating the working environment in similar ways, such as subverting the extraneous distinction between work and play.

The wide distribution of these songs has many implications. One of the aims of this thesis has been to establish the centrality of the working life in any definition of traditional song. In spite of widely-differing editorial principles and definitions of traditional song, recent collections consistently show about one song in two making some play with the occupation of the hero or heroine. Occupations are the most durable of all the social signifiers of the protagonist. However, this signification is not fixed. Whether of insider or outsider status, occupations are represented in a dynamic, not a normative way, constantly spreading to take in new conditions. They thus function as a form of argument with the dominant discourse.

In the same way, songs about occupations fill a shifting space. Rather than setting them up as a discrete genre, this thesis has attempted to collapse the walls interpolated between love songs and working songs, between orality and print, and between popular and "high" culture. Much more work remains to be done on tracing the iconography they share with, for example, jokes, proverbs, vernacular decoration in churches, and trade union emblems. In a new awareness of the imbrication of traditional song with popular print (in the widest sense), the section on the representation of the miller was a preliminary attempt to extend this awareness to written literature.

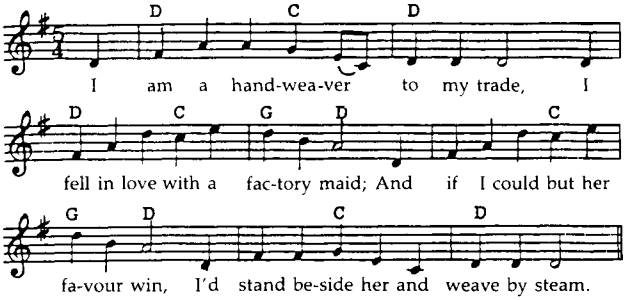
This study has also sought to present the subjects of its songs as characterised by diversity rather than by trade stereotypes or a simplistic heroism. The leaden cult of the worker associated with many studies of occupations effectively set up a new model, male and primevally physical, which is not so different from the dull-witted slave of the machine that it sought to replace. The woman fighting for acceptance as an engineer, the rootless apprentice in the city, or the weaver left behind by the rapid mechanisation of his skill, are often complex and witty protagonists in a song. Further study of the way they are represented would reveal the changing space occupied by these transitional figures, who might be simultaneously, like the Big Hewer, a role model, a moral warning, a laughing stock, and a fellow sufferer.

Although the songs are a source of insight into marginalised cultures, they do not present an unmediated, univocal view of working life from which social detail can be read off at will. This view is implied by the familiar position that the occupation of the protagonist is an aspect of "character" rather than "role." It is true that the settings of occupational songs are usually integral and specific, their themes topical, and their language often technical and richly localised. Unlike the heroes and heroines of the traditional ballad, the protagonists are meaningfully embedded in space and time; the sweatshops, navvy gangs, berry-fields and mining villages were an ambient reality. However, my purpose has been to suggest that, instead of being a naturalistically-rendered slice of life, work is represented in song connotatively rather than denotatively, figuratively rather than functionally. In erotic songs, for example, work processes are the richest source of metaphor. The occupation is a stance, a position, a place to stand, and characteristically the position is used to offer resistance, not only to the dominant discourse but to other authoritarian and life-denying attitudes. As with other forms of music, the songs become "a central domain of 'anti-structure' in which the forces governing other aspects of life are contradicted" (Nettl 339).

An identifiable working group was important for the creation and sustaining of this resistance, and in insider songs the sense of the audience is almost palpable. However audiences, and least of all the songmakers themselves, are never purely carpenters, migrant fruit pickers or garment workers. They have what I have called "a multiplicity of belonging," being perhaps at the same time women, Cockneys, travellers and hop-pickers. The songs therefore never confine themselves purely to the immediate working environment. They draw on the total resources of their enveloping culture, including of course patriarchal attitudes, popular stereotypes and the grand narratives of the dominant discourse. In this sense, the occupational song can be said to exist only as part of a response to the normative tendencies of that culture, where traditional song gives a means of expression to those who find no voice elsewhere. Since print, and factory conditions which were highly unfavourable to singing, only increased the popularity of such songs, they will continue to fulfil that role. As praxis cannot be mapped out in advance, this is perhaps the only prediction about the future direction of occupational song that can be made with any confidence.

Appendix I

## THE WEAVER AND THE FACTORY MAID




I am a hand weaver to my trade.
I fell in love with a factory maid,
And if I could but her favour gain
I'd stand beside her and weave by steam.

The factory maid she is like a queen,
With handloom weavers she'll not be seen.
---
---.

---
---
When you could have girls fine and gay
And dressed up like to the Queen of May.

"For all her finery I don't care;
Could I but enjoy me dear
I'd stand in the factory all the day
And she and I'd keep our shuttles in play."

"How can you say it's a pleasant bed
When nought lies there but a factory maid?"
"A factory maid what though she be,
Blest is the man that enjoys she."

---

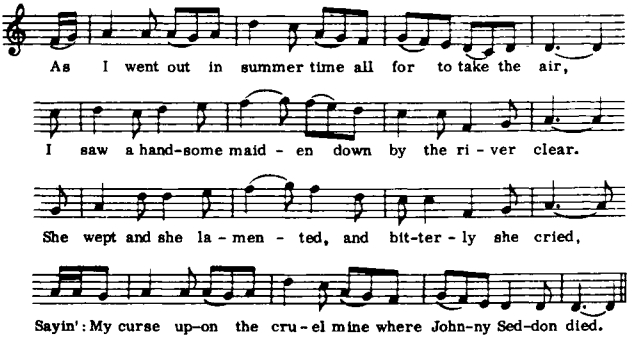
And makes me wish I'd never been born,
I sit and grieve at my loom all day
For the lass that stole my heart away.

Now where are the girls? I'll tell you plain,
The girls have gone to weave by steam;
And if you'd find 'em you must rise at dawn
And trudge to the mill in the early morn.

Sung by William Oliver of Widnes, 1951. Roy Palmer was the first to print it as sung, in "The Weaver in Love," *Folk Music Journal* 3 (1977) 273-274. Reprinted by permission.

## Appendix II

### JOHNNY SEDDON




As I went out in summertime all for to take the air,
I met a handsome maiden down by the river clear,
She wept and she lamented and bitterly she cried,
Saying: "My curse upon the cruel mine where Johnny Seddon died.

"My love he was a collier lad, he worked beneath the ground.
His modest mild behaviour, his equal can't be found.
His two bright eyes and yellow hair, his cheeks a rosy red,
But alas, my handsome collier lad lies numbered with the dead.

"Last night as I lay on my bed I fell into a dream.
I dreamed a voice came unto me and called me by my name,
Saying: 'Jeannie, lovely Jeannie, for me you need not mourn,
But the cruel stone does crush my bones and I'll never more return.'

"Early the next morning my dream was clarified.
The neighbours all came rushing in. 'John Seddon's dead!' they cried.
'As he was at his work last night, the roof all on him fell.'
The grief and sorrow of my heart no mortal tongue can tell.

"Come all you pretty fair maids, I hope you'll lend an ear,
For the grief and sorrow of my heart is more than I can bear.
For once I loved a collier lad, and he loved me also,
But by a fatal accident, he in his grave lies low."

Sung by Thomas Mitchell, Chopwell, Co. Durham, November 1953. Printed in A. L. Lloyd, *Come All Ye Bold Miners: Ballads and Songs of the Coalfields* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1978) 199. Speech marks added. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

## Appendix III

## THE POOR COTTON WEAVER

The text printed here is from a broadside, "Jone o'Grinfield," printed by John O. Bebbington of Manchester, c. 1860.

I'm a poor cotton weaver as many one knows.
I've nowt to eat i' th' house an' I've wore out my cloas.
You'd hardly give sixpence for all I have on.
My clugs they are brossen an' stockins I've none.
You'd think it wur hard to be sent into th'world
To clem an' do th'best ot you con.

Our church parson kept tellin' us long,
We should have better times if we'd but hold our tongues.
I've houden my tongue till I can hardly draw breath.
I think i'my heart he means to clem me to death.
I know he lives weel by backbitin' the de'il,
But he never picked o'er in his life.

We tarried six weeks an' thought every day were t'last.
We tarried an' shifted till now we're quite fast.
We lived on nettles while nettles were good,
An' Waterloo porridge were best of us food.
I'm tellin' you true, I can find folks enew
That er livin' no better than me.

Old Bill o'Dan's sent bailiffs one day,
For a shop score I owed him that I couldn't pay,
But he wur too late, for old Bill o'Bent
Had sent tit an' cart and taen goods for rent.
We had nowt bur a stoo', that were a seat for two;
An' on it cowered Margit an' me.

The bailiffs looked round as sly as a mouse,
When they saw aw things wur ta'en out o' t'house.
Says one to the other: All's gone, thou may see.
Aw sed: Lads, never fret, you're welcome to me.
They made no more ado, but nipped up t'owd stoo',
An' we both went wack upo' t'flags.

I get howd o'Margit, for hoo're stricken sick.
Hoo sed hoo ne'er had such a bang sin hoo wur wick.
The bailiffs scoured off wi' owd stoo' on their backs.
They would not have cared had they brokken our necks.
They're mad at owd Bent cos he's taen goods for rent,
An' wur ready to flay us alive.

I sed to our Margit as we lay upo' t'floor:
We shall never be lower in this world, I am sure.
But if we alter, I'm sure we mun mend,
For I think in my heart we are both at far end,
For meat we have none, nor looms to weave on,
Egad, they're as weel lost as found.

Then I geet up my piece, an' I took it 'em back.
I scarcely dare speak, mester lookit so black.
He said: You wur o'erpaid last time you coom.
I said: if I wur, 'twas for weavin' bout loom.
  In the mind as I'm in, I'll ne'er pick o'er again,
  For I've woven myself to th'fur end.

Then aw coom out o' t'warehouse, an' left him to chew that.
Whe aw though again, aw wur vext till aw sweat.
To think we mun work to keep him an aw th' set,
All the days o' my life, an' die in their debt!
  But I'll give o'er this trade an' work with a spade,
  Or go an' break stones upo' th'road.

Our Margit declares if hoo'd cloas to put on,
Hood go up to Lundun an see the young Queen,
An' if things didn't alter when hoo had been,
Hoo swears hoo would fight, blood up to th'een.
  Hoo's nought agen t'queen, but hoo likes a fair thing,
  An' hoo says hoo can tell when hoo's hurt.

*Major Variants*

Selected variants are given below from four other texts and two oral sets as follows:

B - "Jone o'Grinfilt, Jr.," a ?second printing of the broadside by Bebbington of Manchester, c. 1860. Printed in Martha Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse* (London: Croom Helm, 1974) 49-51. Ten stanzas.

D - "The Four Loom Weaver," three verses and three varying refrains, collected from Beckett Whitehead in Delph, Lancashire c. 1954, by Ewan MacColl. Printed in Ewan MacColl ed., *The Shuttle and Cage* (London: Workers' Music Association, [1954]) 4-5.

H - Printed in J. Harland and T. T. Wilkinson, eds., *Ballads and Songs of Lancashire, Ancient and Modern*. Third edition. (Manchester: John Heywood, 1882) 94. Eight verses.

L - ten verses "from the singing of an old hand-loom weaver at Droylsden" [c. 1865], printed in J. Harland, ed., *Ballads and Songs of Lancashire* (London, 1865) 169-172.

O - "The Oldham Weaver," seven verses in Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton* (1848. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970) 72-73.

P - broadside printed by John Harkness of Preston, Lancs (n.d. [c. 1859]).

1. knows: O knoowas.
2. i' th' house: D, O *omit.*
3. sixpence: D, O tuppence.
4. brossen: D broken; L baws'n; P bursten.
5. sent: O browt
6. ot: O as.
7. Our church parson: D Owd Billy o't'Bent; O Dicky o'Billies; H, P our parish church parson.
8. but: D nobbut.
9. can hardly draw: D near lost me; O near stopped my.
10. he means to clem me to death: D, L I'll soon clem to death.
11. D Owd Billy's awreet, he ne'er were clemmed;
    O Owd Dicky's weel crammed, he never wur clemmed.
13. We tarried: B I tarried; H wey tooart; O We tow'rt; D We held on.

17-54. D *omits (lines 41 and 48 are added to the last refrain).*

18. than: H nur.
20. score . . that: L scoar . . . ot; O debt . . as.
22. sent: O sowd;
    tit: P horse.
23. a stoo': O a' owd stoo'.
25. looked: H sceawlt.
26. saw: L seedn; O seed.
28. Lads: O mon.
29. nipped: H ipt; O whopp'd
30. went: H leeten; L leeten swack; O leet.

31-36. O *omits.* 31-42. L *omits.*

36. flay: B flee.
37. lay: L lien.
41. meat: H mayt; O meeat.
42. Egad: H ecod; O edad.
43. Then I geet up my piece: L My piece wur cheeont off.

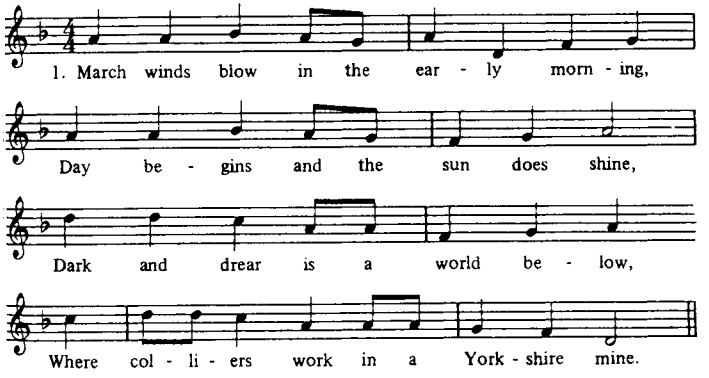
43-54. O *omits.*

49. o' t' warehouse: B *omits.*
52. die: B, P still be.
55. if hoo'd: O had hoo.
56. young Queen: B big mon; D, H, L, O, P great mon.
58. O Hoo's fully resolved t'sew up meawth an' end.
59. queen: O, L, P King.

59-60. D *omits.*

Appendix IV

## THE LOFTHOUSE COLLIERY DISASTER (Sam Richards)




March winds blow in the early morning,
Day begins and the sun does shine,
Dark and drear is a world below
Where colliers work in a Yorkshire mine.

Day begins and the mist is rising
But there are eyes which cannot see.
Seven men at the Lofthouse Colliery
Flockton Seam Face South 9B.

Eighteen fifty was the year
When Low Laithes Colliery was closed down,
Leaving pitshafts, disused workings,
Leaving tunnels underground.

A hundred years of coalblack water,
Waiting to be a miner's tomb,
Trapped in the silent earth and waiting
A hundred years of rubble and stone.

Wednesday morning, Lofthouse Colliery,
Water flooded into the mine.
No one knew of the disused workings,
Seven men died for that crime.

Keep on working, get the coal out,
Safety takes up too much time.
There's seven of those greedy miners
Lying in a sea of grime.

March winds blow in the early evening.
Seven men lost in their prime.
Who can sleep, who can sit easy,
Who'll be there to mourn next time?

Source: Sam Richards and Tish Stubbs, eds. *The English Folksinger* (London: Collins, 1979) 187-188.

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The songs, which have been collected orally unless otherwise specified, are keyed to entries in the Corpus which follows. The titles given are not always the singers' own; they may have been added by editors. Numbers in italics refer to pages.


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A-Beggin' I will go: Kennedy 497. Collected from Becket Whitehead, Delph, Yorkshire, 1952. *63*

All Things be Deare but Poor Mens Labour: Pinto165-168. 17thC broadside by "L. W." *18*

Bailiff's Daughter of Islington, The (Child 105): *When Sheepshearing's Done* LP, Side 2, Track 7. Bronson 2. 515-529. Freda Palmer, Oxon., 1972. *74*

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Ball of Yarn, The: *Sussex Harvest* LP, Side 2, Track 6. "Mrs Haynes" (no first name given), Sussex, between 1972 and 1975. *97*

Bantry Girls' Lament, The : O'Lochlainn 152-153. 19thC Irish set. *81*

Beggar's Intrusion, or the world's Illusion, The: Day 1. 216. 17thC London broadside. *85*

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Blacksmith Courted Me, A: Kennedy 346. Oral set from Phoebe Smith, Suffolk, 1956. *110*

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NAME INDEX

OCCUPATION INDEX

**Hittills utkomna arbeten i ACTA UNIVERSITATIS UMENSIS**

1 **Bertil Malmbergs skolpojksbrev.** Utgivna av Sven Wallmark. 1975.
2 **Saga-Marianne Norlén & Teut Wallner.** Skriftatlas för datering av Birger Sjöbergs manuskript. 1974.
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20 **Teater i Göteborg 1910–1975.** I–III. 1978.
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32 **Konstkultur i Norrland.** En informationsskrift om forskning vid Institutionen för konstvetenskap. 1980.
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37 **Svenskans beskrivning 12.** Utg. av C.-C. Elert och S. Fries. 1981.
38 **Ingeborg Nordin Hennel.** Dömd och Glömd. En studie i Alfhild Agrells liv och dikt. 1981.
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56 **Sverker R. Ek & Lennart Forslund.** Marionetten som avantgardist. Kring Marionetteatern i Stockholm. 1984.

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61 **Florilegium Nordicum.** En bukett nordiska språk- och namnstudier tillägnade Sigurd Fries den 22 april 1984. 1984.

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Among other findings, it establishes that occupation is one of the most stable elements in song transmission, and that in song women often transgress work roles and job barriers to subvert patriarchal positions.


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