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HUMANITIES RESEARCH

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Published by ANU E Press

Email: anuepress@anu.edu.au

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Cover image: Lee Anne Proberts.

Printed in Australia

VOL XIX. NO. 3. 2013

ISSN: 1440-0669 (PRINT), ISSN: 1834-8491 (ONLINE)

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Introduction

Aaron Corn, Ruth Lee Martin, Diane Roy, Stephen Wild

This volume represents a selection of papers delivered at a colloquium on laments sponsored by the International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM), The Australian National University (ANU), the National Folklore Conference (NFC) and the National Folk Festival (NFF) on 20–22 April 2011. The title was ‘One Common Thread: A Colloquium on the Musical Expression of Loss and Bereavement’. Nineteen papers were delivered over three days at the ANU School of Music and the National Library of Australia (hosting the NFC). A ‘conversation with renowned Australian collector and folk musician Rob Willis on Australian folk laments with scholar and folklorist Jennifer Gall from the National Film and Sound Archive’ was held as a preliminary public event.¹ The program of the colloquium consisted of keynote addresses, paper sessions, roundtable presentations and discussions, concerts and a public forum at the National Folk Festival. A conscious effort was made to include a variety of presentation forms and opportunities for public participation.

The idea for the colloquium was initiated by a lecture-recital on Scots Gaelic laments given by visiting singer Christine Primrose at the Research School of Humanities, ANU. At the colloquium Christine illustrated this tradition by singing to accompany the opening keynote address with Ruth Lee Martin: ‘Songs of Loss and Longing in Scots Gaelic.’ The organisers sought to be cross-cultural as well as historical in scope, including presentations on Indigenous Australian, Scottish Australian, Chinese Australian, Fijian, Korean, Mongolian, Irish, Uzbekistani, Papuan New Guinean and Hawaiian laments, not all of which made it into this volume. In addition, presentations were made on Western popular music and Western art music. Undoubtedly it is a huge topic and this volume only scrapes the surface.

The concept of laments was deliberately defined broadly as ‘the musical expression of loss and bereavement’ whether or not the traditions represented included self-identified genres of laments. The colloquium brief also included ‘expressions of loss of culture, language, home or country, or personal loss’. Three main themes were identified

- loss of place/displacement
- personal loss
- cultural/language loss.

¹ From the program introduction to the colloquium.

All of the themes are represented in the papers of this volume.

The broader context of laments is the musical expression of emotion—a theme that is gathering momentum in international musicological and ethno-musicological circles, prompting the organisation of panels and whole conferences. The editors of this volume are not aware of any previous colloquium of the International Council for Traditional Music on the narrow or wider theme, although a world conference panel was convened in the past on the latter (Vienna, in 2007). And yet, laments are part of the cultural history of a people, especially of oral cultures. Through the private or public outpouring of grief, a healing process is enacted, and positive memories and connections are evoked and passed on through generations in eulogies or panegyric forms. We hope that this volume will contribute to and stimulate the further study of laments and of the wider musical expression of emotion.

The papers are grouped on principles of generality, genre, region and prominence in the colloquium. The first, by Sorce Keller, wide-ranging and erudite, acts as an introduction to the topic of laments. The last, by Corn, is, in part, a lament on the loss of Australian Indigenous song traditions—an appropriate, if sad, note on which to conclude an Australian volume on laments. Corn's oral presentation was given with Joe Gumbula, an Indigenous singer from Arnhem Land, northern Australia. Papers two to five are concerned with European laments: Porter's on Irish songs, Lee Martin's and Bowan's on Scottish songs in their diasporas, and Gall's on Irish-Australian songs. Papers six to nine have Asian-Pacific themes: Ng's on Chinese-Australian songs, Kaeppler's (Hawaiian), Plueckhahn's (Mongolian), and Gillespie and Hoenigman's (Papua New Guinean) on laments in their original locations. Loy's paper (10) is on Western popular music while Powles' (11) is on Western art music. The groups reflect the interests of sponsoring bodies, the diversity of the topic and the broad scope of the colloquium.

The editors wish to thank the International Council for Traditional Music, the ANU Research School of Humanities, the ANU School of Music, the ANU College of Arts and Social Sciences, the National Library of Australia, the National Folklore Conference and the National Folk Festival for their support of and contribution to the colloquium and this volume. We would also like to single out Lee Anne Proberts for her enthusiastic and invaluable administration of the colloquium.

Expressing, Communicating, Sharing and Representing Grief and Sorrow with Organised Sound (Musings in Eight Short Segments)

Marcello Sorce Keller

Section I. Marcus Cato and Me

In Ancient Rome Marcus Cato (234–149 BC), commonly surnamed the Censor, or the Wise, would often speak up in the Senate and, whatever the topic under discussion, he would unfailingly start with words such as ‘the City of Carthage must be destroyed’ (*‘Carthago delenda est’*). He was obsessed with the idea that Carthage, the great power competing with Rome for dominance in the Mediterranean, should be annihilated. At some point, the Phoenician city was indeed destroyed by the Romans.

It is impossible for me to feel strongly about power struggles that took place in antiquity, but I carry an obsession myself, somewhat like Marcus Cato did, and I know what it feels like having one; however, the one I have is, luckily, harmless. Whatever musical topic is put on the table, I cannot help taking it as an opportunity to observe and check whether it offers any good reasons to review, refine or possibly correct our general idea of what ‘music’ is. That is probably because, already at the beginning of my professional life, I had to completely revise my own concept of music.¹ There was a lot of revising to do because my early training took place at the Milan conservatory, the atmosphere of which could not have been more exclusively rooted in the Western tradition, to the exclusion of all others.² Moreover, in Milan I was indoctrinated to believe in that cluster of Romantic leftovers that still lingers in most conservatories: ‘great art is immortal’, ‘its import is intrinsic to the work itself’, ‘produced by a genius’, ‘result of a single creative mind’, and so on; they are all residual

1 My latest revisitiation and revision of the concept are expressed in a recent article: Sorce Keller, Marcello 2010, ‘Was ist Musik? Einige Gründe dafür, warum wir die <Musik> nicht mehr als <Musik> bezeichnen sollten’, *Schweizer Jahrbuch für Musikwissenschaft*, vol. 30, pp. 11–26 [later appeared as ‘Che cosa è la musica e perché, forse, non dovremmo più chiamarla “musica”’, *Musica/Realtà*, vol. 1, pp. 33–56].

2 Puccini, Mascagni, Ponchielli, Berio, Muti, Pollini—only to mention a few—all studied there and make up the pantheon students are supposed to venerate; never mind if they are never told about Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, A. L. Webber, the Trimurti of Indian classical music (Syama Sastri, Tyagaraja, Muttuswamy Dikshitar) or the more recent Ravi Shankar, or the contemporary Bollywood wizard composer A. R. Rahman.

Romantic attitudes that later, during my doctoral training in sociology and ethnomusicology, I completely rejected. Now I am constantly on guard, ready for clues that may lead me to change my mind once again on concepts and ideas we may uncritically take for granted.³ After all, our understanding of reality is at best incomplete and, therefore, always provisional.

The subject of ‘laments’—chosen for the ICTM Colloquium that was held at The Australian National University in Canberra in 2011, for which this article was prepared—immediately appeared to me as a wonderful opportunity to cultivate my ‘obsession’, and venture a few considerations that go a bit beyond the subject itself.

Section II. Laments and their Archaic Features

The experience of sorrow is certainly universal. Forms of behaviour meant to express, communicate and share loss and bereavement—with or through organised sound—exist across most cultures, just like other practices where organised sound relates to the life cycle: lullabies, nursery rhymes, love songs, marriage songs, carols, and so on. Early twentieth-century German ethnologists of the *Kulturkreislehre* School believed forms of sonic behaviour expressing grief and sorrow, along with yodel, healing songs and cattle calls, represent an archaic surviving layer of European (and possibly universal) folklore.⁴ *Kulturkreis* theories—never adopted in France, Britain and North America—are today abandoned, given the more culture-specific and historically shorter-range interests of work done today.⁵ And yet no-one has proved the *Kulturkreis* approach to be wrong so far. Indeed, laments, yodel, healing songs and cattle calls frequently exhibit a characteristic ‘tumbling strain profile’ (a gradually

3 There is no shortage of opportunities to do so, as in the course of time new areas of intellectual endeavour emerge—for instance, ‘zoomusicology’ and ‘ecomusicology’—which antagonise and challenge my accepted views on organised sound. Sorce Keller, Marcello 2012, ‘Zoomusicology and ethnomusicology: a marriage to celebrate in Heaven’, *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, vol. 43; Sorce Keller, Marcello 2012, ‘The windmills of my mind. Musings about Haydn, Kant, sonic ecology, and hygiene’, in Gisa Jähnichen (ed.), *Music in and as Environment*, Department of Human Ecology of Universiti Putra Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur.

4 Schneider, Albrecht 1976, *Musikwissenschaft und Kulturkreislehre: zur Methodik und Geschichte der vergleichenden Musikwissenschaft*, Verlag für systematische Musikwissenschaft, Bonn; Schneider, Albrecht 1987, ‘Stil, Schicht, Stratigraphie und Geschichte der Volksmusik. Zur historischen Erforschung oral tradiert Musik’, *Studia Musicologica*, vol. 20, pp. 339–59. Fritz Graebner formulated the theory of cultural strata and cycles—named in German *Kulturkreislehre*—and organically developed it in *Methode der Ethnologie* (1911, Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung, Heidelberg). His central idea was that the distribution of culture traits indicates not only former cultural contacts (monogenesis), but also strata of cultural history.

5 Cultural relativism, as formulated by the school of Boas, Mead, Benedict and Bateson, assumed cultures to be intrinsic and almost impossible to compare. Their attitude was very influential in triggering the transition from ‘comparative musicology’ to ‘ethnomusicology’ and, indeed, ethnomusicology moved away from comparative studies and emphasised acquisition of in-depth knowledge in circumscribed contexts. As ethnomusicology gained ground in Europe, the German *Kulturkreislehre*, oriented as it was towards world-scale comparisons, went out of fashion.

descending melodic contour and a ‘decrecendo’, as the singer runs out of breath) that Curt Sachs, Marius Schneider and Walter Wiora—all of them influenced by the *Kulturkreis* approach—described as an archaic feature.⁶ Laments, yodel, healing songs and cattle calls are also usually—at least in the Mediterranean area—made up of few tones (less than five), and their frequent non-strophic character also seems to point to their antiquity. Whether we look at them from a diffusionist (that is, monogenetic) or, on the contrary, a polygenetic outlook, it does not ultimately make any substantial difference, as both would lead us to believe that such widespread cultural traits go back to a past, prior to recorded history.⁷

Section III. Laments, Oral and Written

Not only do laments—that is, sound-complemented performances in honour of the dead, conveying grief and sorrow—exist in most cultures but, intriguingly, they also often take diverse forms in different layers of the same culture.⁸ In the West, they are widely present in the oral environment, but its literate tradition as well has cultivated all along forms and genres meant for mourning. In Classical Greece a poetic form (which of course, like all ancient Greek poetry, also entailed organised sound), the *Epikedeion*, was nothing but a funeral lament and a eulogy for the departed; and the *Seikilos Epitaph* of 200 BC, the oldest surviving example of a completely notated composition from anywhere in the world, is nothing different.⁹

6 Sachs, Curt 1962, *The Wellsprings of Music*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague; Schneider, Marius 1969, *Geschichte der Mehrstimmigkeit. Historische und phänomenologische Studien*, Hans Schneider, Tutzing; Wiora, Walter 1949, *Zur Frühgeschichte der Musik in den Alpenländern*, Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Volkskunde, Basel; Wiora, Walter 1957, *Europäische Volksmusik und abendländische Tonkunst*, Hintenthal Verlag, Kassel; Wiora, Walter 1960, *Das Musikwerk. Eine Beispielsammlung zur Musikgeschichte Europäischer Volksgesang. Gemeinsame Formen in charakteristischen Abwandlungen*, Volk, Köln.

7 The diffusionist theory in anthropology—one denying that in the aggregate people think and behave in similar ways under similar conditions, or that history can ever repeat itself—is contrasted with that of polygenesis, which holds that very similar stories, artefacts and cultural attitudes more generally may originate independently in different parts of the world since man was often confronted by similar needs and challenges. For the purpose of my argument, the two positions are, paradoxically, similar. In fact, both processes require a time scale of considerable magnitude in order to unfold. The diffusionist holds that there is homology between universal distribution of cultural traits and their antiquity, because distribution takes time to occur; the polygeneticist comes to the same conclusion, because for something to be reinvented and then be present in different parts of the world much time is necessary. One is reminded in this connection of Jonathan Swift who, in his Gulliver visiting Laputa, suggested that there is a very small probability, but finite, that one could write a profound book by simply scrambling around the letters of the alphabet, which is a way of saying that, given a sufficient amount of time, all cultures could in the end independently come up with the same inventions.

8 I call them ‘sound-complemented’ performances because organised sound is necessary in order to achieve the performance goal, but it is not in itself ‘the’ goal; it will not exist for the sake of having a public listening to it with concentrated attention and appreciating the quality of its design.

9 West, Martin Litchfield [1992] 1994, *Ancient Greek Music*, Clarendon, Oxford, pp. 23–4.

A popular form in the Middle Ages was the *Planctus*, a lament to be sung, either in Latin or in the vernacular.¹⁰ Students taking a course in medieval music get to know at least the *Planctus Karoli* written for the death of Charlemagne (814) and, in the thirteenth century the *Planctus Mariae* (dedicated to the Virgin Mary).¹¹ In Italy during the nineteenth century an anonymous *estampie*, called 'Il Lamento di Tristano', was widely circulated.¹² There was, of course, the *Requiem Mass*, the *Miserere* and, in the Baroque period, the French *Tombeau*.¹³ In late madrigals and in early operas (by Monteverdi and Cavalli, for instance), a 'lament' was often encountered and it stylistically required a descending ostinato bass figure.¹⁴ In the oral environment of Western culture an even greater variety of forms and genres exists as well, serving the purpose of expressing grief or, more generally, some sense of loss, like, for instance, in 'weeping wedding' ceremonies.¹⁵

Yes, grief is universal, but cultures deal with it differently.¹⁶ Depending on where and when we live, grief is something we may need to express, communicate, share or even 'represent'. Incidentally, one needs to be careful because terms such as 'express' and 'communicate' are not interchangeable. We may express ourselves through organised sound, and yet that form of expression may be meaningless to anyone else. If, on the contrary, it is regarded as meaningful and is understood, the result is both expression and communication. We may actually wish to go even further and not just communicate, but also share with others the experience of loss, and one way to do so is by bringing people into a ritual meant for that purpose. We may even wish to have our grief 'represented', framed, put on stage, so to say, for ourselves and others to see and contemplate. This, also, is one way to let everybody know we are going through a traumatic experience, and should be treated accordingly, because, under emotional strain as we are, we may not behave or react in our usual manner.¹⁷

10 De Martino, Ernesto [1958] 1975, *Morte e pianto rituale nel mondo antico: dal lamento pagano al pianto di Maria*, Einaudi, Torino, pp. 195–210.

11 Reese, Gustave 1940, *Music in the Middle Ages: With an introduction on the music of ancient times*, Norton, New York, p. 198; Hoppin, Richard H. 1978, *Medieval Music*, Norton, New York, pp. 257–9.

12 Reaney, Gilbert 1960, 'Ars Nova', in Alec Robertson and Denis Stevens (eds), *The Pelican History of Music. Volume 1: Ancient forms to polyphony*, Penguin Books, Baltimore, pp. 261–322.

13 Vendrix, Philippe 1989, 'Il tombeau in musica nel periodo barocco', *Nuova Rivista Musicale Italiana*, vol. 23, no. 3, pp. 325–41.

14 Hill, John 2005, *Baroque Music. Music in Western Europe, 1580–1750*, Norton, New York, p. 197. This 'lamenting bass' (a bass line descending by half steps) was a standardised procedure, presumed by eighteenth-century composers to 'represent' the *Affekt* of sadness.

15 Ling, Jan 1997, *A History of European Folk Music*, University of Rochester Press, Rochester, NY, pp. 50–3, 58–9.

16 De Martino, *Morte e pianto rituale nel mondo antico*, pp. 111–16.

17 *Ibid.*, pp. 12–24.

Section IV. Expression versus Representation

'Representation' over direct 'expression' is often a cultural choice. In fact, in music history courses we explain to our students how, whereas nineteenth-century composers were expected to 'express' their feelings and pour them into their music, in the Baroque period the *Affektenlehre* (the 'Doctrine of Affections') required a different, totally 'un-Romantic', attitude. It maintained that by using proper standard procedures (the descending ostinato bass figure mentioned above was one of them), a capable composer could 'represent' emotions so effectively as to produce in the audience a corresponding response (not unlike what happens in film music, where the composer is not supposed to express his own emotions, but, rather, those felt by the portrayed characters, or suggest to the audience how they should feel about the action). Theories of acting developed during the twentieth century were also concerned with the expression versus representation dilemma—both finalised to communication. Constantin Stanislavskij and Lee Strasberg (the founder of the Actors Studio in New York) believed actors should forget who they are and become the character itself; it is easy to sense in this wish to offer the public true emotions some late-Romantic overtones.¹⁸ Johann Wolfgang Goethe, on the contrary, did not believe theatre (musical theatre included) should even try to give the illusion of reality, because the audience, by attending a performance, automatically accepts the idea of representation.¹⁹ Berthold Brecht with his 'Dialectic Theatre', where acting is a form of social critique, bypassed with one single stride the whole expression versus representation dilemma;²⁰ and the celebrated actor Marcello Mastroianni, in several interviews, simply expressed the idea that actors do not have to feel like the character they are portraying, they just need to put some conviction into their actions.²¹

I find this whole question of 'expression' versus 'representation' intriguing, because ethnographic experience shows that even oral cultures go either one way or the other. In fact, when grief needs not only to be expressed but also to be communicated, socially shared, it is often felt that the effectiveness of communication can be increased through a formalised behaviour that will give grief a somewhat theatrical dimension. In that case people learn to express and channel their sorrow according to patterns that the community understands

18 Stanislavskij, Constantin 1981, *La construction du personnage*, Pygmalion, Paris.

19 Goethe, Johann Wolfgang 2005, 'Über Wahrheit und Wahrscheinlichkeit der Kunstwerke. Ein Gespräch', *Schriften zur Kunst, Schriften zur Literatur, Maximen und Reflexionen. Volume 12*, Edited by Erich Trunz, C. H. Beck, München.

20 Reich-Ranicki, Marcel 1996, *Ungeheuer oben. Über Bertold Brecht*, Aufbau-Verlag, Berlin.

21 Back in the 1980s I watched Marcello Mastroianni on American television, interviewed by Dick Cavett. On that occasion I heard him say an actor does not need to feel like his character does, only that, if the character has to say 'good morning', the actor should simply be fully aware he is wishing somebody a 'good morning' and do it properly!

and appreciates. Cultures do not just let us cry and despair in any way we might possibly like. They give us constraints, which are part of the socialisation process, which we assimilate as we grow up, and which lead us to react to sorrow in a manner that is culture-specific and not universal. That is why Scandinavians are usually surprised at how grief is expressed in Mediterranean cultures, and vice versa. The perception in Northern Europe is that in the south grief becomes spectacle when mourners not only cry, but may even need to be restrained, lest they pull their hair out or self-inflict bleeding wounds. The perception in the south is, on the contrary, that Scandinavians, who may not even shed a tear during a funeral ceremony, react in such an introverted, 'cold' manner that 'southerners' may even wonder whether they really experience any profound sense of bereavement and loss—which, of course, they do.

Section V. The Professionalisation of Sorrow

In traditional societies, the formal vehicle for communicating and representing sorrow may have to be so sophisticated that the 'performance' has to be delegated to professionals. They are people, usually women, who obviously do other things as well in life, but develop specialised skills that can be exhibited during mourning ceremonies, and which they will exhibit with adequate compensation. This is nothing to be surprised about. Let us consider how expensive funerals are in urban society and how, although often without music, they serve a similar function.

In the Mediterranean area from antiquity, and certainly in southern Italy, Corsica and Romania until the 1950s, professional wailers were usually hired to perform laments. In Apulia and Calabria they were named *rèpute* or *chiangimorti*; in Sardinia *attitadoras*; in Corsica *voceratrici* (and there are in Corsica 'categories' of lament: the *voceru* for those who die a violent death and the *lamentu* for those who die a natural death). In Romania the lament is called *Bocet*. A study of the Romanian *Bocet* by Constantin Brailoiu was one of the elements on which anthropologist Ernesto De Martino developed his epoch-making study of *Death and Ritual Wailing in the Ancient World*.²²

Professional wailing in Mediterranean cultures was performed only by women, and by those capable of giving in their performance the appearance of a total, unrestrained, overwhelming emotion, accompanied by streaming tears and sobbing that intermittently cut off the narrative of their wailing: the life, merits and deeds of the deceased. It was such an effective representation of sorrow

22 De Martino, *Morte e pianto rituale nel mondo antico*.

that it could have (and was expected to have) some kind of cathartic, healing effect for the immediate circle of the deceased, and inspire a sense of respectful empathy by the more distant relatives or the village at large.

Section VI. When Ritual Mourning Goes Literate

Let me now go back to the Western literate tradition, and recall how my first and most vivid memory of a lament relates, in fact, to the written music of Europe. It is a piece my professor of composition gave me once to analyse and admire: Josquin des Prez, *'Déploration sur le trépas de Jean Ockeghem'* ('Lament on the passing away of Jean Ockeghem').²³ Here Josquin des Prez, arguably the greatest composer of the Renaissance, expresses his sorrow for the passing away of Johannes Ockeghem, who had been his teacher. That piece by Josquin, already famous in his own time, made the sad news public across Europe that the great Ockeghem was dead.

Compositions of this type have a long history, although they are seldom mentioned and remembered. It is one intriguing and puzzling aspect of our Western mentality that so-called masterpieces can only occur within certain genres or through specific instruments or ensembles. A symphony can be a masterpiece (and many of them are considered such), but not a brass-band fanfare or a piece for mandolin. In fact, Beethoven once wrote four mandolin pieces for a friend who played that instrument and none of them has ever been elevated to the pantheon where the great (supposedly) immortal works are collected and venerated. Music in commemoration of, and expressing regret for, the passing away of someone also has little chance of being recognised as a masterpiece unless it is pretentious, monumental and, by losing its original connotation, becomes a concert piece. The *Requiem Mass* usually qualifies, and many great composers produced one that entered the repertoire (thereby losing its original 'lament' quality): Mozart, Cherubini, Brahms, Berlioz, Verdi, Gounod, Fauré, Lygety, Penderecki.²⁴ Mysteriously, other composers failed: Haydn, Donizetti (he wrote a mass to lament the death of Bellini) and Schumann, amongst several others.

23 Reese, Gustave 1954, *Music in the Renaissance*, Norton, New York, pp. 118, 235, 245.

24 Giuseppe Verdi's requiem composed for Alessandro Manzoni is probably the most famous and most often performed of all. It is also an example of how theatrical a 'lament' can be. In fact, it was described with the following words: 'Verdi's Requiem is a work which defies all the canons of good taste. It is melodramatic, sentimental, sometimes almost cheap; it employs without shame such well-worn means to excitement as the diminished seventh and the chromatic scale. Yet it is one of the greatest works of art and gained the reluctant admiration of a composer with a much different artistic philosophy, Brahms' (Vaughan-Williams, Ralph 1953, *Some Thoughts on Beethoven's Choral Symphony with Writings on Other Musical Subjects*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 57).

We do find in the literate tradition compositions that in spirit are more connected to the idea of 'lament' as we find it practised in the oral environment. I am thinking, for instance, of Igor Stravinsky's 'Dirge-Canons and Song: In Memoriam Dylan Thomas' of 1954. If we made the effort of putting together the whole repertoire of pieces composed with a similar intention, an interesting aside to music history would appear—one very rich in curiosities. For instance, just imagine: Viennese composer Anselm Hüttenbrenner (1794–1868), a good friend of Schubert's, was almost a specialist in the genre. He is in fact the author of a musical lament, to be played on the piano, for Beethoven's passing in 1827 (*Nachruf an Beethoven in Akkorden*) and, one year later, for Schubert (*Nachruf an Schubert in Trauertönen*).

The reason I find it appropriate to mention in this article much music that does not fall under the purview of ethnomusicology is that if we look at the literate tradition anthropologically, here we recognise once again—just like we do in the oral environment—the need to have sorrow professionally interpreted, expressed and represented so that it may become publicly contemplated and shared. What we find in the literate tradition ultimately is the surface manifestation of needs and practices widespread all along, and much earlier also, in the oral environment.

Section VII. Is It Music or What?

But, of course, what we find in the literate tradition is... 'music'! Funeral laments as we know them in traditional environments, on the contrary, are not necessarily to be categorised as such—not in the Mediterranean area. Here we are talking about forms of behaviour that have their roots in classical antiquity (when the word 'music' or μουσική meant a blend of organised sound, poetry, dance, physical exercise and even medical practice—that is, profoundly different from what it means today) and managed to survive in contemporary Christian and Islamic cultures, often frowned upon by religious orthodoxy. Surely the Christian Church tried as much as possible to erase everything reminiscent of pagan practices, such as traditional 'laments' among others.

Indeed, in antiquity the concept of 'music' was so quite unlike the one we have today (that could be a story in itself) that when we say that the ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Romans had 'music' we are simply looking at the past, as if it were an extension of the present. That is a risky thing to do because, as Leslie P. Hartley reminds us at the outset of his celebrated novel *The Go-Between*: 'The past is a foreign country. They do things differently there.'²⁵ In antiquity

25 Hartley, Leslie P. 1953, *The Go-Between*, Hamish Hamilton & The Book Society, London.

our concept of music was unknown, and that is why I feel uncomfortable calling ‘music’ what, back then, went by other names. For the purpose of scholarly investigations I feel it would be more appropriate to use terms that have no historical or ideological connotations, terms such as ‘sound-centred’, ‘sound-dependent’, ‘sound-enhanced’ or ‘sound-complemented forms of behaviour’. It is actually worth considering whether it makes any sense at all—in scholarly and scientific discourse—to speak about ‘music’ in general as well. Here we have a veritable ‘word of mass deception’, charged with Romantic overtones; indeed, not a scientific term at all, and one that helps us overlook nuances rather than helping us assess subtleties.²⁶ We categorise far too many things under this label: a funeral lament, a Bruckner symphony, a medieval organum, a TV jingle. They all are forms of organised sound, although made for essentially different purposes. It is almost as if we spoke of ‘metal things’, while failing to observe that a knife does not really deserve to be put in the same category as a nail or a screwdriver. It is almost as if we put into the same category such different things as the Princes Highway in Australia, the Magnificent Mile in Chicago, the floor of my Lugano apartment and the surface of the desk I am using right now, only because—if one really wanted to—one could dance on such surfaces, and then created the category of ‘danceables’. It would make no sense at all.

Be that as it may, Judaism, Christianity and Islam have expressed mixed feelings towards organised sound all along because of its physical, sensual and body-activating power, especially when referred to as ‘music’. All three have elaborated an entire philosophy of what music is appropriate to have, and when.²⁷ So, just as Koranic cantillation is not classified as ‘music’ in Muslim cultures (it would be disrespectful to sing the Word of God) and, by the same token, lament practices across traditional Mediterranean cultures are not classified as ‘music’ either, it would be inappropriate to sing a ‘song’ in the presence of the dead. In other words, a lament is a ‘lament’ and nothing else. In many cultures funeral laments may be seen as falling into the category of excited speech, emotional speech, solemn speech, call, address, invocation, weeping, and so on. Rather than putting too many things into the same basket, and calling them ‘music’, as we so often do, it would be worth considering retaining the terminology actually applied by the people who do those things—unless we wish to apply a term that can be applied cross-culturally. Perhaps we should speak of ‘sound-dependent’ activities, because in most traditional cultures a lament, although not considered ‘music’, is simply not conceivable without its reliance on organised sound.

In the literate tradition, on the contrary, it is quite appropriate to call expressions and representations of grief and bereavement ‘music’. It is the literate tradition

²⁶ Sorce Keller, ‘Was ist Musik?’.

²⁷ During Lent, for example, many Catholics refrain from forms of sonic behaviour that may be construed as ‘music’.

that in recent times (historically speaking) has developed a concept of ‘music’ and ‘art’ that is quintessentially noble, and a religion of sorts. Art and music in the cultivated tradition are supposed to elicit not just pleasure and emotional response but veneration. In fact, in a concert setting, when confronted with the *absolute Musik*, with a musical work regarded as ‘immortal’, we are expected, if not actually to genuflect, at least to sit motionless and keep silent.²⁸ When organised sound comes to be conceived in such unusual terms—as an anthropological singularity limited to the West and cultures that have come under its influence—it surely can be seen as the appropriate means to express and represent grief and sorrow. At that point one could almost maintain that without ‘music’ no such expression and representation are complete.

Section VIII. Conclusions (Sort of...)

By way of conclusion, in order to end on a lighter tone, I would like to remind my readers that laments also exist that are not entirely serious: they range from the grotesque to the tongue-in-cheek. They make up a mixed genre. The ‘Ballad of Mack the Knife’ in Kurt Weill’s *The Threepenny Opera* is one such case. It belongs to the German genre called *Moritat*. A *Moritat* (from Latin *mori* meaning ‘deadly’ and *tat* meaning ‘deed’) is a kind of murder ballad performed by strolling minstrels. In *The Threepenny Opera*, the *Moritat* singer with his street organ introduces and closes the drama with the tale of the deadly Mack the Knife, the character based on the dashing highwayman Macheath in John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera*.

There is Gluck’s famous aria ‘*J’ai perdu mon Eurydice, rien n’égalé mon maleur*’ (‘I have lost my Eurydice, nothing equals my grief’), whose music, according to Eduard Hanslick, equally well fits words expressing the contrary sentiment: ‘*J’ai trouvé mon euridyce, rien n’égalé mon bonheur*’ (‘I have found my Eurydice, nothing equals my joy’), in which case we would have a lament about ‘presence’, rather than about absence and loss.²⁹ Another lament about a condition of presence would be the old song in which Louis Armstrong used to sing ‘What Did I Do, to Be so Black and Blue’.

Another intriguing case exists in a 1938 set of recordings, made for the Library of Congress by Alan Lomax with Jelly Roll Morton, the legendary pianist-

28 The irony of the *absolute Musik*—of music that wants to be appreciated as ‘music’ and nothing else—is that the concept was formulated by Richard Wagner, precisely to suggest that such a thing could not possibly exist; and then it became the flag of formalist aesthetics formulated by Wagner’s enemy, Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick, who actually believed that the *absolute Musik* is the only music worthy of this name! Hanslick, Eduard [1854] 1957, *The Beautiful in Music*, Translated by Gustav Cohen, Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis; Pleasants, Henry (ed.) 1988, *Hanslick’s Music Criticisms*, Dover, New York.

29 Hanslick, *The Beautiful in Music*.

composer from the bygone days of New Orleans jazz. In 'Funeral Marches', softly strumming the keys, Jelly Roll Morton conjured up a New Orleans funeral, from the wailing dirge to the graveyard, to the raucous march back to the wake, with all its sorrow and jubilation—in his words, 'the end of a perfect death'.³⁰

The last case I would like to mention is actually not about death at all, although it is about loss, the loss of something very precious indeed: the ability to see. Saverio Mercadante (1795–1870), in his time arguably the most famous opera composer in Europe, became completely blind in 1862. That same year he managed to dictate to his pupils a full-scale orchestral piece, with the apparent autobiographical title of *Il lamento del bardo* (*The Bard's Lament*). Contrary to what one might imagine, it is an entertaining, witty piece, in which Mercadante, far from feeling sorry for himself, actually communicates a sense of comic irony. The blind musician is one of literature's oldest themes; it dates back at least as far as the Middle Kingdom of ancient Egypt. And then there are of course Homer and the Irish bard O'Carolan, with many others in between and afterwards. Mercadante, in a way, makes us understand how he felt: that by becoming blind, he was now in very good company. This is as good a case as any to remind us all of the therapeutic value of expressing, communicating, representing and sharing grief and sorrow.

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Grief for the Living: Appropriating the Irish lament for songs of emigration and exile

Gerald Porter

Lillis Ó Laoire¹ has shown how, as the Irish language today signifies identity less and less, Gaelic forms of expression have paradoxically come to signify more. Irish has come to occupy a liminal space where both Irish speakers and those who have only a few words at their command share a range of forms of cultural expression.² In this study of some extensions of the Irish lament into English, such as songs of emigration and exile, I suggest that, in spite of the threat to Irish as an expressive medium of everyday speech, these songs can be regarded as important, and contemporary, examples of the 'lost voices' of feeling.

The lament in Irish drew on a long tradition. In Classical Greece, emotional appeals to those who grieved (*paramythia*), consoling them for their loss, were part of the apparatus of traditional rhetoric. Patricia Lysaght says that in Ireland a lament was not simply a conventional performance but above all 'a means of expressing a sense of personal...loss, grief, love, sorrow and bitterness'.³ In addition, Ó Laoire has shown that *cumha* (grief, longing for what was lost) was part of a web of customs and beliefs accepted as entirely natural.⁴ The dead have often been described through metaphors of the journey such as 'the departed' and 'passing over'. Since those who left Ireland were often never seen or heard from again, songs of emigration and exile drew on these readily available discourses of grieving.

Sigmund Freud distinguished between two responses to loss: melancholia and mourning; the former he saw as a pathological reaction to loss involving identification with the lost object, while the latter was a healthy condition of coming to terms with it.⁵ Keening corresponded to the second of these—the

1 I am very grateful to Dr Ó Laoire for his insights and discussions; my debt to his work is evident at many points in this paper.

2 Porter, Gerald 2008, 'Code-switching and empowerment in the Macaronic Irish lyric', in *Übersetzungstheorie, Fachsprachen und Mehresprachigkeit* [Terminology, Translation Theory and Multilingualism], Special Number: Language and Diversity, Studiengruppe für Übersetzungstheorie, Fachsprachenforschung und Mehresprachigkeit, Vaasa, pp. 257–67.

3 Lysaght, Patricia 1997, 'Caoineadh os Coinn Coirp. The lament for the dead in Ireland', *Folklore*, vol. 108, pp. 65–82, at pp. 66, 69.

4 Ó Laoire, Lillis 2005, *On A Rock in the Middle of the Ocean. Songs and singers in Tory Island*, Cló Iar-Chonnachta, Indreabhan, Conamara, Ireland, pp. 183, 185.

5 Freud, Sigmund 1959, 'Mourning and melancholia', in *Collected Papers. Volume 4*, Edited by Ernest Jones, Translated by Joan Riviere, Basic Books, New York, pp. 152–70.

immediate response to a death. It was performed in the presence of the dead, since a folk belief maintained that the dead person could continue to hear mortals until earth had been thrown on the coffin. It often took a very simple form, since emphasis in the Gaelic tradition was laid not on improvisation but on accurate repetition, and, by spontaneously expressing *cumha*, providing a measure of release.⁶ It was not purely verbal, however, but a response to personal loss played out simultaneously through the space of the body and the space of the mind. In the words of Lauri Honko:

[I]t is absolutely misguided to approach laments via a perusal of their texts. The reader who is unfamiliar with the vocabulary of the laments is left utterly bewildered after only a few verses: he can only vaguely make out the sense of the poem. One comes to the language of ritual lament with an entirely different attitude if one has listened to the wailings of a Karelian woman in an authentic performance environment, in a graveyard, at the foot of a cross, or in the house of a bride at the moment of her departure to the [bride]groom's farm.⁷

As is well known, in Ireland a death was often also accompanied by a quite different form of grieving: the often riotous nature of the funeral wake. Such behaviour was considered by outsiders (such as members of the English Ascendancy) to be quite inappropriate to the presence of death, but, in Roy Foster's words, 'the Irish affected to dwell in a different abstract world', where death was often referred to mockingly.⁸ In Bakhtinian terms, humour makes death easier to live with; in Freudian terms, it makes grieving a whole and healthy practice.⁹ At a moment when nature has asserted its supremacy over culture, it is the momentary return of the repressed. In the doubleness of humour and terror, we perceive the kind of ambivalence that is part of the process of confronting the prospect of one's own death.

Laments in Ireland took many more forms than mourning a death: they were sung on conscription into the army, on the field of battle and during evictions, in addition to those sung on emigrating, which are the subject of this paper. In Eastern Europe, from Karelia to Greece, they were also sung to brides before their wedding: 40 000 such songs, known as *dainas*, have been documented in Latvia alone.¹⁰ At funerals, formal laments—which have remained a supreme

6 Ó Laoire, *On A Rock in the Middle of the Ocean*, pp. 91, 176, 215.

7 Quoted in Nenola, Aili 2002, *Inkerin itkuvirret [Ingrian Laments]*, SKS, Helsinki, p. 75.

8 Foster, Roy F. (ed.) 1989, *Oxford History of Ireland*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 94.

9 Bakhtin, Mikhail 1984, *Rabelais and His World*, Translated by Hélène Iswolsky, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, p. 94; Freud, 'Mourning and melancholia', pp. 152–70.

10 Beaton, Roderick 1980, *Folk Poetry of Modern Greece*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 97; Vike-Freiberga, Vaira 1991, 'The poppy blossom from my native land', in Luisa Del Giudice and Gerald Porter (eds), *Imagined States. Nationalism, utopia and longing in oral cultures*, Utah University Press, Logan, Ut., pp. 193–213.

Gaelic genre from earliest times—began in the eighteenth century to be seen as specifically asserting death's dominance over life, and the singing of self-composed songs, often tragic but also including love songs, gradually replaced keening. There were literary examples such as Eilean O'Leary's famous lament for her murdered husband ('*Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire*' ['Lament for Art Ó Laoghaire']), with its unforgettable image of the horse returning without its rider, or the grief expressed at the beginning of the twentieth century by a father for his daughter.¹¹ Such poems and songs were thus an act of healing, a return to the moment of loss.

Keening and Authority

The moment of passing between life and death has often been an arena for the assertion of power, most spectacularly, of course, in ancient Egypt. Because the practice of lamenting coincided with that moment, it often led to clashes with authority figures such as the priest. The singing of laments was strongly opposed as unchristian by Calvinists and Lutherans in German-speaking Europe, and by Catholic priests in Provence, where two choirs of young girls were prevented from following their tradition of chanting dirges alternately to the accompaniment of instruments.¹² One result of this may have been the creation of a lament style in English. Ironically, this was also the position of Catholic bishops in Ireland from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries: in 1748, for example, 'the heathenish customs of loud cries and howlings at wakes and burials' were condemned by the Bishop in Leighlin, near Carlow, on the quite inaccurate grounds that 'no such practice is found in any other Christian country'.¹³ The increase in church building that followed the *Catholic Emancipation Act* of 1830 brought further restrictions on keening on church land and on occasions when priests were present. As in Hungary, Corsica and German-speaking Europe,¹⁴ in Ireland the bourgeoisie, who preferred to use funerals as an opportunity for display and ceremony, began in the nineteenth century to represent keening as pagan, superstitious and unacceptably dramatic. Hence keening in recent years has been policed not only by priests but often also by the mourners themselves, as Lillis Ó Laoire has documented: as late as 1990 the sister of a man who had drowned while swimming started to chant his

11 Kinsella, Thomas (trans.) 1981, *An Duanaire. 1600–1900. Songs of the dispossessed*, Dolmen Press, Portlaoise, Ireland, pp. 200, 258.

12 Ling, Jan 1997, *History of European Folk Music*, Translated by Linda and Robert Schenck, University of Rochester Press, Rochester, NY, pp. 59, 61; Martinengo-Cesaresco, Countess n.d. [1914], *Essays in the Study of Folk-Songs*, Dent, London, p. 270.

13 Quoted in Lysaght, 'Caoineadh os Coinn Coirp', pp. 66–7.

14 Ling, *History of European Folk Music*, pp. 59, 61.

name loudly at his funeral. His relatives persuaded her to stop what was felt to be an embarrassing show of emotion and a throwback to an Ireland that had been left behind.¹⁵

Even the singing of laments has frequently led to conflict. Ó Laoire describes a classic example of such hegemonic control at the funeral of a young girl who had been swept away by a tsunami on Tory Island off the north coast of Ireland. Her grandmother struck up a lament at the funeral and continued until she was asked to 'show some sense' (*ciall a bheith aici*). At the funeral of the greatly admired singer Joe Heaney in County Galway in 1984, the singer Máire Davitt was refused permission by the priest to sing a lament in the church unless it was a sacred one. Ó Laoire suggests that laments were sometimes sung in English as a way of escaping censure by priests and others.¹⁶

All the singers I have mentioned so far have been women: in Martinengo-Cesaresco's words, 'the Irish keeners are invariably women, as also are all the continental dirge-singers of modern times'.¹⁷ The role of women as lamenters, with authority figures like priests playing only a peripheral role, has been well documented in many cultures. Keening was used as an instrument of empowerment by women across Europe: Elias Lönnrot and others were terrified at hearing women's outbursts of grief, some of which, such as the laments of the Ingrians, have been collected and published.¹⁸ They belong to what Andreas Huyssen calls a 'post modernism of resistance' in which subaltern groups—particularly women—speak using the materials of their marginalisation.¹⁹ In Ireland, keening by women took place alongside, and often in competition with, church rituals for the dead, much as the present-day midwife—still representing a link with traditional female birthing practices—works in tandem with the obstetrician. This central role of women has been carried over into the songs of emigration and exile.

The Lament and Songs of Emigration

By the nineteenth century, 'sorrowful songs' were gradually taking the place of keening as an expression of grief in Ireland. This was largely a response to

15 Ó Laoire, *On A Rock in the Middle of the Ocean*, pp. 273–4.

16 *Ibid.*, pp. 150, 273–4, 276.

17 Martinengo-Cesaresco, *Essays in the Study of Folk-Songs*, p. 271. See also Honko, Lauri, Timonen, Senni, Branch, Michael and Bosley, Keith (eds) 1993, *The Great Bear. A thematic anthology of oral poetry in the Finno-Ugrian languages*, SKS, Helsinki, pp. 570–1.

18 Ling, *History of European Folk Music*, p. 60; Nenola, *Inkerin itkuvirret*.

19 Quoted in Wilson, Elizabeth 2009, 'Fashion and postmodernism', in John Storey (ed.), *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture. A reader*, Fourth edn, Pearson, Harlow, UK, pp. 444–55, at p. 451.

the historical moment. Laments were never restricted only to rituals for the dead, and now they were being adapted to express the collective trauma of the tensions and tragedy of emigration.²⁰

As a result of mass emigration, the leaving ceremony later known as the 'American Wake'—singing in the absence of the corpse—became established. Arthur Schrier traces this funeral without a body back to the early nineteenth century, and emphasises the role of singing: 'Frequently the songs sung were also sad. They were generally ballads which told of the difficulties of parting, the loneliness of parents and the hardships of emigrant life.'²¹ These features are rarely found in transportation songs, but are associated with the heavy emigration from Ireland from the time of the Famine right up until the 1960s. This huge movement of population—four-fifths of whom were Catholic—became a leading source of new songs.

Lillis Ó Laoire describes how those leaving would often be accompanied by a large entourage, known as the 'convoy', as if at a funeral. He quotes an account from 1942 that explains the convoy as taking place

the night before someone goes to America. It is a remarkable gathering. It has the joy of a wedding and the *cumhaidh* [mourning] of death. At the beginning of the night, you can hardly see the shadow of *cumhaidh*. But after midnight, it will begin to become apparent. And by daybreak, I may say, nothing else is present.²²

The balance between humour and sorrow is, of course, an almost essential feature of the traditional wake. The American variety also sought to express social values and concerns as well as familial emotions. Songs were 'designed to obscure the often mundane or ambiguous realities of emigration, to project communal sorrow and anger on the traditional English foe, to impress deep feelings of grief, guilt and duty on the departing emigrants, and to send them forth as unhappy but faithful and vengeful "exiles"'.²³

John Ó Duibheanaigh, a member of a well-known family of storytellers and musicians, recalled in an interview the sense of loss in the 1920s when someone left Tory Island. He called it '*cumha* [grief] for the living':

Someone who went to America, your *cumha* for him, and his for you were increasing...because, as I said, the person who went to America had an idea that if he ever came back it would be years and years, and

20 Ó Laoire, *On A Rock in the Middle of the Ocean*, pp. 155, 235, 272.

21 Schrier, Arthur 1958, *Ireland and the American Emigration 1850–1900*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, pp. 85, 89.

22 Quoted in Ó Laoire, *On A Rock in the Middle of the Ocean*, p. 253.

23 Miller, Kerby 1985, *Emigrants and Exiles*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 565.

that his father, perhaps, would be dead and his mother dead, even if he did return, and those were kinds of *cumha*. And that *cumha* is intimately connected with, do you understand, again, the best songs...that we have; they were made because of *cumha* and *uaigneas* [loneliness].²⁴

These two concepts—grief and loneliness—were key elements in the *habitus* (or system of group beliefs and attitudes) of the community and were most fully realised in song. I suggest that the emigration songs that are sung everywhere in Donegal and the whole north coast often have the same dialectical relation to these songs of loss precisely because they include elements of the lament.

The earliest emigration songs appeared in the period following 1830. Joep Leerssen calls this period the *Sattelzeit*—‘the saddle period’—because it was a period of cultural transfer in Ireland between the enclosed Gaelic tradition without a large-scale system of communication and the urban, English-speaking print culture in the early nineteenth century.²⁵ Emigration songs were also sung increasingly in English so that singers could escape the more demanding formal requirements of songs in Irish.²⁶

He sees, instead of colonialist appropriation, the urbanisation and anglicisation of Gaelic culture as a regaining/recovery of public space comparable with Daniel O’Connell’s reclamation of places like Tara and Cashel, which until then had been monopolised by the colonial elite, by holding huge rallies there. Anglophone culture brought more social control and individualism but also greater social mobility and above all access to the printed media. As a result, the dirge shed its role in popular texts as an icon of the subordination of the Irish and became transformed into the voice of the migrant. One reason for this was that England has a weak tradition of laments: only one formal example survives, the famous Northumberland ‘Lyke Wake Dirge’ from before the seventeenth century; however, as English began to be the (imposed) language of cultural expression in both Ireland and Scotland, particular songs took on many of their features. James Porter and Herschel Gower have shown how Scottish singers like Jeannie Robertson projected the idea of the lament on to their big ballads, the ‘muckle sangs’,²⁷ and this transference of the charge that keening has always been felt to bear is found right across Europe.

At the same time, many features of Irish song—internal rhymes, the come-all-ye form, the relative rarity of narrative and the presence of Irish or Anglo-Irish words (such as ‘Erin’ or *mavourneen asthore*: ‘my love, my treasure’)—remained

24 Ó Laoire, *On A Rock in the Middle of the Ocean*, p. 175.

25 Leerssen, Joep 2002, *Hidden Ireland, public sphere*, Research Papers in Irish Studies, Arlen House, Galway, pp. 12–13.

26 Ó Laoire, *On A Rock in the Middle of the Ocean*, p. 150.

27 Porter, James and Gower, H. (eds) 1995, *Jeannie Robertson. Emergent singer, transformative voice*, Tuckwell Press, East Linton, Scotland, p. 300.

prominent in the English songs. As a result of this interactive process, while there were fewer speakers, Irish gradually became more of a presence in the oral culture of those—today numbering an estimated 80 million—who have always lived in the diaspora.

Cheap paper and the invention of the rotary press in 1811 meant that there were now numerous broadside printers, in Dublin, Cork, Belfast and elsewhere, to disseminate these new songs. It is not surprising that many of the emigration songs that were sung at that time established a template that was based on the lament.²⁸ The repetitive, intertextual nature of the emigration song, the final farewell to the grieving parents and the leave-taking from the beloved native land had obvious links with the keening tradition.

During the period before cheap air travel became available, there was a feeling that when someone left for Australia, it was the last anyone would see of them. A journey there or to North America was often seen as ‘tantamount to death’.²⁹ It has been estimated that of the 100 000 emigrants to Canada alone, 40 000 died, 17 000 of them during the voyage and another 23 000 shortly after arrival. It was said that you could have walked dry-footed to America on the bodies of those who had died on the voyage. Significantly, it was at this time (1833 onwards) that the term ‘coffin ships’ came into use to describe the overloaded and unseaworthy vessels on the Atlantic route.³⁰ Geordie Hanna of County Tyrone expressed it vividly in this stanza of ‘Erin’s Lovely Home’, which perhaps dates from the 1840s:

We hadn’t been long sailing till fever it seized our crew,
Falling like the autumn leaves and overboard were threw [*sic*];
The ocean waves they rolled o’er our graves, our bed’s the ocean foam,
Our friends may mourn for we’ll ne’er return to Erin’s Lovely Home.³¹

This stanza gives a good idea of the pervasive melancholy of this song, with its biblical intertext of human lives falling like leaves in the autumn and the idea of the ocean as a vast graveyard, a passage to the other world, like the River Styx.

28 Of the 66 songs relating specifically to emigration in Edwards (Edwards, Ron 1987, *The Convict Maid. Early broadsides relating to Australia. Part 1*, Rams Skull Press, Kuranda, Qld; Edwards, Ron 1988, *The Transport’s Lament. Early broadsides relating to Australia. Part 2*, Rams Skull Press, Kuranda, Qld) and Anderson (Anderson, Hugh [ed.] 2000, *Farewell to Judges and Juries. The broadside ballad and convict transportation to Australia, 1788–1868*, Red Rooster Press, Hotham Hill, Vic.), more than half show features of the lament, and more than one-quarter have the word in their title.

29 Ó Laoire, *On A Rock in the Middle of the Ocean*, p. 242.

30 Woodham Smith, Cecil 1964, *The Great Hunger*, Four Square Books, London, p. 234; Harte, Frank 2004, *The Hungry Voice. The song legacy of Ireland’s great hunger*, [CD: HBCD 0034], Hummingbird Records, Dublin, track [25]; *Compact Oxford English Dictionary* 1991, Second edn, Clarendon Press, Oxford, p. 282.

31 Moulden, John 1994, *Thousands are Sailing. A brief song history of Irish emigration*, Ulstersongs, Portrush, Northern Ireland, p. 30.

In particular, lines on the real danger of the sea crossing—a common subject of laments³²—often accompanied the emotion felt by each emigrant at the wake, as in this broadside from Newcastle in the north of England:

Go where I may, nor billows, rocks, nor wind,
Can add of horror to my tortured mind.³³

The sea crossing was in other respects too a kind of journey through hell (*katabasis*). The fever mentioned in the first line of 'Erin's Lovely Home' was typhus, which spread easily among the passengers and crew in the crowded conditions on board. In those conditions, songs of exile functioned as close relatives of the lament, with émigrés as the 'walking dead'. In 'Three Leaves of Shamrock', for example, a pastiche of Thomas Moore published in Belfast as a broadside about 1900 but perhaps originally written in the United States, a woman begs a departing sailor to carry three shamrock leaves to her brother in America, and pass on her dead mother's appeal that he will return if he is still alive:

'My darling son come back to me', she often used to say,
And saying so she sickened, and soon was laid away:
Her grave I watered with my tears, and there those flowers grew,
Dear brother, they were all I had, and these I sent to you.³⁴

'Three Leaves of Shamrock', with all its sentimental debt to Thomas Moore, functions like the Eastern European laments described by Lauri Honko, which call on the departed (the double meaning is intentional) to end their restless wandering and return, either in the form of a heroic homecoming or as a ghostly visitation.³⁵ The shamrock acts as an instrument of intercession. Within this tradition they can be seen as songs of loss, songs of a people unsettled, whose lives have been ruptured and have suffered a kind of 'little death'.

The process of cultural transfer moved rapidly and, by the middle of the nineteenth century, Protestant songs too had adopted the features of the Catholic lament. One of the earliest examples is 'The Transport's Lament',³⁶ where the singer opens with a circumstantial description of how he was caught poaching and sentenced to 14 years in Van Dieman's Land:

On the 15th of September we sailed from Chatham quay,
For full five months and upwards boys we ploughed the raging sea,

32 Martinengo-Cesaresco, *Essays in the Study of Folk-Songs*, p. 286.

33 Anderson, *Farewell to Judges and Juries*, p. 456.

34 Ó Cróinín, Dáibhí (ed.) 2000, *The Songs of Elizabeth Cronin*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, p. 284 [Punctuation added].

35 Honko et al., *The Great Bear*, pp. 565–70.

36 Cork broadside, c. 1830.

Neither land nor harbor could we see—believe me it’s no lie,
But around us one black water and over us a blue sky.
Young men all beware lest you draw into a snare.

There is an almost obligatory reference here to the carefree childhood spent in the land that is being left behind, and a tableau of grieving parents:

I often looked behind me towards my native home,
That cottage of contentment the place I’ll ne’er see more,
Nor yet my poor old father who tore his old grey hair,
Likewise my tender mother those arms that did me bear.
*Young men all beware lest you draw into a snare.*³⁷

After the success of the Irish-American song ‘Mother Machree’ in 1910, the Irish mother standing weeping on the dock (or today at the airport departure gate) to mourn the parting son became a standard trope in Irish emigration songs.

Many of these songs are very precise in their accounts of the circumstances leading up to the exile, as in this version of ‘Erin’s Lovely Home’ in the repertoire of four members of the Butcher family from North Derry:

My father sold his second cow and borrowed twenty pound,
All in the merry month of May we sailed from Derry quay,
There were thousands more along the shore all anxious they might roam
To leave the land where we were reared called Erin’s lovely home.³⁸

The anxiety expressed in the third line, however, suggests a darker intertext. In many songs there is a coda where the emigrant speaks as if he himself were one of the ‘walking dead’:

Mourn not for me, my mother dear,
And father, do not grieve.³⁹

These two songs—‘Erin’s Lovely Home’ and ‘The Transport’s Lament’—from two very different Irish communities, deal in the same way with the cultural transfer of the lament. When separated from the dynamic of a performance in a community in Cork or Donegal, where migration has been a fact of life for nearly 200 years, such songs are often considered embarrassingly sentimental today. By restoring their link with the Gaelic lament, they can be recovered as responses to loss, sung by marginal figures testifying to their own occluded history. Emigration, whether as a result of famine, eviction or stealing a bolt

37 Edwards, *The Transport’s Lament*, p. 98 [Original punctuation].

38 Shields, Hugh 1981, *Shamrock, Rose and Thistle. Folk singing in North Derry*, Blackstaff Press, Belfast, p. 76.

39 Moulden, *Thousands are Sailing*, p. 20.

of cloth, can fairly be ranked alongside the institution of slavery as a primary source of trauma, both individual and collective, for those who suffered it. Being forced to leave one's native land and the subsequent sea crossing have been known to cause serious traumatic symptoms since the seventeenth century. The song topos of wishing to return to a lost and idealised past has been described in migration literature as 'cultural nostalgia';⁴⁰ however, the term is not a trivial cliché. As Ó Laoire puts it, 'nostalgia [coined 1688, *nostos*, return to native land, and *algos*, grief] was thought to be a physical disease rather than a psychological state. It was thought to affect people who were away from their native countries to the extent that it sometimes caused death.'⁴¹ As the powerful acts of recall in the songs of Geordie Hanna and the Butcher family show, nostalgia is crucially related to the process of grieving. It functions as what Toni Morrison calls in *Beloved* 'rememory'—an act of healing, a return to the time before the moment of loss.⁴²

With Ireland's recession the most serious in the European Union after Greece's, not only are Poles and Latvians returning to their home countries, but once again young Irish in Donegal, Derry and Galway are leaving. These migrant songs continue to be written today, often under the influence of romantic nationalism, in Irish communities in Australia and elsewhere, and have regularly been mistaken for traditional compositions.⁴³ In Newfoundland, for example, where the Irish diaspora is strong, songs like 'That Dear Old Land', 'Erin's Green Shore' and 'Misty Morning Shore' are still composed and performed in traditional style;⁴⁴ however, these songs can usually be distinguished from the early songs by their upbeat tone: understandably, during the Kennedy years in the United States, for example, they emphasised the advantages that settling in a land of opportunity offered.

John Moulden has called into question the assumption that all emigration songs were filled with melancholy: he suggests that it was a projection by those who remained, and that those who survived the voyage took a much more cheerful view of it on their arrival.⁴⁵ This is particularly true of the flourishing tradition of such songs along the North American seaboard. The involvement of those who remained is precisely that aspect which drew, like a bereaved family, on the consolatory role of grieving. Not unnaturally, the sea crossing was symbolically associated with dying: the possibility of shipwreck, the liminality of the sea

40 Svensson, Anette 2010, *A Translation of Worlds*, University of Umeå, Umeå, Sweden, p. 86.

41 Ó Laoire, *On A Rock in the Middle of the Ocean*, p. 193.

42 Morrison, Toni 1997, *Beloved*, Vintage, London, p. 35.

43 Moulden, John 2006, *The printed ballad in Ireland*, Unpublished thesis, National University of Ireland, Galway, pp. 387–411.

44 Greenleaf, E. B. and Mansfield, G. Y. (eds) 2004, *Ballads and Sea Songs of Newfoundland*, Memorial University Folklore and Language Publications, St Johns, Newfoundland, pp. 142–5; Irish Descendants 1991, *Misty Morning Shore*, [Audio cassette: FCP 106], First City Productions, St Johns, Newfoundland.

45 Moulden, *The printed ballad in Ireland*, 390.

boundary and the difficulty of return all intersected with the preoccupations of keening mourners contemplating death. At the same time, exile was associated with a search for identity and the spirit of the nation. In this way songs of exile became the mouthpiece of a politics of feeling that would not be structured purely in terms of nationalism and oppression. In Ó Laoire's words:

[T]he whole narrative web is a symbol of the tensions and tragedy of emigration, of the expression of family bonds and the dialectical relation to marital ties, of island ideology, of the *cumha* and *uaigneas* [sorrow and loneliness] inherent in the human condition, all of it situated in a common Northern European cultural framework.⁴⁶

It is this complexity that places Irish emigration songs among the greatest expressions of human loss.

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46 Ó Laoire, *On A Rock in the Middle of the Ocean*, p. 235.

Paradise Imagined: Songs of Scots Gaelic migrants in Australia, 1850–1940

Ruth Lee Martin

Life is more than separate events; it incorporates the quality of duration, of passage through time. Buffeted by change, we retain traces of our past to be sure of our enduring identity.¹

The past is important to us, for it makes us who we are in the present, and who we strive to be in the future. Our past contains the essence of who we are: basically a work in progress as we shape and reshape our individual and collective identities. A significant contributor to this process is place—the geographic landscape—saturated with rich layers of cultural memory, in which we are immersed, and which contributes to creating who we are and, indeed, who we are becoming. This paper examines the connection between Scottish migrants and their native landscape through songs written in Australia between the 1850s and the 1930s by migrant songwriter-poets in the Scots Gaelic language. One of the recurring themes that these Scottish Gaelic bards² have expressed in the songs they composed in Australia is an overwhelming loss of place,³ and they remind us of the intricate and intimate connections between landscape and people. These *cianalas*,⁴ or ‘homesickness songs’, were composed by bards who were driven from their homeland, either involuntarily or through necessity, and who emigrated from the Highlands and islands of Scotland.

The early bards who emigrated to Australia from the mid 1800s are quite difficult to trace, as the information about them is scant. Most of them published their songs in newspapers of the day such as the Australian version of *An Teachdaire*

1 Lowenthal 1975, p. 9.

2 I have chosen to use the term ‘bard’ in the sense that it denotes music and text combined, rather than the word ‘poet’, which in English suggests text only, or ‘composer’, which seems to place emphasis on the music. In its original context, the word ‘bard’ referred to professional poets who wrote panegyrics and eulogies to their chiefs. Until recent times, nearly all Gaelic poetry was sung. John MacInnes says: ‘A contemporary bard in a crofting township is the distant heir of the poets who once enjoyed the patronage of the kings of Scotland and the great magnates of the kingdom, and will make songs, as of right, on issues of national and international import’ (MacInnes, J. 2006, *Dùthchas Nan Gàidheal: Selected essays of John MacInnes*, Edited by Michael Newton, Birlinn, Edinburgh, p. 3).

3 The two other recurring themes are loss of family and community, and loss of language.

4 *Cianalas* is a Gaelic word meaning melancholy, sorrow and/or homesickness (Dwelly, Edward 2000, *Illustrated Gaelic–English Dictionary*, Birlinn, Edinburgh, p. 193). There is often a feeling of sadness for a past that is lost. There is a whole body of migrant songs speaking of *cianalas* or homesickness, including the songs of Iain Archie MacAskill written in Australia.

Gaidhealach (*The Gaelic Messenger*), printed in Hobart in 1857, or sent their songs back home to be printed in newspapers such as the *Oban Times*. From the information gleaned from the poetry, they all appear to have been born in the Highlands and islands as their descriptions of events and landscape are extraordinarily detailed and could only come from firsthand knowledge. From the song texts it is also clear that some were evicted, or had close ties to evicted people, and a sense of indignation at the injustices perpetrated against the Gaelic community comes through in some of the songs such as this one from Eoghan Mac-an-t-Shaoir (Ewin MacIntyre) published in *An Teachdaire Gaidhealach* (ATG) in June 1857:⁵

<i>'Snam b' ann chum an fheachda no ghleachd ri ar namheid</i>	It wasn't for vice or bad behaviour
<i>Bhiodh uaislean ar cinnidh 'gar sirreadh mur b' abhaist</i>	That they are ejecting us from our homes and country
<i>Gu onair ar duthcha a's cliu do na Gaidheil</i>	But for the extent of hatred in their two-fold hearts
<i>Cha 'n fhaicte cho craiteach ar cairdean fo bhron.</i>	Who are ruling our country and refusing to give us food.

There is very little factual information about the bards themselves, and to further complicate matters pseudonyms are sometimes used such as that used by the bard who goes by the name Creagan An-Fhithich (Raven's Rock).⁶ Another bard signs himself simply as 'A Highlander from Penola, South Australia'.⁷ The emigrant bards appear to have settled in many parts of Australia, from Kanowna in the goldfields of Western Australia to Lake Eliza in South Australia, Geelong and Melbourne in Victoria, and Armidale in New England and the Riverina district in New South Wales.

5 All of the Gaelic-language spelling is copied exactly from the originals. This means of course that accents are missing, particularly from the older newspaper, *An Teachdaire Gaidhealach*; however, it seems best practice to leave the Gaelic spellings as they were originally published. This includes names.

6 He has two songs published in the Australian version of *An Teachdaire Gaidhealach* (ATG), one being a praise poem for the countryside he has left behind and the other an elegy for a Highlander who died in Hobart in 1856.

7 Penola is a township about 400 km south-east of Adelaide and is mainly known as a winegrowing region. It has a long history of Scottish settlement from the 1840s (<<http://www.southernaustralianhistory.com.au/penola.htm>>).

Two Highland bards whose lives are documented are John MacLennan (b. 1861), who emigrated from Inverasdale on the north-west coast of Scotland to Brisbane in 1885, and the bard, piper and World War I veteran Iain Archie MacAskill (b. 1898), who emigrated to Australia in 1924 under the WA Government Group Settlement Scheme from the small island of Berneray, North Uist, in the Outer Hebrides. Although their lives took quite different paths, both write with a strong love of the landscape of ‘home’. The song texts composed by Iain Archie MacAskill⁸ (or John Archie as he is known in his family circle) are especially caught up in memories of landscape—and his poetic descriptions are full of local placenames and the geographic features of Berneray that he knew and loved so well. No matter what the cause of emigration, however, one thing is clear in the compositions of the bards, and that is the enduring love of the landscape of home.

Homeland, not surprisingly then, takes a prominent role in the minds of the bards here in Australia, so much so that the current landscape in which they are immersed seems insubstantial and scarcely worth noting. It is not insignificant that of the Gaelic songs written in Australia only a very few make any mention of Australia at all, and none in a particularly positive way.⁹ References to Australia are rare and always fleeting.

Indeed, John Archie acknowledges this very poignantly in his song ‘*Oran a’Chianalais*’ (‘Song of Homesickness’), in which the loveliness of the Australian landscape on an early morning seeps into the bard’s consciousness almost unawares before he rather casts it aside. His longing for homeland is too intense¹⁰ to allow consideration of the beauty around him in his new country:¹¹

8 The song texts were edited and published as *An Ribheid Chiuil* with extensive notes by his cousin Alick Morrison.

9 The songs mentioned in this article will be published in full in my forthcoming book, *Gaelic Songs of Australia*, a collection of 45 Gaelic Australian songs (set in musical notation) complete with a critical introduction.

10 It is a curious thing but I have not as yet discovered any praise poems in Gaelic to the Australian landscape, although there are two that praise New Zealand in Donald Fergusson’s book (1977, *Beyond the Hebrides: Including the Cape Breton Collection*, Lawson Graphics Atlantic, Halifax, pp. 332–4). It may be that I just haven’t discovered them yet, or it may be that the New Zealand landscape (especially the South Island), in its rugged geographic formation, was closer to the Gaelic migrants’ idea of what a landscape should look like. This is certainly an interesting theme for future exploration.

11 MacAskill, Iain Archie 1961, *An Ribheid Chiuil*, Edited by Alick Morrison, Learmonth & Son, Stirling, pp. 74–5.

*The mhaduinn sgiamhach 's a'
ghrian ag eirigh*

The morning is lovely and the
sun is rising

*Air uchd nan sliabh chas mar
fhiamh a' cheitein;*

On the brow of the steep hill
like a glimpse of May;

*An driùchd a' deàrrsadh air
bhàrr nan geug ann*

The dew is sparkling on the
tops of the branches there

*'S an eunlaith triall as air
sgiathan gle-gheal.*

And the birds are flying with
bright white wings.

*Cha deàn mi sùgradh ri ciùin
an àite...*

I am not uplifted by the peace
of the place...

*Gach nì tha 'm shùilean gun
diù gun chàil dha,*

The sights before my eyes do
not engage me

*'S nach mòr nach tionndaidh
mo chùl gu bràth ris.*

I would almost turn my back
forever on them.

In the song 'Oran Ionndrainn' ('Song of Longing'), John Archie describes the *machairs*, or plains, of Australia as oppressive under the fierce sun:¹²

Mo chridhe trom, 's duilich leam

My heart is sore, and I am sad

'S muladach mar tha mi,

And sorrowful

*An tìr na machrach
iargaineach*

In the land of the
burdensome machairs

*Fo theas o'n ghrian tha
deàrrsadh.*

Under the heat of the blazing
sun.

In his article 'Reflections on exile', Edward Said describes the severe emotional toll brought about by the severance from home and homeland as 'the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between self and its true home: Its essential sadness can never be surmounted'.¹³

Certainly this 'unhealable rift' is very much evident, and indeed is a central theme, in the texts of Australian Scots Gaelic song where the bards express

¹² Ibid., p. 67.

¹³ Said, Edward 2000, 'Reflections on exile', *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., pp. 173–86, at p. 173.

and share a persistent, and oft times overwhelming, sense of grief and loss of homeland that resulted from their emigration—often without any real choice—from the Highlands and islands to Australia in the mid nineteenth century.

Scots Gaelic migration to Australia began to really get under way in the turmoil of the Highland Clearances in the mid nineteenth century,¹⁴ when many Highlanders and islanders began the long and sometimes hazardous sea voyage to Australia. Many of these early migrants were forced from their hereditary lands due to a complex number of factors that worked together to cause widespread poverty and misery. The hereditary relationship in Scotland between the landscape, landlord and people was going through a phase of rapid change. Agricultural reform began sweeping through the whole of Scotland (including the Scottish Lowlands)¹⁵ from the early 1800s and affected the very poorest group of people struggling to subsist on small plots of land while paying rent to landlords. These subsistence farmers, or crofters, were evicted from the land, which was then given over to larger, commercial enterprises. In the Highlands, large-scale sheep farms were set up and profits were made for landlords and their tacksmen.¹⁶

It is perhaps surprising to the modern-day reader that living conditions in the Highlands and islands of Scotland were so grim that people were literally starving to death. Many of the poorest—through being removed from their homes and lands—were living in the most appalling and squalid conditions with the result that destitute Gaels without sufficient food, shelter or indeed clothing¹⁷ were living on the absolute margins of sustainable life. A minister from the island of Uist, obviously shocked by the condition of the people around him, said that he had ‘never witnessed such countenances—starvation on many faces—the children with their melancholy looks, big-looking knees, shrivelled legs, hollow eyes, swollen-like bellies. God help them, I never did witness such wretchedness.’¹⁸

14 Until the mid 1800s, Canada was the preferred destination (Devine 1999, p. 245).

15 While Clearances did take place in the Lowlands, they were particularly harsh in the Highlands (Kennedy, Kate 2011, *The Lowland Clearances and the transformation of southwest Scotland*, Report on speech given by Tom Devine, 26 May 2011, viewed 15 May 2012, <http://www.royalsoced.org.uk/cms/filea5/events/reports/2010-2011/lowland_clearances.pdf>).

16 The definition of the word ‘tacksman’ from the *Collins English Dictionary* is ‘a leaseholder, esp a tenant in the Highlands who sublets’ (<www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/tacksman>). For a comprehensive account of the Highland Clearances, see Richards, Eric 2008, *The Highland Clearances: People, landlords and rural turmoil*, Birlinn, Edinburgh; or Devine, T. M. 1988, *The Great Highland Famine: Hunger, emigration and the Scottish Highlands in the nineteenth century*, J. Donald, Edinburgh.

17 Clothing was often mere rags. Some people tried to make clothes from the empty bags of meal, and many went barefoot in all weather (MacLeod, John 1996, *Highlanders: A history of the Gaels*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, p. 198).

18 Quoted in *ibid.*

There was a generally held view that the Highlands and islands were overpopulated and this excess of population needed to be culled;¹⁹ one way of doing this was for landlords to evict the small tenantry and send them off to Canada, America or Australia, thus excising them neatly from the landscape.

A constant source of frustration for Highland landholders was the difficulty of detaching people from their homelands. As Prebble states when discussing the formation of the Highland and Island Emigration Society:

In 1851 something like planned emigration was evolved. It was by compromise, of course, with the Government acting like a parent, giving advice and some financial assistance to private emigration societies which were expected to find the bulk of their funds in the pockets of the public. The Board of Supervision, the central administrative control for the Poor Laws, had been in favour of emigration for some time, and was in a constant state of irritation over the people's reluctance to leave their homes. It was of the light-headed opinion that the best way to convince them of the necessity of emigration would be to put the burden of immediate poor relief on the shoulder of local authorities. This would soon starve the Highlanders into submission.²⁰

While there was no choice for some of these migrants, others were under enormous pressure to provide a future for themselves and their children free from poverty.²¹ They came to Australia to forge better lives for themselves and their families, their hopes fuelled by advertising, stories published in pamphlets and newspapers, and letters 'home' of a land of opportunity and plenty, and with the ever present lure of gold. But even those who came to find a better life for themselves and their families felt the desolation of loss of homeland—something that stayed with many for the rest of their days, as their songs attest.

19 Sir Charles Trevelyan, Chairman of the Highland and Island Emigration Committee (set up to give financial assistance to people wanting or needing to migrate), believed in the early 1850s that there was a 'surplus' population in the Highlands and islands of around 30 000–40 000 people (Devine 1999, p. 251).

20 Prebble, John 1963, *The Highland Clearances*, Penguin Books, London, p. 200. The two most important men in the Highland and Island Emigration Society, Sir Charles Trevelyan and Sir John McNeill, had both been active in the promotion of emigration as the solution to social problems in the Highlands for some time (Devine 1999, p. 251). Trevelyan was a complex man, but his view of the necessity to withdraw all aid to starving families in order to force them into compliance in regards to emigration seems extremely harsh and inhumane by any standards.

21 It was only in 1886 that a rather limited and unsatisfactory *Crofter's Act* came into existence, giving at least some security to statutory crofters. For a detailed account, see Richards, *The Highland Clearances*, pp. 384–8.



Figure 1 Abandoned house at Borerraig, Isle of Skye, from clearance that took place in 1853 by agents of Lord MacDonald

Photograph courtesy of Bradley Cummings

These songs are full of longing for ‘home’—not just for the communities and families in which people had been nurtured but also a powerful longing for the landscape itself in which they were reared. They demonstrate a connection with place that is both profound and enduring. As poet and scholar Derick Thomson states:

The commonest theme of Gaelic verse in the nineteenth century is that of ‘homeland’. This was no doubt to be expected in a period of upheaval and uprooting, much of it of an involuntary nature, whether people were forced to migrate by physical action or by economic circumstances. The homeland is seen primarily in a nostalgic light: a place of youthful associations, family and community warmth, a Paradise lost.²²

In these songs the description of landscape is arresting, for the landscape described in no way represents the real landscape left behind; it is rather a constructed landscape of the mind. It is a landscape of the imagination, where time seems to be caught in perpetual late spring, the countryside bathed in golden light. This is not a landscape where one has a sense of being a passive onlooker, awed and overwhelmed by nature in its raw state, but rather the

22 Thomson Derick 1974, *An Introduction to Gaelic Poetry*, Victor Gollancz, London, p. 223.

landscape of these songs is one that is fully revealed in its intimate association and interaction with the people who live in it—a landscape that beckons and invites into itself. It explodes with life and vitality, a place of boundless, directed energy, moving joyfully and ceaselessly towards procreation, life and renewal—and its people are an integral part of it.

John Archie was desperately unhappy in Australia and, after he put in backbreaking toil to clear his plot of land, the bank foreclosed on his property after a severe drought in 1931.²³ The one thing that gave John Archie solace through these difficult times was his imagining of home—the landscape of the little island of Berneray in the Outer Hebrides—so lovingly described in his songs. This landscape has a potent life force that he describes in vivid detail, clearly demonstrating his intimate connection with it, and his respect and love for it:

*Is damh na cròice neo-stòlda
séideachd*

The stag with antlers is
restless, snorting,

*Air cnocan móintich 's e tòir
nan éildean.*

On moorland hillocks the
hinds he's seeking.

*Tha 'm bradan tarrgheal 'san
tan'-abhunn ghléite*

The greyish salmon in the
shallow river

*Is e cluich gu lean-shamhach
gur dearg air leum e;*

Is now calmly playing before
madly leaping^{'*}

* *Air fonn: Fhir a' Bhàta* [To the tune: The Boatman]'. MacAskill, *An Ribheid Chiuil*, p. 88.

Or consider this reflection on the home country from Iain Dubh Mac Dhomhnull 'ic Iain, known as John MacLennan:

*Tha crodh is caoraich air
raointean fàsail,*

There are cattle and sheep in
desolate fields,

*Na laoigh 's na h-uain ruith
mu'n cuairt ag àlais;*

Calves and lambs running
around and breeding;

*Tha iasg is sgadan gu tric 'g
an tràilleadh,*

Often are fish and herring
caught by trawlers,

*'S cearc-fhraoich is liath-
chearc air sliabh 'sa bhràighe.*

And the moor-hens and grey
hens on the slopes of the braes.

Hug i ho ro, etc.

Hug i ho ro, etc.'^{*}

* *Air Fonn: Tha mi fo ghruaim rinn mo luaidh mo thréigsinn* [To the tune: I'm so sad as my love has deserted me]'. MacLennan, John (Iain Dubh Mac Dhomhnull 'ic Iain) 1937, *Duanagan agus Sgeulachdan Beaga*, Alex Maclaren, Glasgow, p. 4.

23 John Archie's life ended tragically by illness brought on by stress and poor nutrition in 1934 at the age of thirty-six, and he was buried in the Karrakatta cemetery in Western Australia. He was never forgotten by his family back in Scotland. In 2010 they raised enough money to bring his remains back to his beloved Berneray where he was reburied in the small local cemetery next to his parents.

The songs portray the abundance and variety of plant life in the imagined landscape of these bards in a most descriptive way. There are tall, straight, warrior-like oak trees; slim-branched and fragrant birch; soft tresses of the noble pine; and flowers abound: primroses, daisies and heather. It is a landscape replete with animals: cattle grazing or playing on green slopes, or deer that roam freely over hill and moor. It is also a landscape filled with the joyful singing of birds of all kinds: the thrush, skylark, cuckoo, geese and ducks.

For example, this extract of a song recalling home, ‘*Na Tulaichean Boidheach*’ (‘The Lovely Hillocks’), by Seumas Mac ‘Ille-Mhaoil (James MacMillan) from Kanowna, Western Australia, published in Scotland in 1900,²⁴ makes this point explicit:

<i>Glac-nan-laogh tha fo dhuilleach</i>	The gorge-of-the-calves is covered with foliage
<i>Air uilinn dà chnoic</i>	On its shoulder two hills
<i>Far an cluinnear an smeòrach</i>	Where the thrush can be heard
<i>‘Seinn ceòl ann gun sprochd;</i>	Musically singing without gloom;
<i>Tha an uiseag air phreasan,</i>	The skylark is in the briar-bush,
<i>Tha nead aic’ air ghloc,</i>	She has a nest in the gorge,
<i>A’ chuthag ’s gug-gug aic’...</i>	The cuckoo singing gug-gug...

A real sense of movement and abundance in the landscape is drawn into this song—again from John Archie:

<i>Théid ianlaith nan speuran</i>	All the birds of the sky
<i>Air féill ann as ùr,</i>	Joyfully celebrate anew
<i>Dol thairis air sléibhteann</i>	Crossing slopes
<i>‘Nan ceudan le sùnd;</i>	In their hundreds;
<i>Bi ’n cathan ’s an giadh ann</i>	Barnacle and other geese
<i>Glé lionmhor ’na chùl</i>	Will be plentiful in the Cùl
<i>‘S an eal’ air an Tràigh</i>	Swans on the sea-shore
<i>‘S lachainn-bhlàr air LochBhrùst.</i>	And coots on Loch Brusta.*

* ‘*Air fonn: Eilean an Fhraoich* [To the tune: Island of Heather]’. MacAskill, *An Ribheid Chiuil*, p. 61. In his notes on John Archie, poetry editor Alick Morrison comments that Loch Bhrusta, a freshwater lake, is well known for its abundance of birdlife including swans (p. 121).

24 Mac ‘Ille-Mhaoil, Seumas (James MacMillan) 1900, ‘*Na Tulaichean Boidheach* [The Lovely Hillocks]’, *Oban Times*, 9 June, p. 6.

This dramatic and dynamic landscape contains all manner of creatures (useful for sustaining human life) and is in a natural, rightful balance when stewarded by its people: strong, brave and cheerful fishermen, hunters and cowherds and gentle, warm, hardworking women—maidens or milkmaids—without blemish. There are also many references to brave stalwart ancestors and heroes. This landscape is indelibly marked by the names given to it by its people so prevalent in the songs, and by numerous commemorative cairns²⁵ dotted about the landscape.



Figure 2 Commemorative cairn in the foreground from the track to the cleared houses of Boreraig, Isle of Skye

Photograph courtesy of Bradley Cummings

It is a land where there is an abundance of clean, fresh water—something no doubt especially fondly remembered by the Australian Gaelic bards in the dry Australian climate. These bards also remind the Gaelic community of the health-giving benefits of the water that is found in the homeland:

²⁵ Most Scots know what a cairn is as the Scottish landscape is liberally sprinkled with them. For other readers, a cairn is a pile of stones heaped up in a mound as a landmark or to commemorate an event.

<i>Tha comhnaird cheutach nan sgathan speur-ghorm,</i>	The splendid level grounds reflect the blue sky,
<i>De dh' uisge gle-ghlan, mu steidh nam beann,</i>	Of fine, pure water around the base of the bens,
<i>'S tha sruithean uasal 'tigh'n annta 's uapa,</i>	And there are noble streams coming into them and from them,
<i>'Sa' dol le luathghair do'n chuan nan deann;</i>	And going exultantly into the ocean with a rush;*

* *'Air Fonn: Coire-Cheathaich* [To the Tune: The Misty Corrie]. Creagan An-Fhithich (Raven's Rock) 1857, 'Duan Na Smeoraich 'An Tir Chein' [The Thrush's Song "Far Away Land"]', *An Teachdaire Gaidhealach*, [Hobart], March 1857, p. 4.

John Archie is forthright in his views about the significance of water in the landscape of Berneray:

<i>Gur tric air mo smuaintean</i>	I often think
<i>Na bruaichean tha grinn,</i>	Of its beautiful slopes
<i>Le fuarain ghlan-fhuasgailt</i>	With open fresh springs
<i>'Tha luath-ruith le glinn;</i>	Tumbling through the glens
<i>Tha 'n t-uisge cho luachmhor</i>	The water is so precious
<i>'S nach d'fhuaras da prìs,</i>	That it has never been priced
<i>Toirt neart agus suaimhneas</i>	Giving strength and security
<i>Do 'n t-sluagh ann air tìr.</i>	To the people in our land.*

* *'Air fonn: Eilean an Fhraoich* [To the tune: Island of Heather]. MacAskill, *An Ribheid Chiuil*, pp. 61–2.

This theme connects the natural elements of the landscape with the health of its inhabitants. It is particularly significant, for it not only shows that in the minds of the Gaels an essential relationship exists between themselves and their landscape in terms of mental and spiritual wellbeing (which is perhaps what could be expected), but it also emphasises and reminds of the importance of the connection between people and landscape in terms of physical health and wellbeing.

The song from Brisbane bard John MacLennan takes up this theme. It is significant that the chorus is reiterated many times throughout a performance of this song:²⁶

<i>Tha mi tinn, tinn, tinn, tha mi tinn gun bhi slàn,</i>	I am sick, sick, sick, I am sick without health
<i>Mi bhi fàgail na tir gun fhios an till mi gu bràth.</i>	I will be leaving the land without knowing if I'll ever return.

Many of the songs tell of the emotional strains of being separated from a familiar landscape, resulting in negative emotional states such as a lack of joy, melancholy, heavy heartedness and so forth, and, like John MacLennan, they also speak of the physical affects this has on them such as feeling '*tinn gun bhi slàn*' (sick without health). This acknowledges that separation from homeland can have such devastating consequences that not only affect emotional states but also have the power to affect the physical state.

The idea of health emanating from the physical landscape can be seen in the following song, '*Soraidh Bhuam gu Barraigh*' ('Farewell to Barra'), composed by a bard from the island of Barra who called himself 'The Article':

<i>Soraidh bhuam gu Barraidh</i>	My blessings on Barra
<i>Eilean's maisich tha fo'n ghrèin</i>	The most beautiful island under the sun
<i>Far an tric an robh mi sùgradh</i>	Where I often played
<i>'S le sunna a ruith na sprèidh</i>	And happily herded the cattle
<i>Gur lìonmhor lus tha fàs fo'n drùchd</i>	Plants abound beneath the dew
<i>Is deallt air uir as dhèidh</i>	And the fine rain on the soil
<i>A bheireadh slàinte is mùirneal dhuit</i>	On a May morning Gives forth both good health and happiness.
<i>Air maduinn chùbhraidh chèt'</i>	

²⁶ '*Air fonn: Thug mi gaol dhuit Iain Bhàin* [I gave my Love to Fair-Haired Iain]'. MacLennan, *Duanagan agus Sgeulachdan Beaga*, p. 2.

Significantly enough, in this song the author later talks of being alone in ‘*An Astràilia nan craobh*’ (in Australia of the trees), perhaps in the contemporary mind-set no bad thing at all, but to the Gael an over abundance of trees in the landscape spoke of desolation: a land bereft of people and animals.²⁷

A further example of this sense of unease caused by a landscape that supports an abundance of trees can be found in the expressive poetry of Màiri NicDhòmhnaill (Mary MacDonald). In the poem ‘*Craobhan*’ (‘Trees’), she speaks of a landscape without its people resulting in the growth of trees that are ‘*a’ mùchadh a’ ghlinne*’ (choking the glen) and ‘*s a’ dubhadh na grèine*’ (darkening the sun).²⁸

Another interesting aspect of the Australian Gaelic songs is the way in which various aspects of the landscape are treated in an anthropomorphic way. For example, a little later in the verses composed by Creagan An-Fhithich (Raven’s Rock), in speaking of the wind, he says:

<i>Air chiabh nan stucan bu mhor mo shugradh</i>	The wind making a musical sound
<i>Le caithream shunntach fhead- chiuil na chrìos.</i>	Lively, dancing, whistling around the peaks.*

* Creagan An-Fhithich (Raven’s Rock), ‘*Duan Na Smeoraich ‘An Tir Chein*’, p. 4.

And later still, the trees are described as ‘noble’ and ‘gallant’ and likened to brave warriors:

<i>‘Nan geugaibh comhard bu chlu-mhor cosan</i>	These are the gallant trees of the pines
<i>‘Nan cnaimheach oga bu domhail druim;</i>	Clad in a foliage that is gallant and noble
<i>‘S ged ‘ni an tuath-ghaoth an aitreabh ‘luasgadh</i>	The north wind will not shake their abode
<i>Cha ghabh iad fuathas aon uair, na suim</i>	These warriors will not take fright.*

* *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁷ Another good example of this sense of unease generated by a landscape of thick woodland, or forest, is given by the bard John MacLean, who settled in Pictou County, Nova Scotia. He composed a song in 1819 called ‘*A’ Choille Ghruamach*’ (‘The Gloomy Forest’) in which he describes the overwhelming sense of alienation with his physical surroundings (Gillies, Anne Lorne 2005, *Songs of Gaelic Scotland*, Birlinn, Edinburgh, p. 249).

²⁸ Kerrigan, Catherine (ed.) 1991, *An Anthology of Scottish Women Poets*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, pp. 98–9.

There is also this delightful and evocative description of Loch Ewe from John MacLennan:

<i>Gu'm faic thu Loch Iubh gu mùirneil farsuinn,</i>	I can see Loch Ewe with its joyful expanse,
<i>Le acarsaid chiuin chiuin 's gach lùb is camus</i>	With a quiet anchorage and every bend and siding
<i>Mu'n cuairt air gach taobh gu cùbhraidh, fallain,</i>	Around on all sides sweetly, healthy,
<i>Tha'n dùthaich eireachdail, bhòidheach.</i>	The country is beautiful, and lovely.*

* 'Air Fonn: Muile nam Mòrbheann [To the Tune: Mull of the High Bens]. MacLennan, *Duanagan agus Sgeulachdan Beaga*, p. 33.

Of course, a sense of mental anguish runs through many of the songs as well, clearly demonstrating the overwhelming sense of pain generated by separation from the country of birth such as can be found in the following verse—basically a cry from the heart:

<i>Lochabar, Lochabar, Lochabar, nan ard-bheann,</i>	Lochaber, Lochaber, Lochaber, of the high mountains,
<i>Nan stuchd-bheanna casa, 's nan glacagan fasaich,</i>	Of the steep mountain peaks, and the deserted gorges,
<i>'S e dh' fhag mi fo eislein gur eiginn dhomh t'-fhagail</i>	What left me in grief is that I had to leave you
<i>S' bhi triall as an aite rinn m' arach 's mi og!</i>	And to leave the place that reared me in my youth!
<i>Taobh Loch Liobhunn.</i>	Beside Loch Leven.*

* Mac-an-t-Shaoir, Eoghan (Ewin MacIntyre) 1857, 'An T-Abrach A Fagail A Dhuthcha [A Lochaber Man Leaving His Country]', *An Teachdaire Gaidhealach*, [Hobart], June, p. 6.

The effect of separation from homeland is summed up in devastating succinctness with these two lines by John Archie:

*'S e gath a' chianalais pian
gun tròcair*

The arrow of homesickness
causes a merciless pain

*Tha losgadh m' inntinn, mo
chridh' 's mo threòir uam.*

That burns into my mind, my
heart and my strength.*

* *'Air fonn: Fàill il lo agus ho ro eile* [To the tune: *Fàill il lo agus ho ro eile*]. MacAskill, *An Ribheid Chiuil*, p. 74. *The words '*Fàill il lo agus ho ro eile*' are vocables and do not contain any semantic meaning. To say they are meaningless is problematic for they certainly identify many song tunes, as well as provide an opportunity for communal engagement in the singing. See John MacInnes's article 'The choral tradition in Scottish Gaelic Songs' (*MacInnes, Dùthchas Nan Gàidheal*, pp. 211–29) for an interesting commentary on the use of vocables in Gaelic song.

As has been demonstrated, the landscape of home is dynamic, with ample variety and colour. It is a land teeming with life and abundance—in full bloom—vigorous and fertile. Stags are looking for mates; salmon are spawning and calves and lambs are frolicking on green slopes. It is a land of high, heathery mountains, of verdant glens, a land of *machair*,²⁹ of flowery fields shining and golden—gleaming under the dew—and fragrant islands in seas abounding with fish.

But where, in all this fulsome description, is the landscape of reality? Where is the landscape that is often harsh and unforgiving—a land of long, bitter winters, chilling cold, unending rains, poor, thin soils and rough ground? This landscape has been erased from the individual memory of the bards and, through the songs cycling in the public sphere, erased also from the collective memory of the Gaelic community in Australia. So, just as these people were erased from their landscape, so too they in turn erased the harsh physical landscape from their minds and replaced it instead with a utopian vision of homeland.

Lowenthal makes the important point that:

The tangible past is altered mainly to make history conform with memory. Memory not only conserves the past but adjusts recall to current needs. Instead of remembering exactly what was, we make the past intelligible in the light of present circumstances... Above all, memory transforms the past we have known into what we think it should have been.

29 The best description for this term comes, I think, from Dwelly (*Illustrated Gaelic-English Dictionary*, p. 620): 'Long ranges of sandy plains fringing the Atlantic side of the Outer Hebrides. They are closely covered with short green grass, thickly studded with herbs of fragrant odours and plants of lovely hues.'

Selective recall eliminates undesired scenes, highlights favoured ones, and makes them tidy and suitable...we mask diversity and collapse countless disparate images into a few dominant ones.³⁰

To the Scots Gaelic migrant looking back, the glasses are more than rose-tinted, for there are no half measures here in the intensity of love for homeland.

‘This is a past that has been reimagined—it is not the past as it was: The past we know about is not, in any case, a present that was ever experienced.’³¹

This was not a landscape based on the reality of poverty and destitution, but rather a paradise, not so much lost—for it never existed—but rather a paradise imagined; re-imagined, re-created and revisited each time one of these songs was sung.

The power of song is not restricted to text alone, for so much that is culturally meaningful is carried on the tunes themselves. These are significant because they are pre-existing tunes handed down through the oral tradition, around which the bard crafted his or her words.³² For example, in speaking of the death of Uist bard Malcolm Macaskill, Alick Morrison makes the comment that ‘[t]he bard possessed a fine repertoire of Gaelic melodies...In the framework of these tunes, the bard with great skill, inserted his poetic compositions’.³³

New song texts then were often set to older, traditional tunes and many of the Australian Gaelic songs follow this practice, showing that this link with tradition was an important one in the construction of their verses. So although the Australian Gaelic songs were published through the medium of newspapers and books, they retained strong links with the oral tradition. At the top of the new text, the bard would indicate which song tune to use with the words: ‘*Air Fonn...*’ (literally ‘On the Tune...’). For example, see the following from the beginning of John Archie’s song ‘*Moladh Tir Na Gaidhlig*’ (‘Praising the Land of Gaelic’):

Air fonn.—Fhir a’bhata.

[To the Tune.—The Boatman]

—after which he gives his new text.

30 Lowenthal 1975, p. 28.

31 Lowenthal 1975, p. 25.

32 Both men and women composed songs in the Gaelic tradition, and in fact there are some groups of songs mostly composed by women such as the Waulking songs sung while pulling the homespun cloth. In this collection of Australian songs I have gathered, so far, I have not found any songs certain to have been composed by women. It is entirely possible that they have not yet been discovered.

33 MacAskill, Malcolm n.d., *Orain Chalum: Being the poems of Malcolm MacAskill bard of Berneray Harris*, Edited by Alick Morrison, Alexander MacLaren, Glasgow, p. 25.

The tunes provided the framework for the new words and became in a real sense a bridge to the past, carrying an accretion of cultural meanings with them and transferring these to the new texts, in the new country. They are carriers of geographic location, often associated with the particular place in which they were composed, sung and passed around the local community. They are taken up by a new bard, or bards, and fitted with new texts, spawning variants of the melody's phrases and rhythms as they pass through many life cycles—all the while accruing new cultural layers as well as carrying older cultural layers along with them. This referral, or intertextuality,³⁴ performs significant cultural work and the tunes are extremely important because of it.

Gaelic scholar John MacInnes, in his essay 'The panegyric code in Gaelic poetry',³⁵ discusses the deep relationship between the landscape and the Gaels—a landscape rich in meaning on many levels:

The native Gael who is instructed in this poetry carries in his imagination not so much a landscape, not a sense of geography alone, nor of history alone, but a formal order of experience in which these are all merged. The native sensibility responds not to a landscape but to *dùthchas*. And just as 'landscape', with its romantic aura, cannot be translated directly in Gaelic, so '*dùthchas*' and, indeed *dùthaich*' cannot be translated into English without robbing the terms of their emotional energy. The complexity involved can be appreciated by reflecting on the range of meaning: *dùthchas* is ancestral or family land; it is also family tradition; and, equally important it is the hereditary qualities of an individual.³⁶

The landscape the Gaels so fervently long for in many of the songs is an inscribed one—a landscape imagined replete with cultural references and significances built up over generations of intimate contact and held as a potent, yet static force in the mind of the exile.

As this paper shows, for many migrants the removal from geographic place is a painful one, for we have a profound attachment to the things that form us. Our connection to place is strong, and the past is not only rooted deep in the soil of a physical landscape, but is also retained in the memory: an imagined landscape that carries our past forward. This imagined landscape reshapes and reforms itself, polished and transformed in the mind to something that may not have much in common with the original—yet, for the migrant, it imparts comfort and solace, and provides a sense of continuity and identity within a

34 For some interesting ideas on intertextuality and music, see Klein, Michael 2005, *Intertextuality in Western Art Music*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington. Further discussion of this topic is beyond the limits of this particular article.

35 MacInnes, 'The panegyric code in Gaelic poetry' (in *Dùthchas Nan Gàidheal*, pp. 265–319).

36 *Ibid.*, p. 279.

fractured past. The landscape of the imagination to which the Scots Gaelic exiles repeatedly turn is a retreat, a place of refuge: an escape (albeit temporarily) from 'the merciless pain of homesickness', as the bard John Archie so poignantly put it. In a sense, this imagined landscape is divorced from reality, yet it retains a deep connection with the past, ensuring an ongoing sense of identity for Scots Gaelic migrants in Australia in times of great change and turmoil.

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Laments in Transition: The Irish-Australian songs of Sally Sloane (1894–1982)

Jennifer Gall

Irish music in Australia has a strong tradition though it is less thoroughly documented and less frequently the subject of scholarly inquiry than in Ireland, the British Isles and North America. From the earliest days of white settlement in Australia, the Irish represented a significant proportion of total immigrants. One in three convicts transported to Australia from Great Britain after 1798 was Irish. About 20 per cent of these were connected with political and agrarian unrest in England and Ireland and many who survived transportation and incarceration continued rebellious activities directed at the ruling class in Australia. Irish immigration continued to increase in the nineteenth century as a result not only of the famine of the 1840s, but also because of growing persecution from English landlords who raised rents to levels resulting in mass evictions. After 1840, emigration became a vast, relentless national phenomenon. Between 1789 and 1921 about half a million Irish people set sail for Australia.¹ Those leaving Ireland turned towards an unknown future half a world away beyond perilous oceans, not expecting to see their homeland again. Oliver MacDonagh, in his book *Sharing the Green: A modern Irish history for Australians*, asks:

How was it to know that 'home' was much too distant to be seen again, or that one now lived in an expanse into which more than a thousand Irelands could be fitted, or to find the legendary rhythm of the seasons on which so many of the European patterns rested no longer formed the framework of the year?²

The answer to MacDonagh's question can be found in the music that developed in Australia, sung by colonial singers within the Irish diaspora, dating from the songs brought by the convicts and sailors who travelled to Australia on the First Fleet. Transportation ballads, which were often published as broadsides (printed on unfolded sheets of paper that could be pasted upon walls or carried easily), were the earliest of these songs, with titles such as 'The Convict Maid', 'The Transport's Lament' and 'The Black Velvet Band'. These were laments

1 Reid, Richard (Senior Curator), *Not Just Ned*, National Museum of Australia, Canberra, viewed 18 August 2012, <http://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/irish_in_australia/family_history/irish_convicts>

2 MacDonagh, Oliver 1996, *Sharing the Green: A modern Irish history for Australians*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW, p. 5.

with lyrics protesting the innocence of the narrator against the vicissitudes of cruel fate. With so much left behind in the shape of family and the homeland itself, music was the portable, intangible, infinitely expandable mesh in which immigrants carried memories of their cultural identity.

As MacDonagh asserts, the concept of diaspora encompasses more than one homeland and this duality facilitates the development of new songs grafted onto old musical rootstock. Longing for family and 'home' in Ireland is a sentiment regularly voiced today by Australian musicians for sympathetic audiences who are four or more generations removed from their Irish roots, so enduring is the residual dislocation from the mother culture. Songs of protest that travelled with Irish political prisoners transported to Australia were adapted and lived on in the new country, sung as songs of complaint about injustices perpetrated by the colonial government and wealthy landowners. They are still sung, sometimes with modernised lyrics, to equate a contemporary situation with that of the past.

This essay examines laments in transition through the case study of Sally Sloane (1894–1982), a traditional Australian singer whose performance style and repertoire were strongly influenced by the songs she learned, by ear, passed down by her Irish grandmother and mother. These original Irish ballads remained in her repertoire as well as English and Scottish traditional songs, bush ballads and popular music-hall songs learned from the musicians she met throughout her life. Sloane was interviewed and recorded by a number of folk-music collectors—John Meredith, Edgar Waters and Peter Hamilton, Warren Fahey and Graham Seal, Emily Lyle and Chris Sullivan—from the 1950s until the late 1970s.

The case study of Sally Sloane is derived from my doctoral dissertation, titled 'Redefining the tradition: the role of women in the evolution and transmission of Australian folk music'.³ Methodology for this research had four strands: examination of archival field recordings (1950–99) held in the Oral History and Folklore Collections of the National Library of Australia; interviews with four generations of women in one family to examine transmission of repertoire from mother to daughter; examination of handwritten and published music collections of traditional music belonging to women musicians; and my own performance of particular traditional songs to investigate how singing enables the singer to embody and communicate the narrative—that is, to unlock meaning in the song through the physical and mental disciplines involved in re-creating traditional music.

3 Gall, Jennifer 2008, *Redefining the tradition: the role of women in the evolution and transmission of Australian folk music*, Doctoral thesis, The Australian National University, Canberra.

For many colonial families, an itinerant lifestyle in Australia replaced the seasonal patterns and cultural practices reinforced by close-knit communities of European life. Sally Sloane experienced such a lifestyle as a child, accompanying her father as he pursued work, and continuing to move around with her itinerant labouring husband in her adult years. This peripatetic existence encouraged her enthusiasm for learning songs from travelling musicians she encountered socially. The songs learned represented a thread of continuity and created a virtual community of relationships kept alive through the song narratives in her memory. Many songs in her repertoire are laments not just because of the content in the narrative, but because they recall the absence of the person they were learned from.

Another strand of music used by Irish emigrants to maintain a sense of cultural connection to their homeland, and which is well represented in the repertoire of Sally Sloane, was the commercially published sheet music and albums of popular Irish vocal and dance music that reached Australia in considerable quantities. Popular music of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries learned from gramophone recordings or borrowed sheet music provided material for colonial singers who appropriated 'hit' songs, performing them sometimes in a traditional unaccompanied style (for example, Sally Sloane's performance of 'The Cruiskeen Lawn').⁴ Musicians of the Irish diaspora were concerned both with maintaining their traditional repertoire and with keeping up to date with Irish music being published 'at home'. The fear of losing contact with the latest musical fashions was kept at bay through purchase of imported musical scores and phonogram records. Irish musicians now living in Australia helped sustain a market for musical nostalgia and nationalistic pieces. Popular and sentimental Irish musical settings were potent in their ability to sustain Irish-Australian families and communities within Australian society through singalongs at home in extended Irish families, where each family member performed their party piece.⁵

Irish music festivals, like those organised by the Roman Catholic Church in Lismore, northern New South Wales, in the early years of the twentieth century, featured sentimental vocal solos such as 'Kathleen Mavourneen', quite probably learned from a version published by J. R. Clarke in Sydney about 1853.⁶ The symbolism and linguistic frameworks of the genre have provided shared consolation for groups of Irish emigrants down the generations to the present day. Australian author and social reformer Dame Mary Gilmore (1865–1962) in her chapter, 'The singing years', described the cathartic power of these popular

4 Meredith, John 1953–61, Folklore field recordings, ORAL TRC 4/17A, National Library of Australia, Canberra [hereinafter NLA].

5 Interview with Nancy Shaldars by Jennifer Gall, 14 August 2004.

6 'Kathleen Mavourneen', Poetry written by Mrs Crawford, Music composed by F. N. Crouch, Sydney, J. R. Clarke, NLA MUS: N., Snell, A, GE118853, <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.mus-an6552590>>

ballads: 'They were an outlet for the un-let emotions and in many cases were texts of life and an actual help enabling people to carry on. In the idealized, people lived for a moment beyond themselves and above what was sordid about them.'⁷

As banal as 'Danny Boy' sung to the 'Londonderry Air' may sound to jaded ears in the twenty-first century, the lyrics still function as a true lament for many self-identified Irish Australians. 'Danny Boy' deals with the eternal themes of loss and longing; its ability to move listeners to tears is reliable and that is why it is so often requested, because the music liberates the fear of abandonment in individuals, which, once voiced, can be reconciled with present reality. The song describes the departure of a loved one from home, painting a vision of a tragic end for the one who waits should the wanderer delay return.

This paper examines the role of laments in the repertoire of an Australian-born woman singer of Irish lineage. Certain of Sally Sloane's songs represent the transition of the traditional definition of laments such as 'Green Bushes' and 'Molly Baun' to include politically important songs like the Australian-penned ballad 'Ben Hall' and even popular songs such as 'In the Luggage Van Ahead', published in 1898. Sally's traditional unaccompanied performance style used expansive phrasing to reproduce the narrative with great fluency and intensity. This skill enabled her to interpret both old-world and new-world music with authority.

Sally Sloane was born in Parkes, New South Wales, in 1894, the youngest of 10 children. Her grandmother Sarah Alexander sailed to Australia in 1838 from County Kerry, Ireland, at the age of twenty-two. She died in 1889. Family tradition maintained the story that Sarah was a trained singer performing 'Adieu My Lovely Nancy' in a concert for the ship's captain on the voyage out. Sarah's first daughter was also named Sarah and grew up playing concertina, button accordion, jew's harp and piano as well as singing many of her mother's Irish songs.

Sally's family situation was a complex one and this influenced the nature of her repertoire and indeed the importance of music as a thread of continuity linking the generations of women. Sally's birth father, Tom Frost, was a driver for Cobb and Co. Coaches. While Sally was still young, her mother divorced Frost and lived with William Clegg, first a goldminer, then an itinerant worker on the railways. The family moved regularly, following employment. Sally adopted Clegg as her surname and this is the name that appears on her marriage certificate and that of her sister Bertha. This suggests a changing dynamic between Sally and

7 Gilmore, Mary 1935, *More Recollections*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, p. 161.

the two most important men in her early life—the loss of her biological father through her parents’ separation and the new father who took responsibility for the daughter he gained through the relationship with Sally’s mother.

Loss and belonging in relation to significant male figures are important themes in her life. Originally married to John Mountford (m. 1911) with whom she had four children, Sally remarried in the late 1940s. Her second husband, Fred Sloane, forbade her mentioning the name of her ex-husband.⁸ Separation and remarriage continue a family pattern begun by Sally’s mother, a pattern reflected in the narrative of the song significant for the number of performances recorded in Sally’s repertoire: ‘Green Bushes.’ The narrative in this song is a serpentine tale of two young men: a stranger and the betrothed, who are wooing a girl waiting near the Green Bushes. The stranger manages to persuade her not to wait for her tardy betrothed; the girl’s justification for going is that the new lover has been ready to act on his pledge to marry her.

After listening to the considerable number of field recordings of her performances, I conclude that certain of Sally’s songs central to her repertoire, especially ‘Green Bushes’ and ‘Ben Hall’, may be viewed as ritualistic; the connection between her life experiences and the song narrative is evident. When Sally sings the words that have been sung many times before, she creates an intensely intimate, emotionally charged episode, as Christopher Small explains:

During the enactment of the ritual, time is concentrated in a heightened intensity of experience. During that time, relationships are brought into existence between the participants and the model, in metaphoric form... In this way the participants not only *learn about* those relationships but actually *experience* them in their bodies...sometimes to the point where the psychic boundary between the mundane and the supernatural world breaks down so that they leave behind their everyday identity.⁹

The tale of loss that is recorded in the narrative is re-enacted by singing the song. The ‘un-making’ at the heart of Sally’s laments is repaired with each performance. The intensity of Sally’s focus can be heard in a phrase from ‘Green Bushes’ (see audio example 1¹⁰).

Sally’s early exposure to many different musicians and the influence of her musically talented mother gave her versatility and a breadth of repertoire.

8 Lowe, Valda, ‘Who is Sally Sloane’, viewed 18 August 2012, <<http://simplyaustralia.net/article-vl-sloane.html>>

9 Small, Christopher 1998, *Musicking: The meanings of performing and listening*, Wesleyan University Press, Connecticut, p. 96.

10 View associated media files via the ANU E Press website <<http://epress.anu.edu.au/titles/humanities-research-journal-series/volume-xix-no-3-2013>>

The most striking characteristic of Sally's singing that Fahey, Seal and Meredith commented on was her different, distinctive performance voices. John Meredith describes two styles:

Rather amazingly Sally Sloane had two singing voices, which might conveniently be termed 'folk' and 'stage'. The first was used for all those lovely old Irish ballads Sal had inherited from her grandmother, through the medium of her mother, and this was a hard, clear, unemotional voice and style, very much in the Irish tradition. The other voice was reserved for those stage and art songs of probable music hall origins. It was a rich mezzo-soprano with a little vibrato and she used it for such songs as *The Deep Shades of Blue*, to give one example.¹¹

Graham Seal makes a similar comment:

She shifted her style to suit the song and was able to perform in a number of different styles. She sang to us as an audience,—she would close her eyes when she got going; she found a stillness once she got going. Most of the songs she sang sitting down were like this.¹²

The consistent characteristic of Sally's recorded vocal performances is her skill in communicating the narrative to the audience. Her performances command attention. Stylistic alterations of accent, timbre, use of vernacular expressions and phrasing all support this primary motivation. In some performances of 'Green Bushes', 'Ben Hall' and even music-hall songs like 'The Red Barn', Sally is almost keening. Her singing re-creates the action of the narrative, fusing past and present in the way she incorporates elements of her informants' stylistic qualities, predominantly their accent and phrasing.¹³ It is evident from the conversation in Fahey's interview with her that Sally's repertoire is linked to how she remembers events in her life and how she connects the past and present.¹⁴ The songs are inextricably woven through the activity of her daily life and fused with her imagination and memories. Ballads that are unremarkable when heard in Folk Revival recordings—for example, the bush-band versions of 'Ben Hall' when sung unaccompanied by Sally—transcend their immediate narrative to function as universally relevant laments. Alan Lomax refers to this as

[t]he authority of the singer...summed up for the Irish in the term 'blás', and ultimately, it seems to me, this authority depends upon the

11 Meredith, John 2004, 'Introduction', in Gay Scott (ed.), *The Sally Sloane Song Book: Australian traditional singer*, Sydney Bush Music Club Incorporated, Sydney, p. 4.

12 Seal, Graham, Telephone interview with Jennifer Gall, 30 October 2006.

13 Simon McDonald (interviewed by Norm and Pat O'Connor and Mary Jean Officer in Creswick, New South Wales, in the 1950s) shared this quality.

14 Sloane, Sally, Interviewed by Warren Fahey and Graham Seal, 4 May 1976, NLA TRC 5724/1-3.

emotional maturity or, at least, upon his [her] grasp of the content of the songs he [she] sings and the subtle hidden currents of emotion in these songs.¹⁵

Certainly Sally embodied Lomax's assertion that age enhances rather than detracts from a traditional singer's ability to perform traditional material:

In most cases, therefore, since so many of these songs are tragic and, in their way, art of a high order, a singer weathered by time and buffeted by the disappointments and tragedies which are normal to life, can more effectively realize this inner content. His 'blás' improves with age even though his voice may lose its youthful freshness.¹⁶

Sally performs as if she has a personal duty to defend the innocent women in a number of her songs—notably 'The Red Rose Top', 'The Old Oak Tree' and 'The Red Barn'. These songs are performed in the recordings as unaccompanied laments. In the fragment of the 'Red Barn' that she remembers, it is the murdered girl's mother who dreams of the whereabouts of her daughter's burial place, leading to the discovery of the body. Sally's exclamation at the conclusion of her performance illustrates her intense involvement in the narrative and her condemnation of the injustice and the brutality of the crime (see audio example 2¹⁷).

Oh mother dear I'm going to the red barn to meet my William dear
They will not know me on the road or when I do get there
Straight way she went to the old red barn and never more was seen
Three long weary weeks had passed when our mother dreamt a dream
She dreamt her daughter was murdered by the lad she loved so well
At the very corner of the red barn and there her body did dwell.
[Speaks] The coot mangled her all up and buried her.
They dug the ground and there they found her!¹⁸ [My transcription]

Sally's performance of 'Ben Hall' is a definitive example of an Irish-influenced Australian lament. Sally was personally connected to the Australian outlaw Ben Hall, and her singing demonstrates the process outlined in James Porter's Conceptual Performance Model, 'in which units of both cognitive and affective experience are embedded'.¹⁹ 'Ben Hall' works on a personal and a public level as a lament. In her interviews with both Meredith and Fahey, Sally recounted

15 Lomax, Alan 1959, 'Sleeve notes to Shirley Collins—False True Lovers', [fled3029], <<http://www.thebeesknees.com/bk-sc-sleeve-notes.html>>

16 Ibid.

17 View associated media files via the ANU E Press website <<http://epress.anu.edu.au/titles/humanities-research-journal-series/volume-xix-no-3-2013>>

18 Sloane, Sally, Interviewed by Warren Fahey and Graham Seal, 4 May 1976, NLA TRC 5724/2.

19 Porter, James 1976, 'Jeannie Robertson's "My Son David: A Conceptual Performance Model"', *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 89, no. 351 (January–March), p. 17.

the story about Ben Hall's sister, the midwife who was present at her birth and delivered her. This was Mrs Coobung Mick, whose husband betrayed Ben Hall to the troopers and who was carrying a child (said by some to be Ben Hall's) at the time of the bushranger's shooting:

[A]nd when the child was born it had thirty-two spots on it, and that child was exhibited throughout the length and breadth of Australia for show purposes [as the Leopard Boy]. The spots were supposed to correspond with the thirty-two bullet wounds in Ben Hall's body... Ben took to the bush then, and turned out to be a highwayman. When he found out what happened, his wife had gone, and his stock and everything was destroyed and he became a bushranger.²⁰

Sally received this story with the song from her mother. In a later interview, with Fahey and Seal, roughly 20 years after Meredith recorded 'Ben Hall', Sally performed all eight verses confidently although the quality of her voice was less melodious. There were minor modifications to the words, with some slips in the concluding verse particularly, but the verse structure remained the same as the original recording and the version that appears in *Folk Songs of Australia* (see audio example 3²¹).

An outcast from society, he was forced to take the road
All through his false and treacherous wife who sold off his abode,
He was hunted like a native dog from bush to hill, and dale,
He was hunted by his enemies and they could not find his trail.
O up with his companion's men bloody scorn to shed
He oft times stayed and lifted hands with vengeance on their head,
No petty mean or pilfering act he ever stopped to do,
But robbed the rich and hardy man and scorned the poor.
One night as he in ambush lay all on the Lachlan plain,
When thinking everything secure to ease himself at lay,
When to his consternation and to his great surprise
Without one moment's warning a bullet passed him fly.
Oh it was soon succeeded by a volley sharp and loud
With twelve revolving rifles all pointed at his head,
'Where are you Gilbert, where is Dunne?' he low down he did call,
It was all in vain they went up there to witness his downfall.
They riddled all his body as if they were afraid,
But in his dying moments he breathed curses on their head, [she sobs]
That cowardly hearted Cundell the sergeant of police,

20 Meredith, John and Anderson, Hugh 1979 [c. 1967], *Folksongs of Australia and the Men and Women Who Sang Them*, Ure Smith, Sydney, p. 165.

21 View associated media files via the ANU E Press website <<http://epress.anu.edu.au/titles/humanities-research-journal-series/volume-xix-no-3-2013>>

He crept and fired infamously till death did him release.
Although he had a lion's heart more braver than the brave,
Those cowards shot him like a dog no word of challenge gave,
Though many friends had poor Ben Hall his enemies were few,
Like the emblem of his native land his days were numbered too.
It's through Australia's sunny clime Ben Hall will range no more.
His name is spread both near and far to every distant shore.
From generation after this his parents will recall,
And rehearse to them the daring deeds committed by Ben Hall.
[My transcription]

Sally's vocal style suits the nature of the ballad as a lament and this late performance of the song is a fine example of '*blás*' as defined by Lomax. Her vocal style in some phrases is close to keening, and many listeners react to the singing by describing it as 'unpleasant'.²² This 'unpleasantness' is a result of the emotion she is communicating. Ben Hall's tragic death also had resonance for the antagonism many Australians of Sally's generation and social background felt towards representatives of authority: the police, magistrates, the Church of England and squatters. Sally's conversation in Meredith and Fahey's recording reveals her attachment to the song. Ben Hall's sister-in-law was the midwife at Sally's birth and she believed it was her duty to tell the tale and emphasise the injustice of Hall's punishment through her performance, as much as in her verbal explanation. The later rendition of the song has dropped roughly a tone from the version recorded by Meredith,²³ but retains the original power with which Sally sang.

The bushrangers, or outlaws, Ben Hall and Ned Kelly were the people's heroes, as Sally describes them:

S.S. I'd hate to hear his reputation—O God scandalized! He wasn't a bad fella!

W.F. No he got the rough end of the stick didn't he!

S.S. No—you're tellin' us! And the same with Ned Kelly,—his mother, they put her in jail when she was going to have one of her babies, every time there'd be any wrong—of course Ned was supposed to do it...It's a pity he didn't git a few more of them!²⁴

22 'Unpleasant' is the adjective chosen to describe Sloane's voice by Dale Dengate (Interviewed by Jenny Gall, May 2006 and July 2006, NLA TRC 5676).

23 The problems with pitch variation as a result of varying speed in the original recordings make it impossible to determine the exact pitch of the version.

24 Sloane, Sally, Interviewed by Warren Fahey and Graham Seal, 4 May 1976, NLA TRC 5724/1-3.

Conclusion

The definition of a lament as a song expressing deep grief or mourning can be applied to many of Sally Sloane's songs. Sally's early life was a hard one, constantly moving around the countryside with her father, stepfather and her husbands, preventing her from building a community of friends or a stable social life. In the 1976 interview conducted by Warren Fahey and Graham Seal, the continuous recording captures Sally's process of recollection. The associations of songs, events and characters form the web that constructs her pattern of response to Fahey's requests for information and music. There is synchronicity in the interview as the sound of a small clock ticking is audible in tape one and tape two and Sally refers to herself twice as a kind of wind-up musical timepiece: 'Oh I'm not wound up yet.'²⁵ And '[h]e must think I've got a main spring!'²⁶ She perceives herself as a pragmatic seer mediating between the present and past where the old songs that collectors seek are 'kept' in her memory: 'Oh they'll all come to me by and by.'²⁷ To reach back to the source requires a process of being 'wound up' by the action of recollection and musical performance. The sense of mourning is multi-layered: commemorating the old Ireland described in those transplanted songs she had learned via her mother, reflecting the complex emotional upheavals of her mother's and her own marriages, and echoing the numerous transient relationships through which Sally learned songs.

Sally Sloane's bushranger songs in particular represent an answer to the question *How was it to know that 'home' was much too distant to be seen again?* For they voice the quintessential pioneering spirit of a people determined to make a new order by defying what was perceived to be a brutal ruling class—to redress the injustices they had endured before leaving their homeland. Like 'The Wild Colonial Boy', 'Ben Hall' is a lament for a bold hero, but in Hall's death lies the hope of young Australians following his example to overturn, symbolically, the old order, to redistribute the wealth of a few to the many. The Mixolydian melody infuses the narrative with emotion, employing the modal ambiguity heard in great Irish laments such as '*Táimse im' chodhladh*'²⁸ in which the grave darkness of grief is pierced by the light of hope. The last phrase of Sally's version of 'Ben Hall' is triumphant:

For generations after this parents will to their children call,
And rehearse to them the daring deeds committed by Ben Hall.

25 NLA TRC 5724/2.

26 NLA TRC 5724/3.

27 NLA TRC 5724/1.

28 For a definitive performance of this air, see Ciara Walton's version at <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYB9QQf900o>>

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The Travels of ‘John Anderson, my jo’¹

Kate Bowan

Far from being a lament or lamentation in any conventional sense of the genre, the song ‘John Anderson, my jo’ is—certainly in Robert Burns’ sanitised version—a homage to enduring love. The words of the female protagonist, however, also betray a palpable sense of shared personal loss (a perspective also common to lament), although what it is that is lost changes between iterations. An earlier, bawdy version focuses on the loss of youth with special attention to the accompanying loss of sexual function, whereas in Burns’ poem this has been reduced to lost youth alone. Nonetheless, the underlying theme of loss remains constant. The plaintive and lamenting character of the melody created by its minor mode and slow tempo affectively support the character of loss.

In this article I will examine how this underlying sense of lament informs the many political appropriations and parodies that were made of this song, focusing on its travels out to the colonies of settlement. These colonies, when taken together, have become known as the British world, a world constituted by a sense of shared British identity and culture.² I will demonstrate how the sense of loss, together with the affective qualities of the melody, was appropriated and reframed within the arena of radical politics across the nineteenth-century British world and identify the particular ways political appropriations transformed the poignant sense of loss into one of rebuke and complaint. By tracking various printed forms and performances of this song from Britain to Australia, New Zealand and Canada, this article will reveal a shared culture of political radicalism and popular song. The article will also highlight how in the political parodies of ‘John Anderson, my jo’, the personal and intimate become the political and public. Moreover, these versions demonstrate how the malleability of popular song provides a means of expressing local inflections within a shared inter-colonial culture. I will also consider the role of songs such as this in the formation of diasporic cultures and music’s important part in sustaining the memory of home for the thousands who forsook kith and kin and, either willingly or not, participated in the waves of nineteenth-century emigration from Britain.

1 I would like to thank Paul Pickering and anonymous readers for their helpful suggestions and comments.

2 For seminal studies of the British world, see Bridge, Carl and Fedorowich, Kent (eds) 2003, *The British World: Diaspora, culture and identity*, Frank Cass, London; Buckner, Phillip Alfred and Francis, R. Douglas (eds) 2005, *Rediscovering the British World*, University of Calgary Press, Calgary; Buckner, Phillip Alfred 2006, *Canada and the British World: Culture, migration, and identity*, UBC Press, Vancouver.

This research on 'John Anderson, my jo' takes its place as part of a broader project that is inherently interdisciplinary and centres upon the role of music, in particular song and singing practices, in the spread of radical political culture across the British world. As such it throws up questions about the disciplinary forms, methods and objectives of history and musicology. Whereas music has often held a marginal position in historical studies—in great part because of the specialist requirements of musical literacy and musical analysis—history has always been integral to mainstream musicology. Its primary uses, however, have been to cast light upon and bring greater understanding to a particular work of music—to provide a musical work its cultural context. Here, however, the direction is reversed; here music is used to cast light upon, and provide alternative dimensions of, history. My argument is thus twofold: that a tune functions as a vehicle of transmission that can cover vast distances, both temporally and geographically, and that songs themselves are at one and the same time agents and vessels of history, shaping it and containing it.

The eighteenth century saw into being on the one hand Enlightenment ideas such as rationalism and empiricism and on the other the rise of literary antiquarianism and the 'eighteenth-century British ballad revival'.³ This was the time of not only the philosophical theorising of John Locke, David Hume and Adam Smith, but also the antiquarian ballad collecting of individuals such as Thomas Percy, Joseph Ritson and James Johnson. Multiple versions and variants of 'John Anderson, my jo' in both textual and musical forms are found in ballad collections from this period.

Burns' version of the ballad is the best known of the extant versions. It appeared in 1790 in the *Scots Musical Museum* (1787–1803) and was one of the more than 200 songs he contributed to James Johnson's substantial collection.⁴

John Anderson my jo, John,
When we were first acquaint,
Your locks were like the raven,
Your bony brow was brent;
But now your brow is belt, John,

3 See McLane, Maureen N. 2010, 'Mediating antiquarians in Britain, 1760–1830: the invention of oral tradition; or, close reading before Coleridge', in Clifford Siskin and William Warner (eds), *This is Enlightenment*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, pp. 247–64.

4 See Johnson, James 1787–1803, *The Scots Musical Museum*, William Blackwood, London and Edinburgh. There is another somewhat anomalous version in Thomas Percy (1765, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry. Volume 2*, Dodsley, London), which bears little resemblance to other versions. In a lengthy headnote, Percy claimed that it was a 'burlesque sonnet' set to 'solemn church music' written during the Reformation as an attack against the Catholic Church. According to Percy, the original was held 'in an ancient MS. Collection of Scottish poems in the Pepysian library' and John Anderson himself was town piper from Kelso some time in the 1600s (pp. 110–11). This is repeated in the notes found in the *Scots Musical Museum* index. For further details on its provenance, see also Cazden, Norman, Haufrecht, Herbert and Studer, Nomran 1982, *Folk Songs of the Catskills*, SUNY Press, Albany, NY, pp. 368–9.

Your locks are like the snaw,
 But blessings on your frosty pow,
 John Anderson, my jo.

John Anderson my jo, John,
 We clamb the hill thegither,
 And mony a canty day, John,
 We've had wi ane anither;
 Now we maun totter down, John,
 But hand in hand we'll go,
 And sleep thegither at the foot,
 John Anderson, my jo.⁵

Like many of Burns' poems, it is a polite adaptation of a far older and far bawdier text, the second stanza of which is given below. Only the first line is common to both versions.

John Anderson, my jo, John,
 When first that ye began,
 Ye had as good a tail-tree,
 As ony ither man; but now it's waxen wan, John,
 And wrinkles to and fro;
 I've twa gae-ups for ae gae-down,
 John Anderson, my jo.⁶

As Maureen MacLane has recently reminded us, '[b]allad books are print objects that ceaselessly point beyond print and to other modes of communication—singing, reciting, speaking, saying, writing'.⁷ 'John Anderson, my jo' is at once a poem and a tune. The origins of the tune are, as is usual with the oral tradition, equally unclear as the text. It appeared with this title in the *Skene MS* of 1630; in 1731 it accompanied the Scottish poet Allan Ramsay's words in John Watt's *Musical Miscellany* as well as being used twice in Ramsay's own *Tea-Table Miscellany*; and it was printed again in James Oswald's *Caledonian Pocket Companion* of 1752, and in James Aird's *Selection of Scotch, English, Irish and Foreign Airs* in 1782.⁸ Scholars from the nineteenth century on, however, have remarked on its similarity to other tunes—in particular two English melodies, 'Paul's Steeple' and 'I am the Duke of Norfolk'. Matthew Gelbart recently

5 Burns' poem appears in several broadside ballads with two additional stanzas.

6 The bawdy versions appear in *Philomel* (1744, London) and *The Masque* (1768, London) and appeared later in 1800 in Burns' own collection of bawdy and erotic verse, *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*.

7 MacLane, 'Mediating antiquarians in Britain', p. 256.

8 See Watts, John 1731, *The Musical Miscellany*, [London], vol. vi, no. 202; Ramsay, Allan (ed.) 1723–37, *The Tea-Table Miscellany: A collection of choice songs, Scots and English*, [4 vols], Edinburgh; Oswald, James 1752, *The Caledonian Pocket Companion*, [London], vol. iv, no. 22; Aird, James 1782, *Selection of Scotch, English, Irish and Foreign Airs*, [Glasgow], vol. ii, no. 167.

identified it as a Scottish fiddle song, surmising correctly that it ‘probably derived from a bawdy song’.⁹ These variants that are all ‘John Anderson’ call to mind Foucault’s insights into the fruitful but ultimately doomed pursuit of origins in his work on history and genealogy.¹⁰ ‘John Anderson, my jo’ rises up out of the murky depths of the oral tradition and exemplifies the complexities of popular song provenance.¹¹

The nineteenth century saw the continued and rapid proliferation of print culture; nonetheless the relationship between printed forms of song and the oral tradition remained dynamic. Newspapers, journals, pamphlets and other ephemeral printed formats both disseminated and mediated oral song culture. Although emerging from a far older tradition, ‘John Anderson, my jo’ became part of a broader nineteenth-century popular song culture. It cut across genres and printed formats, appearing in broadside newspapers, as a street ballad, a part song and, given the voracious Victorian appetite for Scottish folk song, in countless parlour song books. The ballad appeared most often in the two-stanza version by Burns set to the melody found in the *Skene MS*, and my research to date has shown that it is also this version that was most often the subject of appropriation and parody.

The practice of setting new words to pre-existing tunes had long been axiomatic in popular song culture and continued throughout the nineteenth century and beyond. Appropriations served a range of functions: they could take the form of parody in the generally understood sense of that term and ridicule, satirise or attack, but they could also pay homage, show allegiance to the original and enlist its meaning for their own agenda. Appropriation is then a broader practice within which lies parody. Parody provides a critical distance from which to question and dissent and creates a space in which ironic inversion can occur.¹² New texts borne of local contexts interacted with the song’s older

9 Gelbart, Matthew 2007, *The Invention of ‘Folk Music’ and ‘Art Music’: Emerging categories from Ossian to Wagner*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

10 See Foucault, Michel 1971, ‘Nietzsche, genealogy, history’, in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader*, Pantheon, New York, pp. 76–100.

11 Recent scholarship on the ballad by Paula MacDowell and Maureen McClane gives extended examinations of the challenges of ballad provenance that not only face current scholars but also were always at the forefront of balladeering. As McClane has observed: ‘The whole problem of representing something like a ballad in print, moreover—its tune as well as its words, its variants, its ellipses—is one that eighteenth-century editors identified and grappled with in revealing ways.’ See McClane, ‘Mediating antiquarians in Britain’, p. 251. Paula MacDowell has also explored what she calls the ‘hybrid textual and oral nature of ballads’. See MacDowell, Paula 2006, ‘“The manufacture and lingua-facture of ballad-making”: broadside ballads in long eighteenth-century ballad discourse’, *The Eighteenth Century*, vol. 47, no. 2, pp. 151–78, at p. 173.

12 In the history of Western musical composition the term parody is used in a qualitatively different manner. In this context parody denotes a compositional technique that incorporated pre-existing works into new ones. Parody technique was particularly widespread in the sixteenth century and resulted in the genre of the parody mass. Unlike literary parody, this technique did not engage with ideas of ironic inversion or satire, and so seems to be closer in sense to appropriation than literary parody. This is true also of the technique of contrafactum—the placing of a new text to a pre-existing melody, which can be traced back to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and even earlier in plainchant.

meanings. The new texts' relationship to the original was varied and often complex and the new meanings were reliant on a shared knowledge of the original. Intertextuality is thus at the centre of this fluid cultural practice, and it is made possible by the tune. The appropriations and parodies become part of the history of the tune. Early song collectors largely dismissed parodies as somehow degenerate, but for the historian they are valuable documents telling us much of contemporary events and attitudes. Accretions of meanings, layers of use, memories and associations were instantly reanimated by the invocation of a song title and with these came the music flooding into the reader's mind.

John Anderson my Jo.
Written for this Work by Robert Burns.

260

John Ander-son my jo, John, When we were first Ac-
Lively
-quent; Your locks were like the ra-ven's, Your bony brow was
brent; But now your brow is beld, John, Your
locks are like the snaw; But blefs-ings on your
frosty pow, John Ander-son my Jo.

John Ander-son my jo, John,
We climb the hill the gither;
And mony a canty day John,
We've had wi' ane anither:
*Now we maun totter down, John,
And hand in hand we'll go;
And sleep the gither at the foot.
John Ander-son my Jo.

Figure 1 'John Anderson, my jo' from James Johnson's *The Scots Musical Museum*

Source: Johnson, 'John Anderson, my jo', in *The Scots Musical Museum*, p. 269

'John Anderson, my jo' had appeared as a tune for new texts from the mid eighteenth century before Burns had produced his own poem. Parodies continued to appear throughout the next century, covering a range of topics from poverty to local government and city parks.¹³ Among these parodies are examples of not only intertextual play with the poetic text, but also a kind of play in which the titles of the tune are in conversation with the original. In some instances these changes in the title of the tune served to intensify the sense of loss expressed in the new text. For example, the poem 'The Departed', in Joseph Barker's *Democratic Hymns and Songs*,¹⁴ is set to the tune of 'John Anderson's Gone', and a street ballad called 'In the days when I was hard up', which centred on the individual experience of privation and difficulty, takes it one decisive step further with the tune given as 'John Anderson's Dead'.¹⁵ There is no way of knowing if the semantic play in these titles left the tune untouched or not.

'John Anderson, my jo' found an explicitly political expression both as an appropriation and in its original form when it was featured prominently during the liberation tour of Scotland by the Chartist martyrs John Collins and Peter Murray McDouall in 1840. Far from being objects of satire, these Chartists were celebrated as returning heroes. Collins and McDouall had spent the previous year imprisoned for sedition, both victims of the government crackdown in the aftermath of the presentation of the Chartists' National Petition in 1838. Scottish songs dominated the celebrations of their freedom. As they travelled across Scotland, the liberated patriots were heralded by performance of many of Burns' best loved and politicised songs, notably 'Scots wha hae' and 'A man's a man for a' that'. The working people paid their respects, particularly to John Collins, through various performances of 'John Anderson, my jo'. Unsurprisingly in this context, ironic inversion is absent in their appropriation of 'John Anderson, my jo' in which they retained and celebrated the powerful sense of affection that permeates Burns' version. The connection between song and individual was made explicitly at Glasgow's Grand Soiree, during which a Mr McCrea from Kilbarchan was called upon to sing his own version of John Anderson, a tribute to the Chartist leader, in which the last line of every verse was changed to 'John Collins, oh my jo'.¹⁶ At a public dinner the following week in Edinburgh, Collins

13 See "'Airn John", To the tune of: "John Anderson, my joe"', 1858, Glasgow, viewed 29 September 2011, <[http://bodley24.bodley.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/acwwweng/ballads/image.pl?ref=2806+c.11\(224\)&id=12790.gif&seq=1&size=1](http://bodley24.bodley.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/acwwweng/ballads/image.pl?ref=2806+c.11(224)&id=12790.gif&seq=1&size=1)>

14 Barker, J. 1849, *Democratic Hymns and Songs*, J. Barker, Wortley, UK.

15 Ibid., p. 23. "'In the days when I was hard up" to the tune of "John Anderson My Joe"', [c. 1845–59], Ryle, London, viewed 29 September 2011, <[http://bodley24.bodley.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/acwwweng/ballads/image.pl?ref=Firth+b.26\(221\)&id=16908.gif&seq=1&size=1](http://bodley24.bodley.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/acwwweng/ballads/image.pl?ref=Firth+b.26(221)&id=16908.gif&seq=1&size=1)> For broadside ballads about poverty, see Hepburn, James G. [c. 2000–02], *A Book of Scattered Leaves: Poetry of poverty in broadside ballads of nineteenth-century England*, [2 vols], Bucknell University Press, Lewisburg, Pa.

16 *Northern Star*, 26 September 1840. Expressions of solidarity through banners, clothing, toasts, recitations and singing were central to 'the culture of popular protest'. James Epstein has explored how many of these

was introduced by the chairman who, after outlining his sacrifices to the cause, handed over to the 'excellent instrumental band' who honoured him with yet another performance of 'John Anderson, my jo'.¹⁷

Collins remained in Britain until his death in 1852. McDouall, however, after a further stint in prison between 1848 and 1850, gave up on his lifelong goal of achieving reform in Britain and, like many of his fellow Chartists, decided to emigrate, determined to create a better Britain in the colonies of settlement. McDouall, however, drowned just off the coast of Australia never to realise his dream of democratic change.¹⁸ 'John Anderson, my jo' had in fact arrived in Australia much earlier. Music travelled with people and, as Britons dispersed across the Empire, so did their musical culture. 'John Anderson, my jo' took its place in a shared popular culture that spread rapidly over the Empire with the onset of mass emigration.¹⁹

The Scottish people formed a substantial proportion of those who immigrated to the colonies of settlement. They came to Australia in increasingly large numbers from around 1820. The 1820s ushered in what Susan Cowan has described as 'a new age of free settlement' when land was opened up by means of grants.²⁰ Scots came as part of an assisted-emigration scheme, helped by the emigration societies that proliferated from around 1820, or as self-funded immigrants or as reluctant victims of the Highland Clearances that dispossessed so many Gaelic-speaking Highlanders (their number was increased further by the impact of a potato blight between 1846 and 1848).²¹ Between 1832 and 1850, 16 000 people came as assisted immigrants, more than 20 000 came without assistance and around 10 000 as a result of the Clearances. Although many individuals came in search of a better life and embraced and realised the possibilities of the new world, there was nonetheless an enduring sense of loss.

This sense of loss created an urgent need to maintain a sense of cultural identity. The singing of songs such as 'John Anderson, my jo' was a crucial way to ensure the survival of Scottish culture. A vivid expression of this is found in an account of a performance during the voyage to Australia aboard an immigrant ship in the early 1840s given by John Hood. Hood described an evening

became 'radical dining rituals'. For an extended discussion of such symbolic practices, see Epstein, James 1988, 'Radical dining, toasting and symbolic expression in early nineteenth-century Lancashire: rituals of solidarity', *Albion*, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 271–91.

17 *Northern Star*, 3 October 1840.

18 For McDouall, see Pickering, P. A. and Ashton, O. R. 2002, *Friends of the People: Uneasy radicals in the age of the Chartists*, Merlin Press, London, pp. 7–28.

19 For a comprehensive history of emigration from Britain out to Empire, see Richards, Eric 2004, *Britannia's Children: Emigration from England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland since 1600*, Continuum, London.

20 Cowan, Susan 2003, 'Contributing Caledonian culture: a legacy of the Scottish diaspora', *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 27, no. 76, pp. 87–95, at p. 88.

21 See 'Scots and Australia: immigrants—Scottish Australians', viewed 22 September 2011, <<http://www.ltsotland.org.uk/scotsandaustralia/immigrantsscotsaustralians/index.asp>>

when, to the great delight of us Scots, a Blaugowrie man and two other Highlanders struck up, in admirable style, a whistling trio—‘Scots wha hae wi’ Wallace bled,’ and ‘John Anderson my jo.’ The effect was electric: the airs of Scotia on the wild strange sea sounded more touchingly to us than they ever did before.²²

Hood’s final line powerfully conveys the anxiety felt by emigrants in the face of an uncertain and unknown world. This collective expression of Scottish identity not only draws our attention to the emigrant fear of cultural loss in the face of dislocation and displacement, but also shows us the power of music to ameliorate this fear. It accounts too for how Burns and his political sentiments shaped by the French Revolution and British radicalism made their way to the far reaches of Empire. The Burns clubs and Caledonian societies that proliferated from Cape Town to Melbourne, from Halifax, Nova Scotia, to Dunedin, New Zealand, and the Scottish and Caledonian concerts that became regular popular entertainments were part of a diasporic community’s determined agenda to assert and maintain cultural identity in new and alien environments and to compensate for the loss of home.

Although ‘John Anderson, my jo’ never attained the enduring iconic status in radical political song repertoire of other of Burns’ songs—notably ‘Scot wha hae’—it nonetheless retained its capacity to carry political resonances in these new environments. Satirical parody—although absent in the liberation tour of Scotland—was nonetheless an integral part of the political culture of opposition and subversion, taking its place in what E. P. Thompson has identified as the plebeian tradition of counter theatre.²³ Like many ballads, ‘John Anderson, my jo’ gives itself up easily to ironic inversion in which the gently humorous but still loving reference to the encroachment of old age is turned on its head to become a mocking reproach for betrayal and disappointment. Many of the surviving printed parodies are satirical addresses to politicians and they can be found throughout the British world.

In stark contrast with the celebration for the Chartist martyrs, there was no trace of affection in the parody of ‘John Anderson, my jo’ that appeared in Sydney almost a decade later in the *People’s Advocate*, a radical newspaper edited by former Chartist and poet Edward Hawksley, who, unlike McDouall, had reached Australian shores. This satirical attack on Lord John Russell that appeared in the poetry section in September 1849 was taken from London’s *Punch*.²⁴ Russell

22 Hood, John 1848, *Australia and the East Being a Journal Narrative of a Voyage to New South Wales in an Emigrant Ship with A Residence of Some Months in Sydney and the Bush and the Route Home by Way of India and Egypt in the Years 1841 and 1842*, John Murray, London, p. 16.

23 See particularly, Thompson, E. P. 1974, ‘Patrician society, plebeian culture’, *Journal of Social History*, vol. 7, no. 4, pp. 382–405.

24 *People’s Advocate*, 29 September 1849. I specify London here, as *Punch* itself is an ideal example of the way that cultural forms were transported around the British world. Colonial versions of *Punch* appeared in places as far afield as Dunedin, Melbourne and Montreal.

had been active in the Whig campaign for the great *Reform Act* of 1832, a cause that gave rise to widespread optimism among reformers generally. Radicals, who had vociferously supported the campaign, had been given the impression by the Whigs that the passage of the Act would be the first instalment in a process of incremental reform. In government, the Whigs had proven a great disappointment and popular hopes for further democratic reform had been dashed when Russell explicitly ruled it out in 1837, earning him the sobriquet 'Finality Jack'. 'John Anderson, my jo' lent itself to parody in part because it is an address to an individual; if their name was John or Jo so much the better, but it was not necessary. In almost all parodies, specific individuals are taken to task as radical-turned-Tory traitor. In this parody, Russell is censured for his betrayal of fundamental radical democratic concerns. The dynamism inherent in the print–oral nexus is brought into play as the tune comes to mind despite the resolute silence of the printed medium:

John Minister, my jo, John, when we were first acquaint,
Ye were a bold Reformer, on liberal measures bent;
But now ye're growing cold, John, ye're getting slack and slow;
I wonder what has come to ye, John Minister, my jo.

Betrayal and disappointment suffuse the poem, as the singer protests 'Ah! Ye're not what ye used to be, John Minister, my jo', and then goes on to accuse him of being 'tamed', but suggests hopefully that if Russell were to have a change of heart and 'resume the path of progress' he would find forgiveness. Ultimately, however, the final stanza reveals Russell to be irredeemable in the eyes of the protagonist, and the image of the couple sleeping 'thegither at the foot' after facing life's challenges as a united front is fundamentally destroyed:

John Minister, my jo, John, we've clamb the hill together,
And both have had to struggle with very stormy weather;
And I have kept ahead, John, but you have crept below,
And now are sleeping at the foot, John Minister, my jo.

This practice of what we would nowadays call syndication was a vital element of the development of communication within Britain and beyond. The inclusion of an item from a British publication in an Australian paper was *de rigueur*; the democratic culture of print ephemera was in no way geographically bounded. This parody takes its place in a vast body of print that circulated around the Empire, finding a place in countless publications. Furthermore, in 1849, the year of its publication in Sydney, Russell was the prime minister of a government bent on reintroducing transportation to New South Wales. Opposition to transportation became, as Paul Pickering has noted, a metaphor

for the campaign for self-government.²⁵ Its reappearance in a radical Sydney newspaper at this moment was, then, no coincidence; and this new dimension of dissent would not have been lost on the *Advocate* readership.

Although John Anderson's most frequent appearance in the Land of the Long White Cloud was as an advertisement for a public house, it was also brought into the political sphere. Two satirical parodies found in nineteenth-century New Zealand newspapers show exactly how the earlier theme of lost youth and inevitable mortality is transmuted to a loss of political radicalism. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, a resident of Toko (a rural settlement on New Zealand's North Island) was not impressed with his Member of Parliament and, on behalf of the 'simple-minded Toko folk', took him to task:

John Anderson, my jo, John,
When first we were acquaint,
Ye were a smooth-tongued canty chiel—
A beauty without paint.
But you're now an MHR, John,
And I should like to know
If ye have gathered any sense
John Anderson, my jo.²⁶

The author of the second example from New Zealand disclosed the influence of the immediate and improvisatory nature of song culture in his short explanatory preface to his disgruntled attack on the politician and prohibitionist Thomas Edward Taylor:

Sir,—As I sat the other night contemplating the conduct of the junior member for Christchurch, the old air of 'John Anderson my Jo' came into my head, and my thoughts arranged themselves somewhat as follows:—

Taylor, T. E., of Christchurch
When we were first acquent,
I thought you were a Radical
And what you said you meant...

'T. E.', you're now a different man,
A Tory, not a 'Rad',
And everything seems very good
You once thought very bad.²⁷

25 For the campaign against transportation, see Pickering, P. A. 2005, 'Loyalty and rebellion in colonial politics: the case against convict transportation in Australia', in P. Buckner and R. D. Francis (eds), *Rediscovering the British World*, University of Calgary Press, Calgary, pp. 87–107.

26 'John Anderson, My Jo (new version)', *Bruce Herald*, 3 July 1888.

27 W. H. D. 1899, 'Correspondence: the junior member for Christchurch', *The Star*, 19 August.

More than 50 years earlier in lower Canada, 'John Anderson, my jo' was enlisted in a bitter election campaign. As the tune for an election song that was disseminated as a song sheet among political radicals, it is a fragile piece of ephemera that has somehow survived the vicissitudes of time, capturing and preserving a complex historical moment. 'Another New Song to Another Old Tune' was a direct address to the Irish-Canadian politician John Donellan. Although it is, as they often were, an awkward setting in which aesthetic concerns have given way to those of political utility, it is nonetheless still singable:

John Donellan, my jo, John,
When we first acquaint,
Your politics were good, John,
On Freedom you were bent.
But now you're getting old, John,
You've forgotten long ago
And you've turned Tory on our hands
John Donellan, my jo
John Donellan, my jo, John
In Eighteen Thirty Two,
TRACY [sic], the friend of Irishmen
Found an enemy in you.
You left our ranks in dudgeon, then,
And joined our mortal foe;
The quid the vote you'll get from us,
John Donellan, my jo.
John Donellan, my jo, John
You swore you would oppose,
The 92 Resolves, John,
We passed against our foes,
But we'll stick by O'CONNELL, John,
Whilst HANCOCK and AULDJO
Spill their blood in your support,
John Donellan, my jo.
John Donellan, my jo, John
You hope to gain your ends,
With ARMOUR & TOM BEGLEY, John,
And such like Tory friends,
Who falsely called the IRISH, John,
'The tools of Papineau',
Because we would not be their tools
John Donellan, my jo.
John Donellan, my jo, John

The day is coming fast
When you will be defeated John—
When you'll have polled your last.
And then you'll toddle home, John,
Cursing Dolye and Co.
Who first advised you to set up,
John Donellan, my jo.
For the Irish have resolved, John,
To stick like friends together
And not desert the truth, John,
For you or any other.
With PAPINEAU & NELSON—John,
They triumphed long ago,
And they'll conquer with the same again
John Donellan, my jo.²⁸

The mock exasperation and wry knowingness expressed in the title's 'another' suggest the anonymous author's awareness of its position as part of the not-so-new 'new song' genre. There is a wealth of historical detail within this more extended political parody. It is peppered with names of key individuals and historical references: John Donellan, the year 1832, Tracy, the Ninety-Two Resolves, O'Donnell, Auldjo, Tom Begley, Papineau, Nelson. These details are enough to identify it as an election ballad that formed part of the arsenal of the reformist Patriote campaign led by Louis-Joseph Papineau and Robert Nelson against the conservative Irishman John Donellan and his running mate, William Walker, for Montreal West in the riotous election of late 1834. The ballad can be seen as an agent in the events leading up to the 1837 Rebellion, which was a significant marker on the road to Responsible Government in Canada.

Between 1828 and the early 1830s a 'climate of sympathy', to use Mary Finnegan's words, arose between the Irish and French in Canada.²⁹ Drawing upon their shared religion and experience of British oppression, the two ethnic groups came together. The renowned Irish politician Daniel O'Connell, dubbed 'The Liberator' for his central role in the campaign for Repeal of the Union, had taken up the French Canadian cause in the British Parliament, and the Canadians in turn held him up as a 'symbol of hope', drawing favourable comparisons between him and Papineau, who they hoped would become their own 'Liberator'.³⁰ O'Connell's activities were reported in both French and Irish

28 Anon. [18??], 'Another new song to another old tune air, "John Anderson, my jo"', [S. I.], CIHM No. 51821, Metropolitan Toronto Library, Toronto.

29 Finnegan, Mary 1985, 'Irish-French relations in lower Canada', *CCHA Historical Studies*, vol. 52, pp. 35-49, at p. 35.

30 Jackson, James 2005, 'The radicalization of the Montreal Irish: the role of "the Vindicator"', *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, vol. 31, no. 1, pp. 90-7, at p. 92.

radical newspapers. Daniel Tracey, with whom the author of this song so clearly identified, was a key player in the Irish involvement with the Patriote movement during these years. He was the editor of the radical *Irish Vindicator and Canada General Advertiser*, which had started in December 1828. Reporting on both Irish affairs and local Patriote activities, Tracy performed an important role in agitating for reform and successfully ran in the 1832 by-election for Montreal West. Nevertheless, the ballad also points to a division within the expatriate Irish community in the lead-up to the 1834 election. It is clear that French Canadians had to be careful not to let their attacks on Donellan be seen as an attack on the Irish more generally. Significantly this song comes from within Irish ranks, and possibly played a role in the noisy meetings of Irish electors of the West Ward prior to the election—meetings that may have been attended by Donellan's Tory supporters Thomas Begly and Auldjo. In this respect the ballad proves its worth as a primary source by telling us that Donellan, despite having worked alongside Tracey promoting the Irish cause, had, as early as 1832, turned against him—a fact not noted in the current scholarship.³¹

Also in 1834 the Patriotes sent their Ninety-Two Resolutions to London. These resolutions, which stand as their 'political manifesto', consisted of a series of grievances against the Legislative Council and proposed reform measures for colonial policy. The ultimate rejection of the resolutions by Britain and the official response in the form of none other than Lord John Russell's Ten Resolutions contributed to the 1837 Rebellion. Recently James Jackson has identified the 'radical nature' of the Ninety-Two Resolutions as a key cause for the subsequent divisions that fractured the Patriote party—divisions he sees as the Tory party's attempts 'to exacerbate by enticing the Irish away from their traditional support for Papineau'.³² Donellan's Tory lieutenant, Thomas Begly, accused Papineau of exploiting the Irish for political gain. Tories sought to play upon anti-Irish sentiments among the Patriotes and rupture the fragile alliance between French and Irish so as to bring the Irish over to their side. To do this they exploited the general French Canadian opposition to Irish immigration. This opposition was fuelled in part by the cholera epidemics of 1832 and 1834, which were directly linked to the arrival of emigrant ships from Ireland (ironically it was one such outbreak that had killed Tracey just as he was to assume office in 1832). In this way the Tories managed to gain the support of many Montreal Irish after 1834. The song then sounded the death knell for the brief period of Irish–French Canadian solidarity in lower Canada. There was now 'outright

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., p. 94.

division in the Irish ranks' and considerable hostility towards them from the Canadians.³³ This election song shows just how effective music can be as a 'tool of historical inquiry'.³⁴

Popular song was a readily available form of communication. It was part of a broad culture, but was also capable of acute specificity, and so allowed interplay between global and local understandings. In the telling of transnational history, popular song can play an important role in allowing disparate and often national histories to be woven together, for parallels to be drawn and comparisons to be made that would otherwise not. It is the tune that allows this play between textual meanings. It is the tune that sounds across time and space, acting as a historical agent, a vehicle of culture.

The diasporic community is at the centre of many of the examples cited above: the Scottish in the antipodes, the Irish and French in Canada. The keenly antagonistic or gently humorous political parodies of 'John Anderson, my jo' found in Australia, New Zealand and Canada, and the communal singing of the 'original' song by Scottish emigrants on their way to Australia, represent different expressions of, and engagements with, loss. Through these we can witness how a song could be used to reaffirm and sustain identity, or how its meaning could be rearticulated to represent loss of different kinds: of faith, loyalty or solidarity.

33 Ibid.

34 See Jackson, Jeffrey H. and Pelkey, Stanley C. 2005, *Music and History: Bridging the disciplines*, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, Miss., p. xiv.

Chanting Grief, Dancing Memories: Objectifying Hawaiian laments

Adrienne L. Kaeppler

Introduction

Throughout Polynesia, death and funerals were, and in some islands still are, some of the most important social events, with unbounded grief often expressed. Immediate expressions of grief might be voiced in special ways and categorised with special terms, such as *tangi* in Aotearoa (New Zealand), and poetic eulogies might be composed some time after a death has occurred. Though these are often mentioned in ethnographic literature, not many studies have been published on this specialised category of music/poetry. In the Oceania volume of the *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*,¹ for example, most authors of Polynesian music articles devote only a few sentences to laments, and do not focus on their importance, style or poetry. On the other hand, the concept of laments has been used in contemporary expressive culture. For example, Samoan-Japanese artist Shigeyuki Kihara styles the performance of his recent work ‘Tauluga: the last dance’ as a lament for the loss of Samoan culture through colonisation.² Between these two poles are passing mentions of sad songs as laments—for example, a Cook Islander sings a song about her dead mother, but not in a distinctive style,³ or a danced ‘lament for a kite’ as a metaphor for a missing loved one (in the Human Studies Film Archives of the Smithsonian Institution). This essay is a step towards filling the void in recent literature about Hawaiian laments by exploring the poetry of traditional and modern laments known as *kanikau* and the changing performances and contexts of Hawaiian grieving.

In socially stratified Hawai`i, as known in the nineteenth century, grief over an individual’s death was expressed and commemorated visually, verbally and with bodily movement, its elaboration depending on one’s place in society. The passing of a high-ranking chief was an appropriate occasion for self-mutilation, such as knocking out teeth or inflicting wounds. Shark teeth were mounted into

1 Kaeppler, Adrienne L. and Love, J. W. (eds) 1998, *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music. Volume 9: Australia and the Pacific Islands*, Garland Publishing Company, New York.

2 Shigeyuki Kihara 2012, ‘Tauluga: the last dance’, *Pacific at Te Papa*, vol. 17, p. 4.

3 Alexeyeff, Kalissa 2009, *Dancing from the Heart: Movement, gender, and Cook Islands globalization*, University of Hawai`i Press, Honolulu, pp. xiii–xiv.

wooden handles and used to cut oneself, hair was cut on one side of the head,⁴ and sometimes the tongue was tattooed. High chief-ess Kamamalu (c. 1800–24, the wife of Liholiho, Kamehameha II), at the death of Keopuolani (her mother-in-law), tattooed her tongue and remarked: ‘Pain, great indeed, but greater my affection!’⁵ Jacques Arago, during his 1819 visit to Hawai‘i, noted that the body of Ka‘ahumanu (a wife of Kamehameha I, c. 1758–1819) bore the marks of a great number of burns and incisions that she inflicted on herself at the death of her husband.⁶ This convention evolved into the practice of tattooing a chief’s name and the date of death on one’s arm, as illustrated by J. Alphonse Pellion during the voyage of Freycinet. At the highest level of society, the bones of dead chiefs were encased in coconut-fibre sennit caskets made of fibre cords that had protective prayers chanted into them during fabrication by a specialised *kahuna* (priest). This objectified prayer stayed with the bones as a perpetual *kapu* (taboo).

‘Crystallized Voice of Grief’

More relevant to us here is poetry composed and/or performed for the dead, which has become objectified and preserved in written form since the nineteenth century. Traditional Hawaiian music is based on poetry, much of which is intoned/chanted/sung with a small number of pitches and in a narrow melodic range without polyphony. Vibrato, called ‘i‘i, is an important element of style and varies with the type of intoned poem. A well-developed lament genre called *kanikau* extols the virtues of the deceased and provides an appropriate medium for the stylised wailing engaged in at the time of death. Not many laments or dirges have been sound recorded because of Hawaiians’ reluctance to sing a dirge when no actual death has occurred or is imminent. A few were recorded on wax cylinders, primarily in the 1920s and 1930s, but not in context. One of these recordings comes from the story of the volcano goddess Pele and her sister Hi‘iaka, where it is used to tell part of the narrative.⁷ A few wax cylinders, recorded after the fact, preserve the sung poetry that was remembered from the death of a high chief. Another recorded example is a generalised poem that could be used at the death of a spouse. These wax cylinders and archival texts can be found in the library and archives of the Bishop Museum in Honolulu.

Kanikau were chanted/sung in a highly emotional style called *ho‘ouēue* (*ho‘ouwēuwē*), characterised by a highly developed vibrato (‘i‘i), and often

4 Kamakau, Samuel M. 1964, ‘Ka po‘e kahiko, the people of old’, Translated by Mary Kawena Pukui, *Ke Kumu Hawaii*, [Semi-monthly Hawaiian newspaper], Special Publication 51, Bishop Museum Press, Honolulu, p. 34.

5 Ellis, Rev. William 1827, *Narrative of Tour Through Hawaii*, London, p. 122.

6 Arago, Jacques 1823, *Narrative of a Voyage Round the World, 1817–1820*, London, p. 92.

7 Emerson, Nathaniel B. 1915, ‘Pele and Hi‘iaka. A myth from Hawaii’, *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, p. 214.

included outbursts of wailing. Today, only a few accomplished chanters continue to voice this difficult style of chanting. The emotion that *kanikau*, embodied as *ho`ouēuē*, conveyed was recently characterised by hula and chant teacher Noenoelani Zuttermeister as follows:

The pain of loss is heard in the voice while crying and wailing. The wailing is gut-wrenching, a person can feel the chanter's sorrow. One can compare the feeling to an opera, even though the listener is unfamiliar with the language one can still feel the emotion. The sound to me was a little scary yet at the same time the feeling of love is felt, seen and heard. The chanter that I heard a couple of times when I was younger chanted her connection with the deceased and while chanting she let people know what a great loss there was.⁸

Relying on improvised or preset texts, *kanikau* serve as a means through which individuals cry and explain their sorrow that the deceased has passed away. They are also poetic creations in praise of the one departed. Delivered in a pitched, rhythmic form, the texted weeping can show immediate grief or be performed at a funeral or memorial. Since the nineteenth century, they have been written down and sometimes published.

Writing in 1895, Reverend C. J. Lyons characterised this chanting/wailing sound as the 'crystallized voice of grief'.⁹ I use this as an apt metaphor for making the emotion of grief into something clear and almost tangible by adapting the dictionary figurative definition of crystallized: 'make or become definite and clear.'¹⁰ That is, grief is made crystal clear in the voicing of a *kanikau*.

Lyons provides an example of a lament composed by native Hawaiian historian David Malo for Queen Ka`ahumanu (a wife of Kamehameha), who died in 1832. What interested Reverend Lyons was that the coming of Christianity did not bring an end to the composition of *kanikau*, but that pre-Christian sentiments were replaced with Christian ones.

*Miha lanaau i kuakahiki ka newa na,
Ke kaha na ka leina aku nei liuliu,
Liua paia aku nei i Kuanalia,
I analipo i analio.
Lilo aku la i ka paia ku a Kane,
I ke ala muku maawe ula a kanaloo,
Keehikulani aku la ka hele ana,
E malolo kiha ka haku leiohua,*

8 Noenoelani Zuttermeister, Personal communication, May 2011.

9 *The Friend*, vol. 53, no. 8 (August 1895), p. 57.

10 *The Oxford American College Dictionary* 2002, Oxford University Press, Honolulu.

*Kelii i Kuluhiolani aui newa aku nei,
I lele aku na i ke kohi ana o ka pawa,
I ke anohia kohikohi ana o ka po,
Ka lilo ana ia la,*

Iala, o---i---e.

*Oia hoi, he uwe, he aloha ia oe, a---
Pakoni hu`i ke aloha loku i ke ake,
Wehe wahi ka pilipaa o ka houpo,
Naha ka paa, ke pe`kua o ke kanaka,
Helelei, hiolo ke pua o ke waimaka,
Lele lei-o, ho loko i ka nihi,
Mihi o ke aloha o juu haku maoli,
A kaawale okoa ia loha ana,
Aloha aku o ke aloha hoahanau,
Aole he hoahanau pono no`u;
He hanauna ku okoa i loi` ka Haku,
I hanaula e ka Uhane Hemolele,
E ka Makua hookah o makou,
I pilikana ilaila e wena aku ai,
Ilina inoa kaikuwahine no`u,
Auwe no hoi kuu kaikuwahine,
Kuu hoa hooikaika i ka luhi leo e, ia,*

Iala, o---i---e.

*Oia no o o eke aloha, ka u a loko a,
A, aloha oe ka haku kau o ka manao,
Ke kookoo ka leo e ili aku ai,
E imi po ai o ka waiwai ka pono e, ia,*

Iala, o---i---e.

*O ka wahine alo ua waahila o Kona,
Nihi makani alo ua, Kukalahale,
Noho anea kula wela ia o Paho,
Wahine holo ua haa Nuuuanu e, ia,
Holo a nele i ka pono, ua paoa,
Ua hihi aku, hihi mai, ke aloha ole,
Aole pono, he enemi noho pu e, ia.
Aha, aia `ku la i he lani,
Ka uhane a ke kino wailua,
Kino akalau pahoahao,
Oiwi haona hiona e,
Haili aka, kino ano lani,
Hoa anela o ka lani ma,
Ke luana wale la i ka lani,
Ua luakaha ka noho ana,*

*Ke halelu ia la ilaila,
Iloko o ka Paredaiso nani,
I kea o mau loa o ka Haku e, ia,
O ko kakou mau Haku no ia,
O ka Haku mau no ia, oia no.
O ka Haku mau no ia, oia no.
O ka manao ia a.loko e ake nei,
E ake aku nei, e, e.*

Mei 22, 1834. Davida Malo

After Death (Translated by Curtis J. Lyons)

Ceasing from storm, the sea grows calm and glassy. Like a puff of wind flitting over it, so *her* spirit glides away to the far regions beyond Kahiki. (The word for far away shores.) She flies; averting her eyes, she fades away in the wild mists of the north-land, the deep, dark, mysterious north.

She has gone from us, to the courts of Kane, treading royally the red-streaked path of the rosy dawn; the misty, broken road to Kanaloa.

An ebbing tide flows out, laden with departing wealth. The chief is turning away, sinking to sleep, drifting away. She fled at the first gleam of the dawn, at the faint ending of the cut-off night. Then was her departure.

Oh our beloved one! Our departed one! Our bemoaned one!

The heart beats tumultuously; it throbs within us; it strains us; it breaks the walls around it.

Oh the pain, the breaking up, the rushing of tears, the falling of the flowers scattered of grief.

We are borne away, carried away, the very depths of us are torn from us by this passionate grief.

Our true liege lady was she, and I grieve. Love as to a sister is mine, yet not to a sister. Yea, a sister, chosen and separate in the Lord, born of the Holy Spirit, of the one Father of us all. Thus, thus I feel that she is mine to sorrow for. The precious name, sister, is indeed ours (to use) by dear inheritance. Alas, my sister! My beloved sharer in the sweet labor of the voice (i.e. conversation). Oh, my beloved! My beloved! Oh centre of thought!

The voice is the staff that love leans upon. With the voice we seek common treasures together, sweet converse together. Gone---Gone---Gone!

O lady, seeking shelter from the Waahila rain of Kona, the cutting rain with the wind beating against the house gables! O lady, companion on the hot, sun-beaten plains of Paho! O lady, beloved, in the cold rain of Nuuanu! We flee together; there is nothing, all is in vain,---empty, forsaken. Confusion all tangled together; there is no more love, no more good; it is an enemy that is now with us! Alas!

The spirit of the shadowy presence, the spirit body is gone. The many-shadowed, the glorified, the transfigured body is beyond,---new-featured, heavenly formed, companion of angels. She rests in the rich light of Heaven, she moves triumphant. She sings praise---psalms of joy in the paradise of glory, in the everlasting Lord. He is our Lord, the everlasting Lord. He indeed, in truth.

Such are the thoughts that burn within me, they burn and go out from me, thus I pour out my soul, my soul!

May 22, 1834. David Malo

In this example, the first few verses tell of the indigenous gods Kane and Kanaloa, while the second part tells of the Christian triune God. The ending finds Ka`ahumanu in heaven, a companion of angels. This acceptance of traditional Hawaiian musical/poetic forms by the well-respected Reverend Lyons was a factor in the preservation and continuance of the composition of *kanikau*.

Another early published example is a *kanikau* composed by Kahekili, the high chief of Maui Island at the time of Captain Cook's visit.¹¹

11 From *Ke Kumu Hawaii* (18 February 1835, p. 64). The text was used as part of a workshop on 'Kaona and Inner Meaning', presented by Puakea Nogelmeier in 2010. English translation by Nogelmeier.

**He mele kanikau na Kahekili no A dirge composed by Kahekili for
ka make ana o kana aikane the death of his aikane**

<i>Me he holoaau la i ka malie,</i>	As though a current borne in the calm,
<i>Ko kalaku, 'kalaku alo na moku,</i>	Your release, the islands shiver in the presence,
<i>Ka pewa, ka hiiu, o Kanaloahaliua,</i>	The tail, the caudal fin of Kanaloahaliua,
<i>Ka halo na mahamah'e au nei;</i>	The frontal fins, gill plates ahead, swimming along;
<i>Ka lele haohao' Kamehame Lanai;</i>	The wondrous flight of Kamehame Lanai;
<i>Lana me he pikoi la, lana Maunaloa,</i>	Bouyant as a net floater, Maunaloa floats,
<i>Ka olokea o na moku ilok'e kai, e,</i>	The criss-cross of the islands in the sea, e,
<i>Kuu hoa, kuu hoa pili o na kai awalu,</i>	My companion, my dear companion of the eight seas,
<i>Mai ka ai nana iuka ke noho; la, e, eia, e;</i>	Bring food, gaze inland, he dwells there, e, here, e,
<i>Ke noho nei no ia me ke aloha,</i>	Residing there, indeed, with affection,
<i>Aohe wai maalili iho ai; laha</i>	There is no water that could soothe it; it is widespread,
<i>Kio e lana ka hau iluna o ke ki</i>	The dense mist emerges, drifting over the ti-plants
<i>Iluna o ka laau 'o miki ka wai,</i>	Over the trees, let the water be drawn
<i>He wai e lu ana iluna o ka ili,</i>	Water that sprinkles upon the skin,
<i>He wai auau no ko laila kupa,</i>	Bathing waters for those who live in that place,
<i>E maka ala ana i ka wa ana o ke ao,</i>	Watching for the emergence of day,
<i>E pulale ana o awakea,</i>	With noontime hastening along,
<i>O inuhia e ka la ka wai;</i>	Let the waters be drunk up by the sun;
<i>Pau ka wai mihi hopo o ka eh'e,</i>	Let the fretful waters of regret over pain be gone,
<i>O ka eha ia a ke aloha, he waimaka,</i>	It is the pain of love, tears,
<i>O kana ukana ia, ke hanini nei, e, eia.</i>	Such is love's burden, pouring down, and here it is.

In this poetic creation in praise of the one departed, Chief Kahekili extols the virtues of his *aikane* (friend of the same sex), and explains his sorrow that his friend has passed away. That is, Kahekili crystallises his emotion of grief in an appropriate medium.

Visualising Grief

Structured human movement was part of the rituals associated with a person's death, especially for those of high rank, in which the *kanikau* extolled the virtues of the deceased and related their genealogies and personal histories. Formalised movements accompanied wailing. These movements included: 1) locking the fingers of the hands and placing them behind the head; 2) stretching the hands and arms upwards, with palms turned towards each other; and 3) beating the breast.¹² These formulaic movements associated with *kanikau* were usually not performed in association with musical instruments, may have been spontaneous (that is, not pre-choreographed into a specified sequence) and were probably personal rather than group responses to the mourning context. Hawaiian historian Samuel M. Kamakau, in a description of beating the breast while swaying the body during mourning, uses the term *ha`a*. He noted that the high chief Keoua 'was mourned by the chiefs with loud wailing and with swaying of the body (*ma ka ha`a ana*) in token of grief'. These movements were called *ha`a*, and, according to Kamakau, the mourner usually kneels with hands clasped behind the neck or thrown into the air or beating the breast while the body sways back and forth.¹³ The noted late nineteenth–early twentieth-century dancer Keahi Luahine (1877–1937) explains that the movements that accompanied wailing denote signs of death and should be avoided in hula; however, the *pa`iумаuma*—chest-slapping hula—may have developed from the movements that originally accompanied *kanikau*. Such a *pa`iумаuma/kanikau* was recorded by W. M. Kalaiwa`a for Helen Roberts in the 1920s.¹⁴ The Bishop Museum published this sound recording on the album *Nā Leo Hawai`i Kahiko, Voices of Old Hawai`i*:¹⁵

Ha`uha`u uwē, ha`uwē

Hu`iau uwē, hu`i e.

Hu`i a`o `ē, e hu`i e.

A sob, a sob, a wail,

A painful grief, painful grief,

A sharp pain, a sharp pain.

¹² See notes by Kenneth P. Emory, 1933, from interviews with dance specialist Keahi Luahine, in the Bishop Museum Archives, Honolulu.

¹³ Kamakau, Samuel M. 1961, *Ruling Chiefs of Hawaii*, Kamehameha Schools Press, Honolulu, p. 75.

¹⁴ Roberts, Helen H. 1926, *Ancient Hawaiian Music*, Bishop Museum Bulletin 29, Honolulu, p. 189.

¹⁵ Tatar, Elizabeth 1981, *Nā Leo Hawai`i Kahiko, Voices of Old Hawai`i*, [Double album with notes and texts], Audio-Recording Collection Series No. 1, Department of Anthropology, Bishop Museum, Honolulu, Record 1, side B, band 6.

The sung poetry and movements communicated grief to oneself and to those watching and listening for whom it was socially appropriate to acknowledge the performance. Although abstract or metaphorical concepts might be expressed, the reason for the performance derived from the emotions of grief.

Grief, Praise, Society and Aesthetics

Oratory was, and still is, important in Hawaiian society; the oratorical voice found in *kanikau* is still part of an aesthetic construction realised through metaphor and allusion called *kaona*, which was central to Hawaiian poetic texts even though they may never have had an oral public performance. When performed, emotions are expressed through affect-encoding words, such as *auē* (or *auwe*), and express relationships among the chanter, the deceased and those listening. Funerals show how the deceased is related to others, and *kanikau* demonstrate verbally how much and by whom he or she is beloved. Hence, funerals were, and are, the distilled essence of society and social relations realised through poetry spoken or sung. Puakea Nogelmeier has reminded us that, in addition, *kaona* is also the seed from which the poetry grew, not just the underlying meaning,¹⁶ and this can especially be seen in *kanikau*, whose poetry grew from grief.

Today laments retain their historical style but are seldom voiced in *ho`ouēuē* (emotional performance style of the *kanikau*), as this difficult chanting style is mastered by only a few. One of these is Ka`upena Wong, who is often called up for eulogies or *kanikau*, which he composes and performs as *ho`ouēuē*. A *kanikau* that he composed for Jim Bartels, the curator of `Iolani Palace, was not performed, but was published in 2003 in the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*:

<i>Auē, auē no ho-`i e, auē!</i>	<i>Oh my, oh gosh, oh!</i>
<i>Aia i hea ke wai lana mālie?</i>	<i>Where are the quiet waters?</i>
<i>Ai(a) wale pu`e wai kupiki`ō</i>	<i>Only stormy, turbulent waters!</i>
<i>Pehea, no ke aha la, i aha `ia la?</i>	<i>What happened, how come, why?</i>
<i>Ua make `o Jim bartels, ua hala akula</i>	<i>Jim Bartels died, he passed away</i>
<i>Auē, ua `eha au me ke kaumaha loa i liko o`u, auē</i>	<i>Oh how I ache with sad feelings inside of me, sad</i>
<i>Pa`i a uma nā māmakakaua*</i>	<i>The māmakakaua slap their chests in grief</i>
<i>Ua hele aku `o Jim, ua hele ia i ke ala Ho`i `ole mai</i>	<i>Jim has gone away, he has gone on the road of no return</i>

16 Nogelmeier workshop, October 2010.

<i>‘O kona mau hoa ka pono a me ka pololei</i>	<i>Integrity and goodness are his companions</i>
<i>Goodbye, aloha `oe e ku`u kaina, ku`u hoaloha maika`i</i>	<i>Goodbye, farewell to you, beloved brother, good friend</i>
<i>‘O `oe no he keonimana hapa Hawai`i he</i>	<i>You were indeed an elegant, learned and gracious</i>
<i>kanaka u`i, na`auao, he lokomaika`i</i>	<i>part-Hawaiian gentleman</i>
<i>Goodbye, aloha e ke keiki hānau o ka `āina, aloha!</i>	<i>Goodbye, aloha o beloved native son of Hawai`i, aloha!</i>

* He was a member of the Royal Society `Ahaui Māmakakaua, Daughters and Sons of Hawaiian Warriors.

Source: Hawaiian and English text by Ka`upena Wong.

Still important today in Hawaiian society, funerals and the wakes that precede them are social functions in which the dead partake; however, *kanikau* voiced as *ho`ouēuē* and the structured movements that accompanied them are seldom seen or heard. Instead, they have been replaced with spoken eulogies, written *kanikau* and hula. Most poignant are songs and dances directed towards an open casket. During the 2010 funeral of hula teacher Ceci Akim, her students and family members performed ‘Lili`u E’ and family members performed ‘Ka Nohona Pilikai’. At the end of the service, her students performed the well-known exit dance ‘Keawe `O`opa (Halehale Ke Aloha A i Ha`iku E)’ to lead the casket out of the funeral home to the hearse. Prior to the official start of the funeral service, people viewed the casket, a music group played Hawaiian music and people rose and spontaneously danced to the open casket.¹⁷

During the wake and huge funeral of well-known hula and chant teacher Kau`i Zuttermeister in 1994, numerous students, friends and family members performed several hula facing the open casket. Her students and family members performed ‘Nā pua lei `ilima’, composed and choreographed by Kau`i, several times, both facing her open casket and, for the last time, when the closed casket remained in the aisle, waiting to be taken to the cemetery. Today, such performances are the most poignant of dancing memories.

Conclusion

Death is ever with us, and its interpretation, like that of all important events, is as significant as the fact itself. The interpretation of Hawaiian *kanikau*, either written or voiced as *ho`ouēuē*, reveals the oratorical power and the poetic

17 Mary Jo Freshley, Personal communication, May 2010.

expression of oral and written verbal art and the movements that objectify them. As this essay has noted, *ho`ouēuē* are seldom performed in public today and the movements that accompanied them during the nineteenth century have been replaced with hula performed to Hawaiian songs loved or composed by the deceased. These danced and sung memories are accepted and appreciated by the living and the dead.

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‘The Power of Two Homelands’: Musical continuity and change, the evocation of longing and an Altai Urianghai song¹

Rebekah Plueckhahn

Introduction

The singing of songs amongst the Altai Urianghai in Duut district, Hovd Province, Mongolia, forms a powerful, emotionally evocative and performative act. As noted elsewhere in Mongolia, it is often in song texts that bittersweet emotions of loss or longing are expressed²—emotions that are not normally displayed in other forms of sociality. In this paper, I discuss the particular poetic encapsulation of longing and loss contained in a well-known song amongst the Altai Urianghai people in Hovd Province, Mongolia. The performance of this particular song of longing and loss is a multivalent phenomenon that occurs in a context of cultural redefinition and rediscovery. In post-socialist Mongolia, song forms and performers themselves have been shaped by the experiences of past socialist cultural policies and post-socialist relaxations in public cultural practice. A close look at this particular song reveals this multi-layered history of social and political change. Evocative song lyrics can express emotional states of being whilst simultaneously articulating ‘ethnic’ delineation, cultural change and perceptions of cultural continuity. The Altai Urianghai short ‘folk’ song (*bogino ardyn duu*)³ entitled ‘*Hoyer Nutgiin Erh*’, or ‘The Power of Two Homelands’, is one such song. Popular amongst Altai Urianghai people in both

1 I would like to thank S. Undargaa for assistance with additional translation of the song lyrics and J. Bolorchimeg for translation of interviews with M. Ganbold and N. Sengedorj. I also wish to thank two anonymous reviewers for their valuable suggestions and ethnomusicologist Andrew Colwell from Wesleyan University for reading a draft of this paper and providing invaluable insights and suggestions. I also wish to thank Professor Stephen Wild and Dr Di Roy for their careful editing and my supervisor, Professor Howard Morphy, for suggestions on a draft of this paper. Last, I would like to thank M. Ganbold of Hovd University and the many Duut friends who shared their enthusiasm for music with me throughout my months of fieldwork.

2 Højer, L. 2004, *Dangerous communications: enmity, suspense and integration in post socialist northern Mongolia*, PhD thesis, Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, p. 117.

3 In this paper, I use a system of Mongolian transliteration as used by Empson (Empson, R. 2011, *Harnessing Fortune: Personhood, memory and place in Mongolia*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York) when she follows Lessing, F. et al. 1960, *Mongolian–English Dictionary*, Mongolian Society, Indiana University Press, Bloomington.

Hovd and Bayan Olgii provinces, it simultaneously reveals the use of textual poetic devices that evoke a strong sense of longing and loss over a geographical distance. At the same time, it embodies a delineation of Altai Urianghai identity in post-socialist Mongolia on melodic and performative levels.

This paper draws from 14 months of doctoral fieldwork in Mongolia spanning 2009, 2010 and 2012. During this time, I largely conducted research in the rural district of Duut Sum, Hovd Province, Mongolia. Duut Sum is home to 1287⁴ Altai Urianghai⁵ people, an ethnic group within Mongolia.⁶ It is an area of carefully demarcated herding rangeland, with a central village, or sum centre (*sumyn töv*), located roughly in the north-east of the district. During my fieldwork, I lived primarily in the district centre where I assisted my host family with daily activities, visited musicians, took music lessons and attended concerts. By living in the district for an extended period, I was able to participate in a wide range of activities and ceremonies through which I was able to learn about the differing forms of musical engagement undertaken by a wide sector of the population. I also travelled with my friends to the provincial capital of Hovd City, to other areas in western Mongolia and to Ulaanbaatar, following people in this mobile environment.

My doctoral research explores the significance of musical engagement in the ongoing post-socialist context amongst this group of Altai Urianghai. Since the fall of communism in 1990, Mongolia has been a fertile scene for an ongoing rediscovery and rearticulation of Mongolian cultural and spiritual practices, and historical origin.⁷ Certain Altai Urianghai musical genres are now being included in this cultural veneration as genres that link Mongolia to an ancient past.⁸ In my doctoral research, I focus on how Altai Urianghai people in and from

4 'Population and dwelling, 2010 National Census—Results—Sum/District [*Hün Am, Oron Suutsnii 2010 oni Ulsyn Toollogo—ür diin—Sum/Düüreg*]', viewed 29 July 2012, <<http://www.toollogo2010.mn/yazi.php?category=Result>>

5 The total number of Altai Urianghai people in Mongolia is 26 684, with most located in western Mongolia (ibid.).

6 In describing the Altai Urianghai as an ethnic group within Mongolia, I am following the translation of the Mongolian term *yastan*, which literally translates to 'nationality' but is now used to denote a sub-ethnic group within Mongolia. Culturally, however, Altai Urianghai are considered Mongolian. Delineations of Altai Urianghai ethnicity largely occur through a spoken Urianghai language, which is a dialect of Mongolian, some different food preparation practices and, significantly, through the practice of specific musical genres. Given the changing significance placed on the term *yastan*, I understand that translating it to 'ethnicity' might be viewed as problematic; however, given that the Altai Urianghai differentiate themselves from other Mongolians, I have chosen to use the term 'ethnicity' as it best encapsulates this differentiation. For further definitions of the word *yastan*, and its increased usage in describing ethnic delineation during the socialist and post-socialist periods in Mongolia, see Bulag, U. E. 1998, *Nationalism and Hybridity in Mongolia*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.

7 Humphrey, C. 1992, 'The moral authority of the past in post-socialist Mongolia', *Religion, State and Society*, vol. 20, nos 3–4, pp. 375–89; Kaplonski, C. 2004, *Truth, History and Politics in Mongolia*, Routledge Curzon, London and New York.

8 O. Undarmaa 2010, 'E. Baatarjav, Tsoor bol hün törölhtnii uugan högjim [E. Baatarjav: the *Tsuur*, people's native original music]', *Önөөдөр*, 12 November, pp. E1–E2.

Duut Sum negotiate this musical notoriety in different ways, and I draw from an in-depth ethnographic focus on how musical engagement forms a fundamental part of ongoing sociality between people within Duut Sum. In doing so, I aim to build upon contributions previously made to the scholarship of music in Mongolia. The nature of the particular place-based ethnographic focus of my doctoral research builds upon the work of Pegg,⁹ whose encompassing study presented a detailed depiction of Mongolian music from across Mongolia at the end of communism. My work also builds upon the work of Marsh,¹⁰ who focused upon the correlations and continuity between socialist and post-socialist musical experiences in Mongolia through the prism of a detailed study of the *morin huur* or horse-head fiddle. Given attention paid to Altai Urianghai musical practice in post-socialist Mongolia, in my doctoral work I aim to reveal how musical practice is an extremely dynamic medium through which Duut Altai Urianghai situate themselves socially, geographically and spiritually in the post-socialist context. The song 'The Power of Two Homelands' provides a key example of such Duut Altai Urianghai musical 'positioning'. It is the multi-layered nature of this song, the simultaneous reference to a cultural delineation and personal loss, that led me to choose it for this discussion surrounding laments and the role of song in loss and longing.

The discussion of lament or loss in song form in the Mongolian context presents some interesting questions. Whilst there are Mongolian musical genres of long song (*urtyn duu*) and short song (*bogino duu*) or short folk songs (*bogino ardyn duu*) that are recognised Mongolia wide,¹¹ there is no specific genre of musical laments in wider Mongolian musical culture. Instead, songs of loss and longing tend to develop in particular historical and localised contexts. One such example was during the political purges of the 1930s in which many Buriad Mongolians from north-central Mongolia were persecuted. Empson discusses how during this time of 'great uncertainty people created a special genre of songs called "persecution songs" (*heltmegdliin duu*) to lament the loss and absence of their husbands, brothers, grandfathers, and sons'.¹²

Instead of possessing a specific genre of laments, the present-day Altai Urianghai in Duut more commonly sing in order to make things good, to sway a given social event into a positive direction. The singing of long song, short or folk songs occurs in concerts, informal social gatherings or life-cycle celebrations (*nair*) such as weddings and children's hair-cutting ceremonies. During these occasions, songs are sung with the aim of creating celebration, or *bayar tsengel*—

9 Pegg, C. 2001, *Mongolian Music, Dance and Oral Narrative*, University of Washington Press, Seattle.

10 Marsh, P. 2002, *Moving the world through two strings: the horse-head fiddle and the cosmopolitan reimagination of tradition in Mongolia*, PhD thesis, Department of Central Eurasian Studies, Indiana University, Bloomington.

11 Pegg, *Mongolian Music, Dance and Oral Narrative*.

12 Empson, *Harnessing Fortune*, pp. 43–4.

making things good—to ensure a good future and fortune (*hishig buyan*) for the new bride and groom or a good life for the child whose hair is being cut for the first time, approximately at the age of three. This causal relationship between perceptions of time and future and the singing of songs can result in great social emphasis being placed on the importance of ‘good’ singing and musical performance, rather than performances that evoke sadness or despair. During such ceremonial occasions, the singing of sad songs (*gunigiin duu*) in a sorrowful way is not allowed. If someone begins to sing a sad song in a sad way, they are quickly hushed by surrounding family members.

‘The Power of Two Homelands’: Poetic analysis and interpretation

Despite this emphasis on song performance creating a positive sense of being, song texts often contain an evocation of a particular emotional bittersweetness. Analysis of the text of the song ‘The Power of Two Homelands’ reveals an emotional lament over a particularly Altai Urianghai conundrum. In Duut’s mountainous environment, herders move between summer, autumn/winter and spring encampments or sometimes more frequently according to pasture availability and suitability. In winter, the mountain passes in the southern Duut subdistrict of Höh Belchir Baga (Blue Confluence of Rivers Subdistrict) are often covered in snow, making them difficult to traverse. Many herders from this subdistrict move to the centre of Höh Belchir Baga (Höh Belchir Bagiin töv) as their winter encampment. The long valley floor provides protection and means that Höh Belchir Baga herders are able to travel to the district centre during winter; however, due to the high snowfall, movements between encampments outside the subdistrict centre are considerably difficult. The type of movement required for herding animals is described as *nüüh*—to move or shift pastures. The song ‘The Power of Two Homelands’ describes the emotional experience contained within and as part of this kind of movement: mobile pastoralism or *nüüh* between high mountain passes.

This song describes two lovers, both from different herding families, who met during summer months when their respective encampments were placed nearby high in the mountains. During summer, animals prefer to graze in the cooler reaches of mountainsides to escape the gnats and mosquitoes that breed in lower-lying waterways. Autumn has arrived, and the lovers have separated, each having ‘nomadised’ (*nüüh*) with their respective families to their autumn and winter encampments. This song evokes their longing for each other whilst they

are separated by frozen, snowed-in winter mountain passes that are impossible to traverse between the cold months of November and March. As noted by Urianghai scholar M. Ganbold, from Duut Sum and now living in Hovd:

This is a song which shows the life of Urianghai people. During summer time they will go over the Altai Mountains...Young people will meet and become friends. In autumn they will return to their autumn camps on two opposite sides [of the mountains]. Then snow will fall and the road will be blocked...They are saying that we split not because we wanted to, we split because we had different homelands, we had to move different ways with our livestock.¹³

In the song text itself are grammatical, poetic devices that encapsulate a simultaneous sense of hope and longing along with a sense of futility and sadness. The artful juxtaposition of these feelings of push and pull between personal desire and familial obligation forms the core of the song text. The lovers are searching for possible ways to meet, but, at the same time, know with each mention of a possible avenue that it will be impossible to do so:

‘Hoyer Nutgiin Erh’

Uulaar yaj dawaa maanim

Uulzaad yaj salnaa maanim

Hadaar yaj dawna maanim

Hargaldaad yaj salnaa maanim

Sal’ya geed salsangui maanim

Salangid nutgiin erheer sallaa

Hold’yo geed holdsongui maanim

Hoyer nutgiin erheer holdloo

Hetseer yaj dawna maanim

‘The Power of Two Homelands’

My dear, by means of the mountain
how will we cross the mountain
pass?

My dear, we met and then how did
we become separate?

My dear, by means of the cliff how
will we cross over?

We came into conflict [with terrain]
and then, how did we become
separate?

Not from a call for separating from
each other

This separation comes from a power
of separate homelands, to each of us,

Not from a call for staying away from
each other

Staying away comes from a power of
two homelands

My dear, how will we cross over the
the mountain ridge?

13 M. Ganbold, Interview with the author, 29 October 2010.

<i>Het n' yaj uulzana maanim</i>	My dear, how soon can we meet?
<i>Dawaagaar yaj dawna maanim</i>	My dear, by means of the mountain pass, how will we cross over?
<i>Daraa n' yaj salna maanim</i>	And how could we separate, when meeting, each other?
<i>Sal'ya geed salsangui maanim</i>	Not from a call for separating from each other
<i>Salangid nutgiin erheer sallaa</i>	This separation comes from a power of separate homelands, to each of us,
<i>Hold'yo geed holdsongui maanim</i>	Not from a call for staying away from each other
<i>Hoyer nutgiin erheer holdloo</i>	Staying away comes from a power of two homelands*

* Original transcription in Cyrillic by M. Ganbold (1991, *Urianghai Ardyn Duunuud* [Urianghai Folk Songs], Edited by D. Tsedendulam, Publisher unknown, Hovd City, Mongolia). Transliteration and initial translation by R. Plueckhahn, 2011. Additional translation by S. Undargaa, 2011. In the English translation of this song text, I aimed to provide a literal translation in order to reveal the juxtaposition between the terrain and people's desired actions, which is encapsulated in the original Mongolian.

This song text evokes a deep emotional state of bittersweet gain and subsequent loss as a result of their separation. The loss is recognised as inevitable—the two lovers must go with their respective families—but that inevitability only compounds its bittersweet sentiment.

This emotional bittersweetness is created poetically through the use of particular grammatical devices:

Verse 1

<i>Uula<u>ar</u> yaj dawaa maanim</i>	My dear, <u>by means</u> of the mountain <u>how</u> will we cross the mountain pass?
<i>Uulza<u>ad</u> yaj salnaa maanim</i>	My dear, we met <u>and then</u> , <u>how</u> did we become separate?
<i>Hada<u>ar</u> yaj dawna maanim</i>	My dear, <u>by means of</u> the cliff <u>how</u> will we cross over?
<i>Hargal<u>daad</u> yaj salnaa maanim</i>	We came into conflict [with terrain] <u>and then</u> , <u>how</u> did we become separate?

The poetic 'pull and push' is between the lovers' feelings for each other and their subsequent separation. In each line, the word *yaj* or 'how' forms the central word of the sentence. It is the point of articulation between two opposing

phenomena: the ‘separating’ environment and the connection between the two lovers. The word *yaj* is preceded by the alternating use of two different suffixes. The first (as seen in line one) is the instrumental suffix, ‘by means of’, or ‘-aar’. Here the instrumental suffix is used to describe the traversing of a possible pathway. As seen in line three, the singer is asking whether they can travel to each other via the cliff—a potential route to travel on, but in this case it is covered in snow and they cannot cross. The second suffix used is the verb suffix ‘-aad’, which translates to ‘and then’. It can be used to describe an action that has occurred sometime before another potential action takes place.¹⁴ As seen in line two, the lovers are lamenting as to how, after meeting and spending time together, they separated, evoking a sense of incredulity over this situation. The usage of these two alternating suffixes with the word ‘how’ both encapsulates and creates a bittersweet lament over the lovers’ predicament.

These intense romantic, bittersweet feelings have occurred as a consequence of the nature of the landscape in which these two people herd with their families. In the song text, the nature of this landscape is described as a form of power or ‘*erh*’ of their two homelands or ‘*nutag*’:

Verse 4, lines 3 and 4

<i>Hold’yo geed holdsongui maanim</i>	Not from a call for staying away from each other
<i>Hoyer <u>nutgiin</u> <u>erheer</u> holdloo</i>	Staying away comes from a <u>power</u> of two <u>homelands</u>

These two words—power (*erh*) and homeland (*nutag*)—are important, polysemic terms. A person’s homeland or *nutag* is a nuanced term and its ‘meaning depends on the situation’.¹⁵ For instance, if someone from Duut is in Ulaanbaatar, their homeland could be described as Hovd, or western Mongolia, as well as Duut itself. This ‘term with variable geometry...connects dispersed places’,¹⁶ and is a place of great attachment and one that conjures up a great deal of nostalgia if a person is away from it. It includes ‘the network of social relationships’,¹⁷ and can often include one’s birthplace or an area where one’s parents reside or used to reside. In the case of this song, homeland refers to the routes travelled by familial encampments as they move between seasonal pastures. The two lovers have strong, interconnected age and gender-specific obligations and emotional attachment to their respective family’s herding activities and movements. The movement with family among this landscape ensures the family’s ongoing growth

14 Uranchimeg, T., Elliot, D. and Yendii, P. 2009, *An Elementary Mongolian Grammar*, Publisher unknown, Ulaanbaatar, p. 75.

15 Legrain, L. 2009, ‘Confrontation on the River Ivd, or, how does music act in social life?’, *Inner Asia*, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 335–58, p. 338.

16 Ibid., p. 338.

17 Ibid., p. 339.

and nurturance, but comes at a cost of separation—separation from other linked familial networks herding or living elsewhere and, in this case, separation of an emotional connection ‘outside’ their respective family’s herding movements.

The power, *erh*, of their homelands is thus twofold. It is the power to provide sustenance to their families, ‘a means by which people actively generate their livelihoods and relate with each other’;¹⁸ however, because of the movement required in order to ensure this growth, it is the power that simultaneously separates and keeps them apart. *Erh* has the added dimension that it can refer to the inherent spiritual power of the landscape itself. As noted by Humphrey, in the Mongolian context, ‘it is not contemplation of the land (*gazar*) that is important but interaction with it, as something with energies far greater than the human’.¹⁹ Whilst Humphrey is correct in stating that interaction with the landscape is paramount in Mongolian transhumance, this interaction often provokes a form of contemplation, as seen in ‘The Power of Two Homelands’. This song is a contemplation of the nature of both inhabiting and interacting with this landscape. The separation of the two lovers is viewed at once as necessary and also ‘experienced as forced upon them’.²⁰ Such is the power of the landscape to determine people’s movements where instead of transforming the landscape Mongolians ‘move within a space and environment where some kind of pastoral life is possible and “in-habit” it’.²¹ In her work, Empson²² describes how people extract ‘parts of people, animals and things when they leave or separate, and then containing these parts inside the ger’,²³ in order to harness fortune. I propose that whilst not directly related to the containment of fortune, this song text is a way to maintain attachment in the face of movement, to ‘contain’ something of their relationship in the face of separation.

18 Empson, *Harnessing Fortune*, p. 319.

19 Humphrey, ‘The moral authority of the past in post-socialist Mongolia’, p. 135.

20 Empson, *Harnessing Fortune*, p. 13. See Empson, R. 2007, ‘Separating and containing people and things in Mongolia’, in Amiria Henare, Martin Holbraad and Sari Wastell (eds), *Thinking Through Things, Theorising Artefacts Ethnographically*, Routledge, London and New York, pp. 113–40; and *Harnessing Fortune* (specifically pp. 13–15 and Chapters 2, 3 and 9) for a more in-depth discussion on ‘containment and separation’ in the creation of growth in both people and fortune in the creation of Mongolian personhood.

21 Humphrey, C. 1995, ‘Chiefly and shamanist landscapes in Mongolia’, in E. Hirsch and Michael O’Hanlon (eds), *The Anthropology of Landscape: Perspectives on place and space*, Clarendon Press and Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, pp. 135–62, at p. 135.

22 Empson, ‘Separating and containing people and things in Mongolia’, pp. 113–40; Empson, *Harnessing Fortune*.

23 Empson, *Harnessing Fortune*, pp. 13–14.

Socialist Cultural Programs and the Movement of 'The Power of Two Homelands'

Stepping back from the song text, the song itself represents a form of mobility and traversing of landscape and social space. It is indicative of a wider form of nostalgia that extends beyond the bittersweet emotion contained in its text, and this part of the song's significance can be seen when focusing on the role of the song's melody. During my fieldwork, 'The Power of Two Homelands' was a song that was considered unequivocally Altai Urianghai, unlike other songs sung in Duut of which the origins were debated. Yet, despite its locality, it also correlates with a national song genre. Once, when I was in Ulaanbaatar staying with a Zahchin friend originally from Hovd, I worked on a musical transcription of the song. My friend commented on what I was doing and I played her a recording of it. She described the song as a *Mongolyn ardyn duu*: a Mongolian song known throughout the country, and one that was first popularised under socialism.

This dual association as a song that is both Altai Urianghai and national stems from practices undertaken during Mongolian socialist cultural programs. These programs were part of an overall attempt to create a 'new national identity for a unified socialist nation' or *ündesten*.²⁴ Following increased hardline socialist directives during the 1930s in the Soviet Union, in Mongolia, 'cultural enlightenment' programs were intensified.²⁵ Part of this cultural program was to ensure the 'synthesis of diverse performance styles into one intellectual cultural and national style' with the 'expectation that each *yastan* (nationality) would renounce its own identity to become part of a unified socialist *ündesten*'.²⁶ In the creation of this unified nationalism, an emphasis was placed on the eastern, *halh* Mongol ethnic majority. During the 1950s, government-led ethnographers collected 'songs, music, myths, legends and epics'.²⁷ Composite versions of songs that were 'national in content' were published.²⁸ This resulted in many songs from different areas and *yastans* or ethnic groups being published in national compendiums as *halh*, which, by association, were deemed national Mongolian songs by a *halh* political elite. As noted by M. Ganbold: 'during socialist times, songs weren't labelled Urianghai or Zahchin, only as eastern Mongolian folksong. There were many [western, Altai] Urianghai songs included in this [so-called] "eastern" collection.'²⁹

24 Pegg, *Mongolian Music, Dance and Oral Narrative*, p. 249.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 254.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 249.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 249.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 249.

29 M. Ganbold, Personal communication, 29 October 2010.

These collection projects coincided with socialist changes in performance practice. The changes were aimed to 'raise the cultural level'³⁰ of rural Mongolian people, and included the opportunity for such people to be involved in the stage musical arts. This happened through the establishment of, first, amateur and subsequently professional musical ensembles, theatres, concert halls and cultural clubs throughout the country³¹ as early as the mid 1920s.³² These performance practices increased the movement of singers and brought together different ethnic musical influences into the same concert programs. Musicians from different rural areas brought songs they had previously learnt in ceremonial spaces into the concert space. In Hovd, the provincial centre, Hovd City's Drama Theatre was an important locus of cultural performance in the region, and to some extent remains so today. Many well-known performers in surrounding sums were requested to come and sing in the Hovd Theatre, some gaining ongoing notoriety for their musical prowess.

'The Power of Two Homelands' was swept up into these socialist performance practices of collecting, reframing and disseminating music. As also noted by M. Ganbold, how this exactly occurred is likely to have been a result of these socialist cultural programs. A singer brought this song to the stage and it was subsequently popularised and disseminated throughout the country, either in compendiums or via radio. M. Ganbold states: 'All Mongolian people know about this song. During the socialist period, a famous singer sung that song. They sung that song under an eastern Mongolian song name, but it is an Urianghai song. Urianghai is the birthplace of this song.'³³

Music, Emotion and Cultural Memory in Song

In contemporary Mongolia, songs are performed both for ceremonial occasions and on stage, where the stage has become an integral part of local musical practice. Songs that previously were included in these socialist collections now form a significant part of the mosaic of current Duut musical repertoire. Since 1990, 'The Power of Two Homelands' has become a popular song amongst Altai Urianghai people in western Mongolia, and it is well known more widely by people in Hovd. It is now described as an authentic Altai Urianghai song, forming another part of the song's 'journey' from one that was purely Altai Urianghai to a national Mongolian song, and its subsequent reclamation as significant in contemporary Urianghai cultural practice.

30 Marsh, *Moving the world through two strings*, p. 65.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 65.

32 Pegg, *Mongolian Music, Dance and Oral Narrative*, p. 253.

33 M. Ganbold, Interview with the author, 29 October 2010.

Ul - laar yaa - j(ee) da wii daa maa nim Uul zaad yaj

(ee) sal ii daa maa nim Had - aar ya - j(ee) daa - win

daa maa - nim har-gaal - laad ya - j(ee) sal-in daa maa - nim. Sal

naa gi geed sa-la-ha soo (choo) sal-lin gui nut gin er -

heer sah-al-aa naa. Hol - joo gi geed hol-jil so (choo) ho - yer

mt - giin er - he - er hol - jil loo.

Figure 1 'The Power of Two Homelands'. Tsevegjav singing in his ger, 01.12.2010

Source: Transcription by author

Figure 2 Pentatonic minor scale used in 'The Power of Two Homelands'

Source: Transcription by author

'The Power of Two Homelands' was sung often throughout my fieldwork: on long car trips on the way to Hovd and for ceremonial occasions—both weddings and hair-cutting ceremonies. When someone started singing this song, the opening notes of the melody evoked nods of agreement, where people indicated that this song is Altai Urianghai. Notably, among the different examples of the song sung both to me and in concerts, the melody was the most consistent musical element of each rendition. Whilst Legrain notes in his work on Darhad music in north-central Mongolia that 'people say that lyrics of songs travel from one melody to another depending on the origin of the singer',³⁴ in the case of 'The Power of Two Homelands', the melody stayed consistent whilst singers added their variation to the lyrics. Whilst the overall topic and content of the song remained consistent between singers, singers added their own poetic or grammatical variations, as seen in this rendition sung by Duut singer Tsevegjav (see audio example 1³⁵). In this version, Tsevegjav sings the same lyrics as transcribed by M. Ganbold in 1991; however, Tsevegjav adds his own grammatical changes, including several vocables (written in parentheses).

Significantly, the song was also a popular choice at the *Altai Urianghai Ih Naadam* or 'Big Festival' held in Altaintsogts Sum in Bayan Olgii Province in September 2009. The singer Tsendmaa from Mönhairhan Sum, a neighbouring Altai Urianghai sum to Duut, performed the song with two different types of accompaniment, both of which could be said to reflect the song's varied musical background. First, in this version, a heterophonic accompaniment was played by Purevdorj, a *morin huur* (horse-head fiddle) player who was living in Duut in 2009 and 2010. Halfway through the song, a chordal synthesiser took over the accompaniment, played by a man from the wider Altai Urianghai area.

See audio Example 2 'The Power of Two Homelands', performed by Tsendmaa, Purevdorj on *morin huur* and a synthesiser player at the *Altai Urianghai Ih Naadam*, Altaintsogts Sum, Bayan Olgii Province, 11 September 2009.³⁶

While this melody is recognised as Altai Urianghai, it is also acknowledged as having an innate authenticity by other peoples of different ethnicities within Hovd. As noted by a well-known western-*halh* musician in Hovd, Sengedorj, the power of the melody is a marker of its authenticity. He locates the melody's authenticity in its ability to evoke emotions stemming from the mountainous landscape. Sengedorj remarked:

34 Legrain, 'Confrontation on the River Ivd', p. 338.

35 View associated media files via the ANU E Press website <<http://epress.anu.edu.au/titles/humanities-research-journal-series/volume-xix-no-3-2013>>

36 View associated media files via the ANU E Press website <<http://epress.anu.edu.au/titles/humanities-research-journal-series/volume-xix-no-3-2013>>

[N]ature or mountains never look bad in any kind of society or time. That mountain was beautiful in socialist time, it is also beautiful in capitalist time... This song *The Power of Two Homelands*, is in a kind of classic form. It requires a lot of voice range, and from that voice range you can see the inner feeling of the person singing that song. This song was born by the force of circumstances [these lovers] found themselves in.³⁷

For Sengedorj, the pentatonic minor scale and the wide vocal range required to sing this song constitute a musical encapsulation of the power of the emotion the song expresses. The combined parts of the song—the melody, the words and the mountainous Altai Urianghai environment from which it originated—are what for Sengedorj imbue this song with a sense of authenticity, of having stemmed from humans' relationships with and connection to the elements of nature in this region.

The current performance practice of and discourse surrounding 'The Power of Two Homelands' present a complex interweaving of different perspectives around the theme of loss amongst a group of people who have experienced vast political and social changes, and for whom movement and separation are continued parts of everyday life. The singing of this song effectively evokes the power of emotional sadness brought about by a separation between differing homelands and the realities that this mountainous mobile pastoralist existence presents. At the same time, this song—having stemmed from the mountains, from a regional Altai Urianghai *nutag* or homeland—results in the song forming an important part of the musical re-imagination of an Altai Urianghai space in the face of past socialist cultural practices and ongoing social change. In the reflections of the musician Sengedorj, this song also represents the power of emotion as a driving force in the creation of song. It was people's connection to the mountains themselves that drove them to experience and lament the loss of each other, where this song is 'the narrative of peoples' heart[s]'.³⁸

37 N. Sengedorj, Interview with the author, 30 October 2010.

38 Ibid.

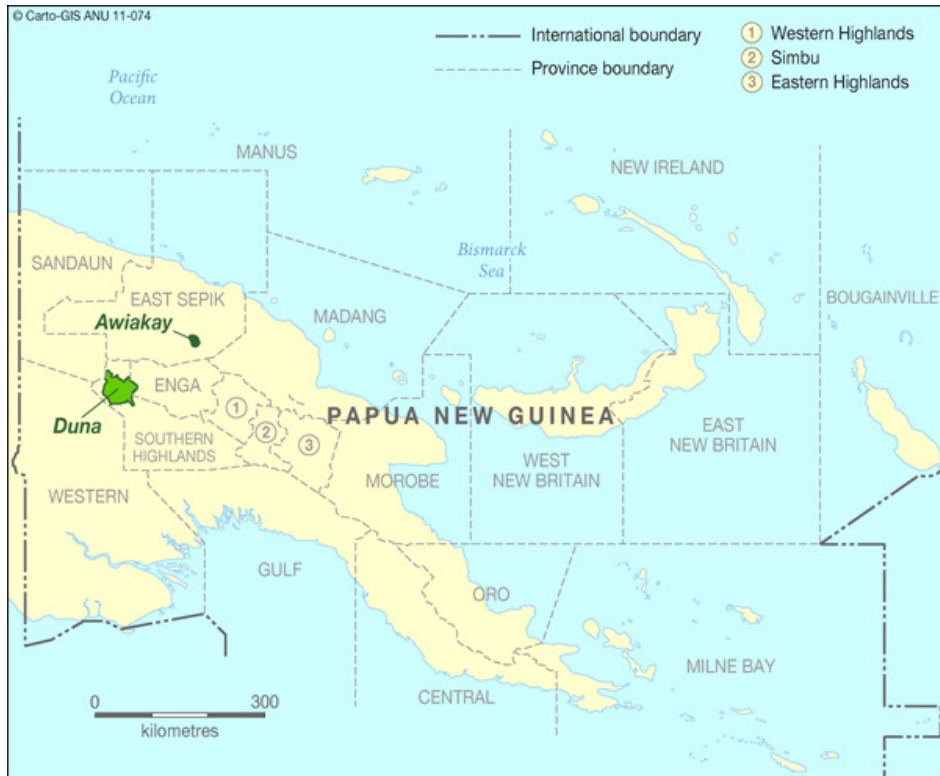
Laments and Relational Personhood: Case studies from Duna and Awiakay societies of Papua New Guinea

Kirsty Gillespie and Darja Hoenigman

Lamenting is a very important aspect of musical culture across Papua New Guinea, a country of more than 800 indigenous language groups and a vast variety of cultural practices.¹ Many anthropological texts address the lament across the country.² In Papua New Guinea, laments—which we define for our purposes as verbal expressions that are performed at the death of a person or other living being (as opposed to verbal expressions about loss more generally)—are established genres that usually have a name or category attached to them. Although lamenting is typically the domain of women, and older women in particular, who bring to the genre a great body of knowledge and considerable skill accumulated over years of mourning, both adult men and women can be composers and performers of laments, particularly in Awiakay society. Laments in Papua New Guinea can be microcosms of a culture; they contain within them much detail about the life of the deceased, and the lamenter, listing the places of their heritage, the activities they once performed and their role within the community, as well as pointing to any existing tensions in relationships between the lamenter and other members of the community, and thus aiming at socially appropriate actions that need to be taken in order to re-establish distorted relationships. Laments are thus as much a part of the present (and consequently the future) as they are of the past. Therefore, to examine a lament closely is to learn much about Papua New Guinean cultures.

1 This chapter is based on two individual papers presented by the authors at the round table of the Laments Colloquium organised by the International Council for Traditional Music and the School of Music, The Australian National University. We would like to thank the organisers for inviting us to participate at the colloquium, and Andrew Pawley, Alan Rumsey and Aung Si for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. In addition, Gillespie wishes to thank the Duna people with whom she has worked for allowing her to record and study laments with them, and also Lila San Roque for ongoing linguistic advice. Hoenigman would like to acknowledge Pip Deveson, Gary Kildea and Robert Nugent for their inspiration, advice and help with editing and subtitling the film about Kununda's lament, the excerpt of which accompanies this chapter. Hoenigman's warmest appreciation goes to Awiakay people, and in particular to her late adoptive mother, Susi Kununda, for letting her record the lament discussed in this paper and teaching her proper Awiakay ways until the end of her days.

2 See, for example, Schieffelin, Edward L. 1976, *The Sorrow of the Lonely and the Burning of the Dancers*, St Martin's Press, New York; Feld, Steven 1982, *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, weeping, sound and poetics in Kaluli expression*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia; Weiner, James F. 1991, *The Empty Place: Poetry, space and being among the Foi of Papua New Guinea*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis.



Map 1 Map of Papua New Guinea indicating Awiakay and Duna land

Source: Carto-GIS, The Australian National University

In this chapter, we consider laments from two unrelated language groups in Papua New Guinea with which we have worked closely: the Duna of the Southern Highlands Province/Hela region who live around Lake Kopyago (Gillespie), and the Awiakay, a small community of about 300 people living in Kanjimei village in the lowland rainforest of the Sepik southern flood plain in East Sepik Province (Hoenigman). We show examples of people lamenting both for deceased people and for deceased dogs, who are in some Papua New Guinean cultures such as the Awiakay seen as their owners' extensions.

We would like to frame these laments within a discourse of relational personhood as it relates to both cultures. In recent times there has been considerable debate in the field of Melanesian anthropology over the idea of 'personhood' and the 'individual'. There is a strong view held by some scholars against applying a Western notion of the 'individual' to Melanesian societies; these scholars argue that a Melanesian person should instead be considered a 'dividual'—that is, someone who is relationally constituted, someone who is defined largely by their

relationships with others.³ The laments we present today, whilst illustrating the personal or ‘individual’ loss experienced by the lamenter, show clearly these social relationships and the loss that is experienced by the wider community of which the deceased was a part. As it will be seen in the second case study, these laments can also be used as an expression of existing imbalances in the community and thus be part of the process of righting such perceived wrongs.

Duna Laments

For the Duna, lamenting so dominates the musical landscape of women’s performance that it was thought for a time that there was no other style sung by them worth describing: ‘Except for mourning laments and tuneless ditties sung while gardening or walking home in the rain, Duna women do not really sing at all.’⁴ While women are the primary performers of laments in Duna culture, some men also sing laments, though usually only when experiencing strong emotions at the death of someone closely related to them, and not in the ritual way that women do. Here we will consider examples of both a Duna woman and a Duna man lamenting, and show how this illustrates the idea of the Melanesian relational person. The two laments, belonging to the general category of *khene ipakana* (‘death songs’), as they are known in the Duna language, represent the spontaneous musical outpourings on the sudden death of the twenty-year-old Duna woman Wakili Akuri, in February 2005, by those close to her.

Kipu’s Lament

Kipu Piero was a close friend of Wakili. Wakili lived with Kipu, her husband, Kenny, and children in their hamlet near Lake Kopiago until a few months before her death, when she had returned to live with her parents. Wakili was like a sister to Kipu (who had only brothers), helping with chores and with looking after Kipu’s four children—particularly the youngest, Monika, Kipu’s only girl. On the morning of Wakili’s death, a very emotional Kipu circled the houses of the hamlet crying for Wakili. The following are single line excerpts from this lament:⁵

3 See Strathern, Marilyn 1988, *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with women and problems with society in Melanesia*, University of California Press, Berkeley.

4 Modjeska, Charles Nicholas 1977, *Production among the Duna: aspects of horticultural intensification in central New Guinea*, PhD dissertation, The Australian National University, Canberra, p. 332.

5 A full transcript and the associated audio file (named Audio 14) can be found in Gillespie, Kirsty 2010, *Steep Slopes: Music and change in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea*, ANU E Press, Canberra. <http://epress.anu.edu.au/titles/steep_slopes_citation>, pp. 223–32.

Example 1 Excerpts from Kipu's lament

aluarena kenaka aru awanana na panenope?

We two care for and cradle the blonde children, now what will I do...

na wara nendeki nangayana na panenope?

I don't do and make friends with other wara women, now what will I do...

Na ayako wanpis na ko kono neyarape...

I'm a lone ayako, weren't you thinking...

warali suni narayania ruwata kenaka aru awanana na panenope?

You said I had no lastborn warali suni sister and we two would care for and cradle (my children), now what will I do...

Monika kampani koneya antia wali-a aki pora antia wali-a

(My daughter) Monika's true companion, mother oh, what have you done? Mother oh...



Figure 1 Kipu carries daughter, Monika (in foreground), as they ascend with others to Wakili's gravesite for the burial

Photograph by K. Gillespie

In her grief, Kipu expresses her own loss but also the hole now made in the family circle, and evokes the responsibilities now unfulfilled. Wakili is depicted as child carer and younger sister figure, providing important companionship to Kipu and her children, in particular Kipu's only daughter, Monika, and now that she has departed, there is no-one to fill this place. Wakili is constituted by these roles and relationships alone in this lament—thus presented as a relational person.

Soti's Lament

Soti Mbulu was Wakili's maternal uncle, and one of very few men heard to sing at the time of her death. On the day of Wakili's funeral, Soti leant on the roof for the coffin that was being constructed, and, first in his full voice and then falsetto, sang of his own feelings of sorrow at her death, and then of the gardening she used to do, preparing the soil for the planting of sweet potato—a staple food in the Duna diet. One of the most important roles for a female in a Duna community is to produce food, and Wakili's sudden exit from the mortal world means there is a gap in the supply of this labour. It is very clear in Duna songs and Duna culture more generally that food nurtures people and people make relationships, and that a lack of food is symptomatic of unbalanced relationships within the community.⁶ The importance of sharing food will also be shown in the Awiakay case study. The motif of food in this Duna lament is further emphasised in the words with which Soti chooses to express his 'individual' grief, as he describes himself as literally 'eating' sorrow (*neya* meaning here 'to eat', which Gillespie has translated as 'to stomach').⁷

Example 2 Excerpt from Soti's lament

ko ngaya kata papu neya kata ngoyana, antia-o

You go and make me stomach this sorrow, then you leave, mother oh

ko ngaya kata pape neya kata ngoyana, antia-o

You go and make me stomach this pape sorrow, then you leave, mother oh

ko ngaya kata yaraka neya kata ngoyana, antia-o

6 See *ibid.*, pp. 134–8.

7 The expression of eating sorrow is also written about in the King James version of the Bible. Psalm 127:2 states: 'It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep.' The fact that this expression occurs in both endogenous and exogenous settings gives further support to the suggestion that both rupture and continuity can exist in the 'local modernity' of the contemporary Papua New Guinean experience. See Jebens, Holger 2011, 'Beyond globalisation and localisation: denominational pluralism in a Papua New Guinean village', *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 91–110, at p. 92. For further discussion on this lament, see Gillespie, *Steep Slopes*, pp. 100–3.

You go and make me stomach this yaraka sorrow, then you leave, mother
oh

koya laranata ndolu weipe? antia-o

You move the mud, one time will you come back? Mother oh

mopotia laranata ndolu weipe? antia-o

Mopotia sweet potato mounds, move the mud, one time will you come
back? Mother oh

yarakatia laranata ndolu weipe? antia-o

Yarakatia sweet potato mounds, move the mud, one time will you come
back? Mother oh



Figure 2 Soti sings against the coffin roof

Photograph by K. Gillespie

We have characterised the above two laments as ‘spontaneous’, but it is worth explaining this a little further. By spontaneous we mean in a social sense: these singers have not sat down in the mourning house by the body with the intent to cry, as is the case for many people during this mourning period. Their laments are not primarily driven by an expectation for them to sing at that particular time in order to show their concern and respect, as those less close to the deceased might do, or to assist the deceased’s movement into the afterlife, as with the longer repetitive laments that older women in the community might perform. These laments are driven primarily by emotion. They do, however, conform to both musical and textual conventions. Musically these laments are generally made up of descending phrases that start either a third or often a fifth above a tonal centre, and then descend to dwell on the tonal centre for several syllables before ending the phrase with some ornamentation in the form of brief steps either side of the tonal centre.⁸

The text, too, conforms to a particular style, displaying much repetition and word substitution with each repetition. The most valued laments use poetic vocabulary known as *kēiyaka* (translated in English as ‘praise names’ due to the general exalting nature of them) to name places and people. There are several of such *kēiyaka* for any place or person, and this is how the song form becomes known as *khene ipakana yakaya*—*yakaya* meaning to ‘name’ or ‘list’ (these special names have been underlined in the above examples). Thus, whilst these very emotional expressions in song are unrehearsed and in a sense unprepared, they are recognised as laments due to their clear adherence to an established set of aesthetic requirements.

Awiakay Laments

Of the several diverse terms used for this particular genre in English, such as dirge, mourning song, wailing song, funerary chant, wailing and lament, the most suitable gloss for the Awiakay term *pukupuku kaṅapla* is Stephen Feld’s term ‘sung-texted melodic weeping’,⁹ because it best describes the practice. *Pukupuku* can be translated as ‘grief’, ‘worry’, ‘keeping in thoughts’, whereas *kaṅapla* is third-person plural present tense for ‘cry’ (that is, ‘they are crying’) and functions as the English gerund.

Some of the traditional mourning practices of the Awiakay people, in which the relatives of the deceased would rub their bodies with white clay and stay

⁸ For a musical transcription of the first minute of Kipu’s lament, see Gillespie, *Steep Slopes*, p. 97.

⁹ Feld, *Sound and Sentiment*, p. 93.

in *haus kraï* (Tok Pisin¹⁰ term for ‘mourning house’) for several weeks or even months,¹¹ have been abandoned since 1995 when the Catholic charismatic movement, which demanded a radical break with tradition, was brought to the village. This has not had much effect, however, on the composition of melodic texted crying, which accompanies every death.

Weeping for Deceased People

Crying for a deceased person (first emotional, then hysterical, later melodic and eventually accompanied by text) starts at the moment when people feel the spirit *mima* has left the body. *Oma* ‘body (of a living person)’ thus becomes *tundia* ‘dead body’, and *mima*, which stands for ‘a person’s spirit, insideness, seat of thoughts, knowledge, mind’, turns into *tangia*, ‘the spirit of the dead’.¹² It stays close to the body and people avoid calling the name of the deceased, as their recently departed spirit could come back and harm them. Instead, they use avoidance terms, such as ‘the bald head’ or ‘the old man’ for the oldest, recently deceased man in the village, and so on.

People nowadays cry until just after the funeral; then they encourage each other to stop.¹³ They say that ‘worry will destroy a person’ and ‘sadness will kill life’ and they reproach those who are overwhelmed with sadness. Nevertheless, one can occasionally hear melodic weeping coming from the house of the deceased even several months after their death. In the example we discuss here, sung-texted-melodic weeping shows a repeated pattern of alternations between passages of sung text and melodic weeping, organised on three descending pitches, the lowest one always ending with sobbing.

SUNG TEXT

SUNG TEXT continued/MELODIC WEEPING

MELODIC WEEPING[SOBBING/CRYING]

It is composed and performed by adult men and women. Although the overall pattern and even some of the phrases are repeated (particularly rhetorical questions aimed at the deceased, asking why they have left without telling anyone, and so on), the content of every lament is unique, depending on the relationship of the deceased and the lamenter. The weeping person usually sings about the places in Awiakay land where the deceased walked, mentions

10 Tok Pisin is an English-based creole, which functions as a lingua franca and is one of the national languages of Papua New Guinea.

11 Hoenigman, Darja 2007, Language and myth in Kanjimeï, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea, MA thesis, Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis, Ljubljana Graduate School of the Humanities, Ljubljana, pp. 59–62.

12 Compare with: Telban, Borut 2001, *Andaypa: Eseji o smrti v novogvinejski skupnosti*, Založba Obzorja, Maribor, Slovenia, p. 57.

13 Compare with: Feld, *Sound and Sentiment*, p. 96.

their common experiences, grieves over their unfinished work and lists all the good that the deceased did for them, lamenting the fact that there will now be no-one to take care of them. They also bring out their own grievances, which are directed at the living members of the society.

Weeping for Dogs

As a predominantly hunter-gatherer society, the Awiakay have always had close relationship with their dogs. They appear in a great number of myths. According to one myth, women used to marry dogs who would vomit food for them. One day, one woman discovered a man, and since then dogs have been helping the Awiakay hunt for pigs and cassowaries. In the days when the Awiakay still practised male initiation, one of the most important things that a boy learned during the course of it was how to use hunting magic to make his dog kill many pigs. Apart from people, only dogs and spirit objects have names. Dogs are normally named after powerful spirits. In 2009, of the 83 adult dogs in Kanjimei, 51 had spirit names, seven were named after pain-inflicting plants or animals and 25 dogs carried names borrowed from Tok Pisin, which are also perceived as powerful, as they come from the outside world. Not only among the Awiakay, but also in the wider Sepik area, a puppy is an important gift, which eventually needs to be reciprocated. Dogs are the only mammals that have never been eaten by the Awiakay. Instead, they are fed with sago and treated relatively well. They are only hit or have something thrown at them when they come too close to food or when they fight. A dog becomes an extension of its owner and is in Awiakay belief the only animal that can be, like humans, attacked and killed by a *sanguma* (Tok Pisin for a kind of a sorcerer, in this area of Papua New Guinea best described as 'assault sorcerer').

Over almost 20 months of fieldwork in Kanjimei, Hoenigman has recorded only one lament for a dog. One of the reasons is that more dogs perish on hunting trips when wounded in a fight with a pig or a cassowary than die of old age. In such a case the dog is buried and cried for in the forest. Their owners' laments are thus never heard by anyone else. Hoenigman was told about two such cases in 2009.

Even when a dog dies in the village, however, this is not an event that would attract much attention, and a dog's burial goes unnoticed by most other people. No matter how important an individual dog is for its owner, it does not have much significance for Awiakay society more generally.



Figure 3 Awiakay man and woman go hunting with dogs

Drawing by Terens Saun, 2004

Kununda's Lament

One early afternoon in September 2004, Darja's classificatory brother Ingasim came to tell her that Mek had died and was about to be buried. Mek was the dog of Darja's adoptive mother, Kununda, and, as she had seen it hale and hearty the previous day, she rushed to ask her what had happened. She found her quietly crying in the bush behind her house, where her sister Pambain was digging a grave. When the hole was ready, she followed them to the house and saw Mek's body lying next to the wall. Kununda put him onto a leaf sheath, leaned against a post supporting the storage rack above the hearth and started weeping.¹⁴

¹⁴ Transcription conventions followed in Kununda's lament: 1 line numbers, *Awiakay text*, *Tok Pisin*, interlinear glosses, [clarification of translation].

KUNUNDA:

- 1 *Aunda makangumyame koŋ aunda nombondimbomiñ.*
He was wandering around in the bush and taking care of them, and they just ate it all up [finished all the pigs he killed].
[He was hunting for everyone and they just ate it all.]
- Aye...*
Ey...
- Aunda nombopua, e-e.*
They just ate it, e-e.
- Aunda nombondimbua, e-e.*
They just finished it up, e-e.
- 5 *E-e-e-e...*
E-e-e-e.
Usaŋumbian pepok, e-e...
I tried to tell them, e-e.
- Aunda maŋgombok, aye-e.*
I just gave it [the meat of the pigs that the dog had killed] to them, aye-e.
- Aunda pokondimbua, e-e.*
They just hit him, e-e.
- Tuŋgoy tam aka tui nombopokoy, e-e.*
I didn't eat my dog's kill secretly by myself, e-e.
- 10 *Tam—o, e-e.*
Dog—oh, e-e.
- Kambanja kolokotay aka iñipepok e-e.*
I didn't hide a little thing [I shared all meat], e-e.
- Aunda pokondimbua, e-e.*
They just hit him, e-e.
- Ambla aka nombopok, papatuŋ pakaiñasipep, e-e.*
I didn't eat it by myself, didn't hide it into a leaf sheath, e-e.
- Kay olukunja wambopuakay isomyawakopaŋ opiaŋgombep aka pakaiñasipok.*
When I saw others coming up to the bushcamp I didn't hide it [the meat].

15 *Tam—o, e-e.*

Dog—oh, e-e.

[Stops crying]

Maninjanda paŋgombek olukunja opiaŋgombep kopa maŋgombalik paŋgombuk aka timbupua.

I saw people [from Konmei who gave me the dog] and I asked them [my sons] for some money to compensate for the debt, but they didn't give me any.

Aunda aŋgainim yambian, yambian, yambian, ya menjenja aunda pokopep nombopua, aunda maŋgombok.

I've been walking around in deep worry, while they've been eating the meat [my dog] had killed. I gave it to them for nothing.

Olukunja ison yambakay iskamianjanda aka timbupua.

Those who searched for eaglewood did not give me a bit.

Kenda pokaŋgunga pekepua kumbin.

When they came down to the village, they would again hit [the dog].

20 *Kenda mengea nombopua, kenda pokaŋgumbua.*

They'd eat meat again and they'd hit my dog again.



Figure 4 Kununda weeping for her dog Mek

Photo: D. Hoenigman

In her lament, Kununda expresses her grievance that her sons would not help her reciprocate for the now deceased dog that had been given to her by people from Konmei village. By failing to do so they prevented her from being a moral person and fulfilling her obligation. She emphasises that she *is* a moral person by saying that she would never hide her dog's kill and eat it secretly by herself. This kind of behaviour is highly condemned in Awiakay society and is considered very antisocial, as one is expected to share all the food they find with others. While they all benefited from the dog, her sons did not pay attention to Kununda's worries, as she was indebted to people from another village. In that neglect, they did wrong to her. Moreover, by hitting the dog (probably chasing him away while they were eating his kill) they did wrong to Mek, which was again directed at Kununda, as dogs are their owners' extensions.

Following the taboo against uttering deceased persons' names, in her weeping, Kununda never mentions Mek's name, but always calls it just 'dog'. After she stopped crying, Kununda kept complaining about how she and Mek had been mistreated by her sons, while her sister Pambain waited to carry the dead dog away. Kununda stayed in the house, but her melodic crying could still be heard while we were burying the dog.

The reader who has access to the Internet is now invited to go to the following link and watch a film excerpt, which is a recording of the event discussed above.

See film 1 [5:35] Kununda's Lament by Darja Hoenigman¹⁵

In Awiakay society a lament is not just an expression of grief and loss. It is also a means to bring out grievances about disorders in social relations: about other people's wrongdoings towards the deceased or, even more often, towards the lamenter him/herself.¹⁶ This practice is in accord with the Awiakay conviction that any grievances, resentments or worries should be let out, lest they lead to sickness—and death.

Conclusion

For the Duna and the Awiakay, then, laments are more than the expression of an individual person's grief in song. Laments locate the deceased within their mortal life, and articulate the deceased's relationships with their community

¹⁵ View associated media files via the ANU E Press website <<http://epress.anu.edu.au/titles/humanities-research-journal-series/volume-xix-no-3-2013>>

¹⁶ The Duna lament form *khene ipakana yakaya* has also been used as a platform to complain of unsatisfactory domestic relations. In one particular case the repetitive textual style and word substitution format allowed Kipu, on an occasion, to list her husband and all her children in turn and complain of them each causing her headaches with their unsatisfactory behaviour. See Gillespie, Kirsty 2010, 'Giving women a voice: Christian songs and female expression at Kopiago, Papua New Guinea', *Perfect Beat*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 7–24, at pp. 15–16.

and the roles they have played within that community. Thus, laments present the deceased—as well as the lamenter—not only as individuals, but also as relational entities. In so many ways then, laments are a ‘shared experience’, as Steven Feld holds for Kaluli song.¹⁷ Even as the deceased has left the mortal world, he/she continues to embody those relationships for those who are left behind.

¹⁷ Feld, *Sound and Sentiment*, p. 34; Feld, Steven 1987, ‘Dialogic editing: interpreting how Kaluli read sound and sentiment’, *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 190–210, at p. 200.

Cultural Sustainability and Loss in Sydney's Chinese Community

Nicholas Ng

Introduction

It is often supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained.¹

There are many challenges for those who move from one country to settle in another. Since 2001, I have investigated the issue of gain from loss in the Chinese community of Sydney. Noting the wealth of musical genres at both community and professional levels, I decided to focus on three groups that have responded to the issue of cultural loss in diverse, yet similar ways. These groups are the Australian Catholic Chinese Community (ACCC), the Buddha's Light International Association, Sydney (BLIA SYD), and the Australian Chinese Teo Chew Association (ACTCA), three collectivities within the larger Australian Chinese community of Sydney. These ethno-specific organisations comprise Chinese immigrants and their descendents with diverse migration histories and settlement patterns. Countries of origin range from Mainland China, Taiwan and the Hong Kong Semi-Autonomous Region (SAR) to Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia and Timor-Leste. Drawing inspiration from Salman Rushdie's *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and criticism, 1981–1991*, this paper will show that where there might be considerable loss through the migratory process, there is also much that can be gained. My study applies to Chinese Australians who have chosen to create a new home in Australia, rather than diasporans who might be classed as 'cosmopolitans' in their constant movement from country to country.

Migration Blues

It is a well-known fact that migration is often accompanied by feelings of loss at various levels. There is, for instance, financial loss due to an acute change in

¹ Rushdie, Salman 1991, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and criticism, 1981–1991*, Viking and Granta, New York, p. 5.

employment and environment.² Further contestation of traditional values might follow with wives and teenage children finding employment to help support the family.³ There is also an overriding sense of cultural loss experienced by many from different age groups⁴ who may give up on their home culture in a process that sociologist Chan Kwok-Bun terms 'passing'.⁵ The various efforts to cope with this and other complex issues of migration help locate and maintain the identity of diasporans in the process of assimilation and adaptation.⁶ Recreational places where music is performed indeed aid with maintaining a sense of home in the new country. This is revealed in the work of Casey Man Kong Lum⁷ and Frederick Lau,⁸ who have studied with great detail the function of the Chinese karaoke scene in California and Bangkok respectively.

In Chinese communities everywhere, social networks have been established to facilitate a range of religious and voluntary socio-cultural organisations such as schools, religious institutions and the age-old clan system of Chinese societies; much scholarly research has been conducted in this area.⁹ Kuah-Pearce found that this type of social network construction assists migrants in dealing with homesickness and residual feelings of loss in several dimensions.¹⁰

2 Mak, A. S. and Chan, H. 1995, 'Chinese family values in Australia', in R. Hartley (ed.), *Families and Cultural Diversity in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, in association with the Australian Institute of Family Studies, St Leonards, NSW, pp. 70–95.

3 Ibid. Considerable study has been conducted on the viridity of loss experienced by female migrants; see Halfacree and Boyle 1999; Silvey and Lawson 1999. As wives, sisters, aunts and housebound grandmothers, female migrants suffer from the loss of the support network of family and friends (Creese, Dyck and McLaren 1999; Man 1993), and a personal sense of financial security in employment (Bonney and Love 1991; Halfacree 1995).

4 Eng, D. 1999, 'Melancholia/postcoloniality: loss in The Floating Life (sic)', *Qui Parle*, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 137–50, 161–4; Stein, B. 1981, 'The refugee experience: defining the parameters of a field study', *International Migration Review*, vol. 15, nos 1–2, pp. 320–30.

5 Chan, Kwok-Bun 2005, *Chinese Identities, Ethnicity and Cosmopolitanism*, Routledge, London.

6 Kuah-Pearce, K. E. 2006, 'Locating the self in the Chinese diaspora: introductory remarks', *Asian Studies Review*, vol. 30, pp. 217–21, at p. 219.

7 Lum, Casey Man Kong 1996, *In Search of a Voice: Karaoke and the construction of identity in Chinese America*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, NJ.

8 Lau, Frederick 2005, 'Entertaining "Chineseness": Chinese singing clubs in contemporary Bangkok', *Visual Anthropology*, vol. 18, pp. 143–66.

9 Fong, E. and Lee, L. [c. 2006], 'Ethnic church attendance and social participation of immigrants in Canada,' in K. E. Kuah-Pearce and E. Hu-Dehart (eds), *Voluntary Organizations in the Chinese Diaspora*, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong, pp. 253–68; Zhou, M. and Kim, R. Y. [c. 2006], 'The paradox of ethnicization and assimilation: the development of ethnic organizations in the Chinese immigrant community in the United States', in Kuah-Pearce and Hu-Dehart, *Voluntary Organizations in the Chinese Diaspora*, pp. 231–52; Lim, P. P. H. [c. 2006], 'Between tradition and modernity: the Chinese association of Johor Bahru, Malaysia', in Kuah-Pearce and Hu-Dehart, *Voluntary Organizations in the Chinese Diaspora*, pp. 29–52; Low, A. [c. 2006], 'The roles and contributions of Chinese women entrepreneurs in community organizations in Sydney', in Kuah-Pearce and Hu-Dehart, *Voluntary Organizations in the Chinese Diaspora*, pp. 201–30; Lu, X. 2001, 'Bicultural identity development and Chinese community formation: an ethnographic study of Chinese schools in Chicago', *The Howard Journal of Communications*, vol. 12, pp. 203–20; Wang, T. P. 1994, *The Origins of Chinese Kongsis*, Pelanduk Publications, Selangor, Malaysia; Warner, S. R. 1998, 'Immigration and religious communities in the United States', in R. S. Warner and J. G. Wittner (eds), *Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious communities and the new immigration*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, pp. 3–36; Yang, F. 1998, 'Tenacious unity in a contentious community: cultural and religious dynamics in a Chinese Christian church', in Warner and Wittner, *Gatherings in Diaspora*, pp. 333–64; Yang, F. 1999, *Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, assimilation, and adhesive identities*, Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, Pa.

10 Kuah-Pearce, 'Locating the self in the Chinese diaspora', p. 217.

Religion and the 'Ethnic Event'

In this paper, I propose that religious centres help instil a similar sense of belonging and future in the minds of migrants as a direct response to cultural loss. As the investigator and a member of the Sydney Chinese community (or one who has come from the same cultural zone), I began my research with the premise that the ethno-specific religious centres of a city are where one is best able to observe diasporans, and analyse ways in which they have come to approach their post-migratory experiences of cultural assimilation or preservation, or both. This perspective is inspired by Herberg's¹¹ study of Judeo-Christian, white (non-Anglophone) immigrants in the United States. Herberg found that, as part of their adjustment process in the pre-1960 period, immigrants would cling to religion while surrendering everything else connected to the mother country. The transmission of religion into later generations remained heavily significant for the purpose of ethnic identification, while languages were often lost within the second generation.¹² Non-white immigrant groups that followed continued to portray the same tendency for preservation of homeland culture in their respective religious communities.¹³

Similarly, religion and recreation, or 'religious recreation' (a term of my own invention), are arenas in which Chinese migrants in Sydney meet to resuscitate their otherwise stagnating cultural selves as part of the renegotiation process in their adopted homelands.¹⁴ Realising that 'where you're at' might be intimately connected to 'where you worship', my conceptual framework lies largely in religion (or religious recreation) as a lens or substrate for examining the Chinese immigrant sense of identity, as it is reflected by religious and musical practices. In order to best understand the notion of identity through music, language and the immigrant experience from this perspective, I will explicate religious gatherings as ethnic events.

Religious activities in migrant communities especially facilitate a number of ethno-specific interactions through which we may view the expression of

11 Herberg, Will 1960, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew: An essay in American religious sociology*, Doubleday, Garden City, NY.

12 *Ibid.*, pp. 27-9. Language shifts continue to be quite common in many migrant communities where the language of the vernacular is adopted in favour of the mother tongue. See Edwards 1984, 1987; Sebba and Tate 2002; Starks et al 2005.

13 Ebaugh, H. R. F. and Chafetz, J. S. (eds) 2000, *Religion and the New Immigrants: Continuities and adaptations in immigrant congregations*, AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, Calif., p. 18; Warner, R. S. and Wittner, J. G. (eds) 1998, *Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious communities and the new immigration*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia.

14 Amanda Scott (1994, Chinese written language in Hawai'i: the linguistic, social, and cultural significance for immigrant families, PhD thesis, University of Hawai'i, Hawai'i) observed that not all attendees at a Chinese church in Hawai'i attended for the sake of worship. Several in the congregation attended church to meet people of the same ethnicity and to take part in the social activities organised by the church community.

culture, self and identity. Such meetings help migrants deal with feelings of post-migratory loss. Chan Kwok-Bun combines the anthropological theories of Rosaldo,¹⁵ and De Vos and Romanucci-Ross¹⁶ with those of various other theorists to explain that ethnic events involve the thickening of ethnic identity during which traditions are not simply repeated but selectively re-enacted.¹⁷ In the ACCC and BLIA SYD, one can witness both instrumental and expressive ethnicities—terms used by Rosaldo.¹⁸

Marcelo Suárez-Orozco defines expressive ethnicity as involving subjective feelings of common origin and destiny.¹⁹ This is related to shared histories, language, religion and, of course, music. Instrumental ethnicity refers to ethnicity tactically used in identity politics to express self-affirmation and self-advancement. Here, diverse groups use ethnic categories, often with political intervention, for individual strategic purposes.²⁰ In most multicultural settings, we are able to find both instrumental and expressive ethnicities in private and public places such as homes, community centres and halls, or clan associations during festivals, special times of worship and ritualistic holidays.²¹ In such settings, one may often encounter interpersonal relationships with more expressive than instrumental ethnicity at work in order to meet the emotional need in migrants for ‘appreciation, affiliation, harmony and pleasure’.²² This brings to mind the singing of sacred songs in the ACCC and BLIA SYD—re-enacted ritualistic events that have been transformed by conscious choices made in the compositional and performative processes. In the words of Chan Kwok-Bun, ‘[r]ituals not only explain but also affirm group, and therefore personal origin’.²³

Rituals help us understand ‘where we are from’²⁴ and, just as importantly, ‘where we’re at’.²⁵ That is, they help solve the perpetual human inquiry into our origins, our actions and what makes us different.²⁶ A religious ritual in

15 Rosaldo, R. 1988, ‘Ethnic concentrations: the Ilongots in Upland Luzon’, in *Ethnic diversity and the control of natural resources in Southeast Asia*, Michigan Papers on South and Southeast Asia No. 32, Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Michigan, Edited by A. T. Rambo, K. Gillogly and K. L. Hutterer, Published in cooperation with the East-West Center, Environment and Policy Institute, Honolulu, pp. 161–71.

16 De Vos, G. and Romanucci-Ross, L. 1982, ‘Ethnicity: vessel of meaning and emblem of contrast’, in G. De Vos and L. Romanucci-Ross (eds), *Ethnic Identity: Cultural continuities and change*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, pp. 363–90.

17 See Chan, *Chinese Identities, Ethnicity and Cosmopolitanism*, p. 18.

18 Rosaldo, ‘Ethnic concentrations’.

19 Suárez-Orozco, M. M. 2000, ‘Everything you ever wanted to know about assimilation but were afraid to ask’, *Daedalus*, vol. 129, no. 4 (Fall), pp. 1–30, at p. 6.

20 Ibid.

21 Chan, *Chinese Identities, Ethnicity and Cosmopolitanism*, p. 18.

22 Rosaldo, ‘Ethnic concentrations’, p. 161.

23 Chan, *Chinese Identities, Ethnicity and Cosmopolitanism*, p. 18.

24 De Vos and Romanucci-Ross, ‘Ethnicity’.

25 Ang, I. 2003, ‘Together-in-difference: beyond diaspora, into hybridity’, *Asian Studies Review*, vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 141–54.

26 Chan, *Chinese Identities, Ethnicity and Cosmopolitanism*, p. 18.

ethno-specific communities is an exclusive event involving people of the same ethnicity. Religion helps assuage the pain of disassociation in immigrant communities while combating the stressful feeling of loss and a confused sense of identity—a common side effect of the relocation process.²⁷ Whereas religion as an expressive and instrumental ethnic marker has often been thought to bind people of all faiths, in this case it labels Chinese Catholics in Sydney as separate from other communities; however, it is a unifying force in that the people of the ACCC and BLIA SYD are indeed of vastly different histories; each respective religion is capable of bringing people together through ritual and sacred songs. This certainly helps combat the feelings of loss associated with migration.

As noted in my fieldwork observations, the music performed in the two community groups is largely affected by outsiders. De Vos and Romanucci-Ross,²⁸ and Rosaldo²⁹ claim that outsiders, who may be present at ethnic events, have a negative impact on the otherwise enjoyable gathering. Here, outsiders are seen as a threat to individual identities, and a potential hazard to the long-term survival of the community. Contrary to this theory, I find that outsiders do not threaten group survival in the ACCC and BLIA SYD. Rather than viewing outsiders as a threat, these two Chinese religious groups have opened their doors to non-Chinese participants and observers, and extended a general invitation to all those who are interested in attending what are normally ethno-specific events.

The presence of non-Chinese visitors helps sustain a certain local pride in community identity and culture in reaction to feelings of loss from having left the home country. Currently non-Chinese membership is still a minority in BLIA SYD and is practically non-existent in the ACCC; it would be interesting to witness the outcome of this openness towards outsiders in later decades. If the constituency of non-Chinese members grows, it may impact on the changing Chinese identity of this group, but perhaps not in a severe or negative way due to the higher, altruistic aim of both religious organisations, which is to worship as one people regardless of nationality and ethnicity.

The religious organisation of the ACCC and BLIA SYD provides an integrated structure through which people of the same ethnicity may meet and interact. Religious venues in these communities help participants co-celebrate in a kind of nostalgic and imagined homeland.³⁰ In this sense, religion is the key to the reproduction of culture that negotiates difference from the perspective of the

27 See Mitchell, T. 2003, 'Clara Law's *Floating Life* and Hong Kong-Australian "flexible citizenship"', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 26, no. 2 (March), pp. 278–300.

28 De Vos and Romanucci-Ross, 'Ethnicity'.

29 Rosaldo, 'Ethnic concentrations', p. 169.

30 Anderson, B. R. O. 1991, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, Second edn, Verso, London and New York.

host society; it is the source of understanding for immigrants and their children coming to terms with their relocation and residual sense of loss.³¹ Here, the following observation made by Timothy Smith on ethnic religion in America several decades ago still holds great relevance for the contemporary Chinese-Australian situation in Sydney:

[L]oneliness, the romanticizing of memories, the guilt for imagined desertion of parents and other relatives, and the search for community and identity in a world of strangers...At such moments, the concrete symbols of order or hope that the village church or priest and the annual round of religious observances had once provided seemed far away; yet the mysteries of individual existence as well as the confusing agonies of anomie cried out for religious explanation. For this reason, I shall argue, migration was often a theologizing experience.³²

Smith asserts that immigrant congregations are great loci of change and not simply transplanted traditional institutions that meet the most current and urgent needs of the community.³³ This point is illustrated by the example of religious leaders addressing the challenges of migration by reinterpreting holy texts to make them more personal and relevant, so that ancient practices may assume a new function.³⁴ Warner maintains that a certain adaptability is required of religion in order for it to survive in the host country because of the importance of religion in the immigrant group, whose cultural situation is now changed drastically and irreversibly due to migration.³⁵ As will be illustrated in the following case studies, music is part and parcel of the transformative process in Chinese religious practice as immigrants of Chinese descent adapt to fit within an Australian context.

Performing Identities

The ACCC and BLIA SYD have, since their respective years of establishment in 1954 and the mid 1980s, provided a refuge for migrants faced with loss and nostalgia for the home country. In order to instil a sense of belonging, while sharing in a common myth, narrative, history and future, members of both communities have created newer genres of devotional music performable within and outside ritual. From fieldwork conducted since 2000, I have collected many hours of sacred music—mostly vocal—that reinforce the theory that identity

31 Smith, T. 1978, 'Religion and ethnicity in America', *American Historical Review*, vol. 83 (December), pp. 155–85; Warner, 'Immigration and religious communities in the United States', p. 16.

32 Smith, 'Religion and ethnicity in America', pp. 1174–5.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 1178.

34 Warner, 'Immigration and religious communities in the United States'.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

formation in migrants and its expression through music are intrinsically linked to religion and religious practices. This repertory of sacred singing in the two communities ranges from traditional to recently composed sacred items in English, Cantonese and Mandarin.

The ACCC reflects the secularisation of ritual music encouraged by the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) through the promotion of the vernacular (or the 'vulgar tongues') and worldwide enculturation of the liturgy.³⁶ In the ACCC, children are given the catechism in English, and often sing English hymns. The Cantonese hymn 'Our Lady of China' is very popular, but of great popular interest in recent years is Eddie Ho's bilingual hymn 'Jesus Forever Reigns'. At important functions, the Mass becomes a trilingual affair, with Mass Ordinaries sung in English and a selection of readings, hymns and prayers in Mandarin, Cantonese and English to cater for non-Chinese dignitaries and visitors at important community events.

A similar situation of secularisation is found in BLIA SYD, although pop hymns and Buddhist hip-hop are not often performed within the Buddhist Mass, or 'Dharma Function', itself. 'Harmonise' and 'Stars and Clouds' are popular, newly composed English 'hymns' written in rock-ballad style with matching hand gestures. BLIA SYD is an organisation well known for its political aptitude. Public functions are always attended by local Members of Parliament, dignitaries from the police force and other influential members of society. In 2004, the NSW Police Band played the well-known 'Ode to the Triple Gem', written and arranged by the Order's Grand Master, Hsing Yun. The community, and its sister communities throughout Australia, strives to present a harmonious, environmentally concerned and Australian Chinese image. Ritual is accompanied by traditional music taken from the homeland in the native tongue, while official prayers have since the 1980s been recited in Mandarin and then English.

36 For more on enculturation, particularly in Chinese Catholicism, see Ng, Nicholas 2009, 'Domesticating the foreign: singing salvation through translation in the Australian Catholic Chinese community', in Amy Chan and Alistair Nelson (eds), *Sounds in Translation*, ANU E Press, Canberra, pp. 111–44.

In both communities, religion and music, in addition to language, help differentiate one's self from the multicultural milieu, and as an effective strategy for handling loss. Through the substrate of the ethnic ritual, the sacred song of the two sub-communities is a vehicle 'by which people can share emotions, intentions and meanings'.³⁷ With advances in music technology, individuals may extend the bonding process outside the sacred space of the church or temple to public places and even at home. Despite the many differences between the two subgroups, we may find in the ACCC and BLIA SYD the preservation of culture on the one hand and on the other the attempt to modernise due to the pressures of migration. There is also the conscious, or perhaps not so conscious, choice of maintaining both old and new in the hybrid combination of homeland traditions and modern practices as a means for adaptation without allowing the past to fade into obscurity. The catalyst for such culturally revitalising and what we might call a forward-moving, progressive attitude is in part the need to resolve the sense of displacement that is part of the migrant's diaspora experience.³⁸

Through religion and various socio-cultural practices including the making of music, Australian-Chinese immigrants, in a similar way to the immigrants of America, keep themselves and their offspring apart and distinct from other migrant groups and the dominant Anglo-Australian culture. Such communal bonding is expressed in certain conscious choices made in the preparation and performance of music within an ethno-specific religious framework. Religion offers solace and relief for migrants who strive to preserve old cultural ways. The divergent socio-cultural histories and multiple levels of settlement contained within the ACCC and BLIA SYD complicate this with a homogenising process that takes place with the dominant groups forming the establishment culture. There is in addition great emphasis on the revitalisation of religion, music and other cultural elements amongst the migrants I have observed. These changes help them to better adapt and even assimilate to the host country.

'Happy Hybridity' versus Cultural Stagnation

Many of the ACCC and BLIA SYD community members I have spoken to do not focus much on what they have lost apart from an occasional longing for certain aspects of old homeland life. Conversations on loss often revolve around food (such as the quality of fish balls), and on certain social conventions that migrants find unusual or outlandish in Australia. With the annual Chinese New

37 Hargreaves, D. J., Miell, D. and MacDonald, R. 2002, 'What are musical identities, and why are they important?', in R. MacDonald, D. J. Hargreaves and D. Miell (eds), *Musical Identities*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 1–20, at p. 1.

38 Hall, S. 1993, 'Cultural identity and diaspora', in P. Williams and L. Chrisman (eds), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A reader*, Columbia University Press, New York, pp. 392–403.

Year celebrations in Sydney becoming more and more prominent and integrated into mainstream culture, and with greater representation of the Chinese or Asian face in Australian popular and high-art culture, one might contest the notion that the Chinese in Australia are faced with any loss at all (see Figure 1). According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australians claiming to have part or full Chinese ancestry form the largest migrant group after German Australians; this category numbers 866 200 people and is 4.3 per cent of the recorded overall population.³⁹ Mandarin and other Asian languages are now gaining popularity over the traditional French and German taught at primary school level.



Figure 1 Famous faces—Australian Chinese celebrities (top row, from left): Senator Penny Wong, Poh Ling Yeow, Lawrence Leung; bottom row, from right: Annette Shun Wah, William Yang, Jeff Fatt

Source: Image courtesy of author

The loss we could focus on exists in traditional elements that the ACCC and BLIA SYD might filter out in their ongoing negotiation of culture and identity. But where things are discarded, there is always the creation of something new. Here, we approach a constantly negotiated balance between parent cultures

³⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011, *Reflecting a Nation: Stories from the 2011 Census, 2012–2013*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra, viewed 9 September 2012, <<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2071.0main+features902012-2013>>

in a kind of deliberate 'happy hybridity', wherein ethnic actors choose which cultural elements to infuse or develop and which to discard.⁴⁰ This led to many interesting results, particularly in food and popular culture: Australia may be the only country in the world where one can buy unusually large and deep-fried Chinese pork dumplings known as dim sims from suburban Lebanese-run milk bars.

There is one community I have observed showing clear signs of cultural stagnation. Sandwiched between a large mansion and the Sacred Heart Catholic Church in the Sydney suburb of Cabramatta, the Australian Chinese Teo Chew Association (ACTCA) is a meeting place for diasporic Chinese hailing from Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Mainland China and various South-East Asian countries. Their common links are the Teo Chew dialect and culture, which originate in the locality of Shantou in Guangdong Province.⁴¹ Figures 2–5 suggest a thriving traditional community with a strong political presence in wider Australian society. The karaoke club, dancing group and integrated kung-fu and lion-dancing school are attended by many, and YouTube clips⁴² reveal the online popularity of lion dancing—a cultural art form in great demand throughout the larger Chinese community, with its popular appeal to both young and old. Since the 1990s, the ACTCA lion-dance troupe has been a regular performance act booked by BLIA SYD for functions held at the mother temple of Wollongong and in Sydney.

40 Ang, 'Together-in-difference'; Lo, Jacqueline 2000, 'Beyond happy hybridity: performing Asian Australian identities', in Ien Ang, Sharon Chalmers, Lisa Law and Mandy Thomas (eds), *Alter/Asians: Asian-Australian identities in art, media and popular culture*, Pluto Press, Sydney, pp. 152–68.

41 Also known as Swatao in the Teo Chew dialect, Shantou is one of two prefecture-level cities in the Chaoshan cultural region where the Teo Chew dialect is natively spoken.

42 See, for instance, a performance in Darling Harbour during the 2010 Buddha Birthday celebrations: <www.youtube.com/watch?v=0dKsiraWvFc> (viewed 3 March 2011).



Figure 2 Equipment used in Chinese lion dancing

Source: Image courtesy of author



Figure 3 Community Karaoke machine

Source: Image courtesy of author



Figure 4 Chinese chess played by elderly members

Source: Image courtesy of author



Figure 5 Instruments used in *Chaoju Dasi*

Source: Image courtesy of author

Meanwhile, the ACTCA hosts and produces the annual *Chaoju Dasi* (Teo Chew operatic production), which involves local performers and specially invited guests from Shantou. An ensemble of live musicians accompanies operatic arias from epic legends and heartbreaking romances. At first glance, this genre appears to be flourishing as a traditional art form. On closer examination, the event only happens once a year, and although certain members of the community take vocal lessons and study their arias with great dedication, they are but a few such enthusiasts. The core ensemble of the instrumental music tradition consists of a small handful of elderly men who meet to play chess on Mondays with a general rehearsal on Wednesdays. These are old, tired and worn-out musicians; it is not uncommon for ill health to prevent them from rehearsing. Although their passion for music remains, the natural tuning, antiquated folk instruments and nasal vocal timbres do not resonate at all with young Teo Chew Australians. The plethora of operatic stories, although archetypal in essence, are filled with musical imagery and metaphors from an irrelevant imperial past that are of little significance and interest to those who prefer singing karaoke and listening to popular Chinese or Western music. The end of this particular tradition is almost certain.

Conclusion

In many migration stories of the present day, diasporans are often faced with considerable cultural, social and personal losses in the choice between preservation of their home culture, which may inevitably lead to cultural stagnation, and complete assimilation and surrender to the ways of the new country. As ethnic actors, however, they also have the liberty to move 'in between' these two options, thereby obtaining something new, as suggested in the opening quotation by Salman Rushdie. I find that this phenomenon relates very much to my research to date with various activities of musical composition and performance where the issue of cultural preservation versus loss is often of significant consequence.

The concomitant negotiation and renegotiation of identity, whether a conscious or a subconscious process, are intrinsically connected to the issue of loss. To combat this issue, ethno-specific religious and cultural meeting places have become important loci for ethnic events that evoke memories from the distant past. In addition, these gatherings celebrate what diasporans have gained in the new country, thereby helping them cope with loss on various levels in the renegotiation of identity. The ACCC and BLIA SYD have been highly active in the revitalisation of their culture with the production of new hymnody that is truly local and expressive of the status of community members as new Australians. This has been achieved through the adoption of modern musical genres and the

English language. Yet, traditional rites and ritual music are retained to preserve the memory of the past. In the ACTCA, popular cultural forms such as karaoke and the lion dance continue to flourish, while the traditional Teo Chew opera has been preserved as an antiquated art form that will survive only as long as its fast-ageing practitioners.

It is interesting to note that in both the ACCC and the BLIA SYD, a certain hegemony prevails in the outward elements of the dominant culture that are more emphatically experienced. In the case of the ACCC, the Cantonese-speaking Hong Kong community officiates over the slightly more repressed but growing Mandarin presence. In BLIA SYD, the cultural aesthetic of the transplanted Taiwanese reigns. Despite the highly diverse demographic constituency of both these organisations, community members are able to congregate mentally, physically and sonically in a haven of creativity and vitality where issues of loss become almost irrelevant as they celebrate what they have gained into the twenty-first century and beyond.

Led Zeppelin's 'Dazed and Confused': From lament to psychedelic tour de force

Stephen Loy

Introduction

Recorded during September and October 1968, and released on the band's self-titled debut album in January 1969, Led Zeppelin's 'Dazed and Confused' is the most significant example of the group's approach to the translation of studio recordings into vehicles for improvisation and experimentation in a live performance context.¹ One of the songs that guitarist Jimmy Page introduced to the other members of the band at their first meeting in London in 1968, 'Dazed and Confused' was to remain an integral part of Led Zeppelin's concert set lists until 1975, being performed at almost all of their concerts during this period. In her book *In the Houses of the Holy: Led Zeppelin and the power of rock music*, Susan Fast describes 'Dazed and Confused' as 'arguably the most important locus for musical experimentation' throughout the majority of Led Zeppelin's career.²

Building on Fast's assertion regarding 'Dazed and Confused'—that the original recorded version constituted a 'blues lament', which in performance developed into an extended exploration of psychedelic³ and avant-garde experimentation⁴—this paper will explore the interconnected relationship between those characteristics that make the work a lament and their contribution to the work's capacity to sustain lengthy periods of improvisation. It will be argued that the ability of the song to support the extended guitar experimentation that became a feature of its concert performance stemmed from the dramatic potential of the original studio version—a drama that derived in many ways from its original conception as a lament. The aspects of the original studio recording that make

1 Led Zeppelin 1969, *Led Zeppelin*, [LP], Atlantic.

2 Fast, Susan 2001, *In the Houses of the Holy: Led Zeppelin and the power of rock music*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 18.

3 Psychedelic connotes here an expansion of consciousness (*ibid.*, p. 18; *Oxford English Dictionary* 2011, [Online edition], Oxford University Press, Oxford). Although often linked to hallucinogenic drugs, the term, for the purposes of this paper, refers to the ability of music to represent, or even induce, a similar expansion of consciousness.

4 Fast, *In the Houses of the Holy*, pp. 18, 24, 29.

it a lament, with a particular focus on the use of the guitar, will be examined with regard to their significance as crucial elements of the extended guitar improvisation that characterised subsequent live performances.

'Dazed and Confused' as a Blues Lament

Led Zeppelin's 'Dazed and Confused' was not an original work of the new band in 1968. A version of the song 'I'm Confused' had been performed by Page with his previous band, The Yardbirds, during 1967 and 1968. Both this and Led Zeppelin's later version drew heavily on a song, also entitled 'Dazed and Confused', by Jake Holmes, released in June 1967 on the album *The Above Ground Sound of Jake Holmes*.⁵ Holmes's original provided a significant model for Page, who made use of the vocal melody, aspects of the structure and, most significantly, the chromatically descending bass riff, identified by Fast as a reference to the descending lamento bass patterns of the seventeenth century.⁶

Drawing heavily on Jake Holmes's version, Led Zeppelin's recording of 'Dazed and Confused' magnified the elements of the work that link it to the tradition of the lament. Holmes's descending chromatic bass line, which in his version is heard below repeated tonic chords on the guitar, is given total prominence at the opening of Led Zeppelin's version, the line being repeated twice as a bass solo, accompanied only by atmospheric harmonics on the guitar. This bass line continues as the sole accompaniment to the opening verse, after which it is repeated twice more, where it is doubled on guitars an octave and two octaves higher. The line again serves as the sole accompaniment for the second and third verses. The incessant use of the riff is interrupted only by the insertion of a short instrumental break between verses two and three, consisting of repeated dominant chords and a rising semiquaver pattern that contrasts with the descent of the bass. In this way, what for Holmes was a bass line working in conjunction with the guitar part, for Led Zeppelin became elevated to the status of a riff, which, typically of their approach to composition, was doubled on bass and guitar parts. Unlike Holmes's original, there are no other guitar parts that contrast with the riff, which permeates the whole of the musical texture.

Another example of the intensification of the lament-like characteristics of Led Zeppelin's version in comparison with Holmes's original concerns the lyrics, which in Holmes's version retain a certain ambiguity of reference. In contrast, Led Zeppelin's lyrics are more transparent, following what Fast describes as 'a well-developed lyrical trope of the blues: the outpourings of a man under

5 Holmes, Jake 1967, *The Above Ground Sound of Jake Holmes*, [LP], Tower.

6 Fast, *In the Houses of the Holy*, p. 22.

the spell of a woman who toys with his passion but whom he can't leave'.⁷ These lyrics reflect the pain of the protagonist, effectively creating a lament of unrequited love. This is clearly reflected in the first three verses, those which precede the guitar solo. The final verse, whilst repeating the opening lines of the first and thus cementing the character of the whole, also suggests a progression on behalf of the protagonist from the totally impotent state of the opening verses to a more defiant position suggesting action: the sending of the bill, we may presume for pain caused. Not only does this brief statement suggest a level of defiance, it suggests that the protagonist has managed to break the spell of the woman in question sufficiently to leave her.⁸ This slight, but significant, shift in attitude between the initial three verses and the final verse is suggestive of the significance of the intervening guitar solo (to be discussed below) in countering the impotence of the opening verses:

Been dazed and confused for so long it's not true
Wanted a woman, never bargained for you
Lots of people talkin', few of them know
Soul of a woman was created below
You hurt and abused, tellin' all of your lies
Run 'round sweet baby, Lord, how they hypnotize
Sweet little baby, I don't know where you been
Gonna love you baby, here I come again
Ev'ry day I work so hard bringin' home my hard-earned pay
Try to love you baby, but you push me away
Don't know where you're goin', I don't⁹ know just where you've been
Sweet little baby, I want you again
Been dazed and confused for so long, it's not true
Wanted a woman, never bargained for you
Take it easy baby, let them say what they will
[Will your] tongue wag so much when I send you the bill?¹⁰

7 Ibid., p. 24.

8 This idea is alluded to in various concert performances where Robert Plant, improvising lyrics, makes reference to 'I Can't Quit You Baby', another song from their debut album (ibid., p. 25). The suggestion that the protagonist has left the woman also parallels traditional uses of the lament in situations of parting or departure, such as those of the Greek tradition discussed in Alexiou, Margaret 2002, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*, Second edn, Revised by Dimitrios Yatromanolakis and Panagiotis Roilos, Rowman & Littlefield, Oxford, pp. 118–22.

9 There are conflicting transcriptions of this line. Both Fast and the International Music Publications score included in *Early Days* (Led Zeppelin 2000, *Early Days: The best of Led Zeppelin. Volume One*, [Music score], International Music Publications/Warner Chappell Music, London) transcribe this line as 'I don't know just where you've been', whereas an earlier score, also published by International Music Publications (Led Zeppelin 1990, *Led Zeppelin: Off the record—Led Zeppelin I*, [Music score], Warner Chappell Music/Rittor and International Music Publications, London), transcribes it as 'only know just where you've been'. To the current author, the latter is correct.

10 Led Zeppelin, *Early Days*, pp. 39–55.

Such an invocation of a blues trope, combined with the descending chromatic bass, creates an intersection between the disparate, yet related, traditions of the lament and the blues. Paul Oliver states that from the beginnings of African-American slavery in the early seventeenth century ‘to “looke blue” had been current for well over half a century as a phrase to describe low spirits, and by the end of the eighteenth century “the blue devils” was a familiar condition of mind’.¹¹ This conception of the blues as a state of melancholy correlates closely with the emotional world of the lament. It is the combination of these elements that led Fast to describe Led Zeppelin’s ‘Dazed and Confused’ as ‘an agonizing blues lament’.¹²

Intensification of the Lament: The guitar solo

There are several other aspects of Led Zeppelin’s version of ‘Dazed and Confused’ that may contribute to an interpretation of the work as a lament. These aspects relate to the intense and dramatic nature of the expression—something that Ellen Rosand has identified as characteristic of the lament from its origins in Greek drama: ‘At least since the drama of Greek antiquity, the lament had enjoyed a special status; an emotional climax followed by a resolution of the action, it was a soliloquy, a moment of particularly intense expression within the movement of a narrative structure.’ Citing examples from Ovid and Ariosto, Rosand argues that the lament ‘provided the occasion for special formal development, the display of particularly expressive rhetoric and affective imagery’.¹³ These characteristics are apparent in both Led Zeppelin’s recording and their performance of ‘Dazed and Confused’.

The dramatic intensity of Led Zeppelin’s ‘Dazed and Confused’ as it appears on their first album is most clearly highlighted in Page’s two-part guitar solo. In the first, slower section of the solo, Page makes use of a violin bow to produce a range of unusual sounds from the electric guitar. This is then contrasted with a faster, more conventional and technically virtuosic guitar solo in the second section. Both segments of the solo make reference to the lament-like character of the work, and in doing so contribute to an intensification of the emotional expression of the opening verses.

Page’s use of the violin bow plays directly into the interpretation of the work as a lament. Page uses the bow to repeatedly create sustained, legato glissandi

11 Oliver, Paul 1990, *Blues Fell This Morning: Meaning in the blues*, Second edn, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 284.

12 Fast, *In the Houses of the Holy*, p. 24.

13 Rosand, Ellen 1979, ‘The descending tetrachord: an emblem of lament’, *The Musical Quarterly*, vol. 65, no. 3, pp. 346–59, at pp. 346–7.

descents of a minor third, initially from the third scale degree to the tonic (G to E), thus replicating the interval outlined by the chromatic descent of the first part of the main riff. This approach makes use of an unusual guitar technique to create an instrumental suggestion of a sigh—a traditional association of the lamento bass. This effect is further heightened by Robert Plant's vocal echoing of Page's instrumental motive, effectively creating a vocal affectation of a sigh. This section of the solo may thus be interpreted as an instrumental invocation of the emotional pain of the protagonist.

This descending minor third motive is developed until the violin-bow portion of the solo is concluded through an extended chromatic glissando descent through an octave. This descent again parallels the chromatic shape of the main riff, and serves to again heighten the emotional intensity of the 'sighing' motive of earlier in the solo. The chromatic descent continues in quavers through a major seventh, at which point the Phrygian flattened second scale degree is emphasised, being held for four bars, until finally resolving onto the lower tonic to conclude the bowed section of the solo.

The second section of the guitar solo, contrasting the first in terms of meter, tempo, timbre and technique, also makes reference to both the main descending riff and a musical suggestion of sighing or crying. Whilst the second part of the solo in the main presents rapid guitar passagework against a repeated rising bass riff, the opening of this section also contains a descending figure that may be interpreted as paralleling the earlier invocation of sighing during the bow solo. Once again doubled by Plant's vocal, the guitar presents a gradual descending semibreve pattern, beginning on the seventh scale degree, and descending initially to the subdominant (D, C-sharp, B, A)—a melodic shape that is again suggestive of the opening riff. The final three notes of the descent to the tonic (G, F-sharp, E) proceed as two minims and a semibreve, providing an arresting diminution of the rhythm, which is then repeated, the second time concluding on the seventh rather than the tonic.

This passage may be interpreted as an intensification of the 'sighing' motive of the bowed section of the solo into a more emotionally extroverted wailing or crying, which interestingly creates a musical image that parallels the original Latin *lamentum*, meaning weeping or wailing.¹⁴ The coupling of the guitar part with a high vocal register and the vocalisation 'Ah' on each pitch are suggestive of wailing, whilst the minim/semibreve pattern of the second half of the descent may be suggestive of the shorter breaths characteristic of sobbing or crying. Interpreted this way, the affectation of sighing in the first part of the solo has

14 Oxford English Dictionary.

been transformed into a more intense and extroverted expression. Both sections correlate with Rosand's explanation of the lament as displaying 'expressive rhetoric and affective imagery'.¹⁵

At the same time, the faster section of the guitar solo also explores a second, contrary relationship to the descending chromatic riff of the opening verses. The bass riff over which the guitar solo unfolds after doubling the riff twice presents a repeated rising quaver pattern (A, B, D, E, G, A, G), which highlights the significant pitches of the original descending riff: the third scale degree, the tonic, the seventh scale degree and the dominant.¹⁶ This reinterpretation of the significant pitches of the main riff creates both a sense of musical unity and a suggestion of contrasting emotional content. Prior to the second half of the guitar solo, the predominating feature of the thematic material is melodic descent, whether in the main riff or in the descending intervals of the bow solo. The contrasting shape of the bass riff that is repeated throughout the second half of the guitar solo, whilst related to the main riff, suggests a slightly more defiant attitude on behalf of the protagonist, who is now unwilling to surrender himself entirely to the pain of the earlier sections of the work. Whilst not managing to purge entirely this anguish, which inevitably returns with the return to the main riff for the final verse, following the guitar solo there is a sense that the pain and sorrow of the opening verses have now been tempered, given a harder edge, through a mood of defiance, suggested by the final line of the final verse: '[Will your] tongue wag so much when I send you the bill?' The guitar solo therefore serves both significant narrative and dramatic purposes in the work.

'Dazed and Confused' as a Vehicle for Improvised Experimentation

Led Zeppelin's version of 'Dazed and Confused' may be seen as closely paralleling many aspects of the lament, not only through the chromatic descending bass, but also through various musical invocations of sighing and crying that intensify the emotional expression, and which are given further dramatic power through the contrasting approaches of the guitar solo. These aspects of the song lend 'Dazed and Confused' significant dramatic potential in performance—something that was fully exploited by the band between 1968 and 1975, but which was to transform the work from the 'blues lament' of *Led Zeppelin* into a vehicle for extensive musical experimentation.

¹⁵ Rosand, 'The descending tetrachord', p. 347.

¹⁶ This riff is also related to the instrumental break used following verses two and three, which outlines a similar rising pattern making use of major seconds (E, F-sharp, A, B, E, F-sharp).

Significant not simply for the regularity of its performance during the first seven years of the group's performing career,¹⁷ 'Dazed and Confused' represented many important aspects of Led Zeppelin's approach to the live concert. Not content to merely replicate their studio recordings in concert, Led Zeppelin incorporated large sections of improvisation within certain songs, vastly altering the nature of these works in comparison with their respective studio versions, which Page described as 'really just frameworks for our stage performances, when we really stretch out'.¹⁸ The combination of a simple, evocative descending chromatic riff with the striking contrasts, in both sound and technique, of the bipartite guitar solo lent 'Dazed and Confused' a dramatic intensity and expressive immediacy that made the song a particularly appropriate vehicle for improvised experimentation in performance. Those characteristics that enable the original studio recording to be characterised as a lament were the very characteristics that provided the work the capacity for extended abstract improvisation into unfamiliar sonic territory.

The focus of this improvisation in performances of 'Dazed and Confused' was the two-part guitar solo, both sections of which became greatly extended, highlighting the inherent dynamism of the original.¹⁹ Consequently, Fast describes 'Dazed and Confused' as 'the most malleable and extended piece in the band's repertory, sometimes running to half an hour or more in performance; within this expanse of time, the musicians were free to roam wherever their imaginations took them'.²⁰ Fast's characterisation of live performances of 'Dazed and Confused', whilst acknowledging the extensive expansion through improvisation relative to the studio recording, does not, however, adequately acknowledge the carefully structured approach that the band applied to this process. Unlike the improvisational approaches of their early contemporary Cream, who would create extended solos over a continuously repeated bass line,²¹ Led Zeppelin's approach to the expansion of 'Dazed and Confused' was to expand various individual sections, incorporating periods where the harmonic and rhythmic structures of the original recording were entirely absent. Crucial to the effectiveness of this approach, in which the audience was presented with large periods of unfamiliar material, were the connections that were retained with the original studio recording. These brief, but significant, references to

17 See the concert set lists provided in Lewis, Dave with Pallett, Simon 2005, *Led Zeppelin: The concert file*, Omnibus, London.

18 Godwin, Robert 2003, *Led Zeppelin: The press reports*, Collectors Guide Publishing, Burlington, Ontario, p. 72.

19 In performance, the introduction and coda were also regularly extended as a means of balancing the extended guitar solo.

20 Fast, *In the Houses of the Holy*, p. 18.

21 See the live version of 'Spoonful' released on *Wheels of Fire* (Cream 1968, 'Spoonful', *Wheels of Fire*, [LP], Polydor). Allan F. Moore: 'On almost all the solos on Cream's *Wheels of Fire*, both bass and rhythm guitar maintain the song's harmonic patterns, restricting the pitches available to the lead guitar at all times' (Moore, Allan F. 2001, *Rock: The primary text*, Ashgate, Aldershot, UK, p. 84).

the version of the work most familiar to their audience provided aural markers of how the improvised performances related to the original, in effect guiding the audience through the unfamiliar improvisation. Thus, the extended performances of 'Dazed and Confused' were able to challenge audiences with unfamiliar material whilst simultaneously retaining an element of coherence with the original. That Led Zeppelin recognised this process as an important factor in enabling their audiences to engage with the improvised sections is reflected in the fact that, rather than taking an entirely free approach, extended performances of the work within each tour, and even between different tours, reflected a remarkably similar structure, the references to the studio being employed in a consistent fashion in each performance.

The Guitar Solo in Performance, Part I

Accompanied by drums, bass and voice in the studio recording, the violin-bow solo in performance regularly incorporated a lengthy unaccompanied segment, in which Page explored the sonic possibilities of the bowed electric guitar, creating an abstract, avant-garde soundscape that was largely removed from the musical parameters of the work. Through this improvised experimentation, Page transformed the bowed guitar solo from an evocation of sorrow and sighing into a psychedelic exploration in sound. Of this section, Fast observes: 'The experimentation with sound, especially Page's trademark use of the violin bow to play his electric guitar, radically expanded the sonic palette, serving as a metaphor for the expansion of consciousness into uncharted territory, and on this count the piece is a classic example of psychedelia.'²²

Despite this, Page's bow solo within performances of 'Dazed and Confused' consistently retained connections with the studio original through differing uses of the minor third G–E. This interval formed the basis of the bowed glissando descent of the studio cut, creating an instrumental invocation of a sigh, and it is with this interval—frequently elaborated upon or filled in to create a stepwise descent—that Page often opened the bowed portion of the solo in performance.²³ Further to this, the other motive that Page used even more regularly during the bow solo (A, G, D, E) may also be seen simply as an

22 Fast, *In the Houses of the Holy*, p. 18.

23 Ibid., p. 37. Of the officially released live performances of 'Dazed and Confused', this may be heard in the version from *The Soundtrack from the Film the Song Remains the Same*, recorded in 1973 (Led Zeppelin 1976, *The Soundtrack from the Film the Song Remains the Same*, [LP], Swan Song). Bootleg recordings of other performances also demonstrate this, including those from Sydney, 27 February 1972 (Led Zeppelin [n.d.], *The Rover's Return*, [Unofficial DVD], Genuine Masters); New Orleans, 14 May 1973 (Led Zeppelin 2006, *Bourbon Street Renegades*, [Unofficial CD], Empress Valley Supreme Disc); New York, 12 February 1975 (Led Zeppelin 2002, *Led Zeppelin's Flying Circus*, [Unofficial CD], Empress Valley Supreme Disc); and Seattle, 17 March 1975 (Led Zeppelin 2011, *Haven't We Met Somewhere Before?*, [Unofficial CD], Empress Valley Supreme Disc).

expansion of this descending minor third.²⁴ In the same way that the solo itself is expanded, the melodic material that forms the basis of the improvisation is expanded through the addition of upper and lower neighbour notes to expand the frame of the original minor third. These connections, which, as Fast states, became somewhat 'set in performance',²⁵ provide melodic coherence between the abstract improvisations of performance and the more familiar recording of Led Zeppelin's first album.

The Guitar Solo in Performance, Part II

The second, more conventional period of the guitar solo was similarly extended, making use of contrasting sections of fast passagework and periods of relative pause. On occasion, riffs from other songs would be inserted, providing an extra section.²⁶ Whilst again much of this portion of the solo was improvised and therefore largely unfamiliar to the audience, short passages of the original studio version were always retained, providing the audience with brief markers by which they could relate the performance to the studio recording.

The most significant example of this technique is the consistent use in performance of the opening of the second portion of the solo as recorded on the studio version. The distinctive descending semibreve/minim guitar and vocal passage—suggestive of wailing or crying—was consistently used in performance at, or close to, the beginning of the second part of the solo. This passage thus served to provide a brief but distinct connection with the studio recording following the extended violin-bow improvisation, and prior to a further period of extended improvisation.²⁷

The consequence of this approach to improvisatory expansion meant that the dramatic contrasts of the bipartite guitar solo were both expanded and intensified. In addition, whilst short passages of the original were retained as markers, the material was for the most part unfamiliar to the audience, who, through the improvisatory process, were challenged to take a journey into the unfamiliar.

24 Fast discusses this motive in some detail, but does not note a link between this and the original descending minor third motive of the studio recording. Fast, *In the Houses of the Holy*, pp. 37–8.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

26 The performance of 'Dazed and Confused' from a 1972 concert in Los Angeles, released on *How the West Was Won* (Led Zeppelin 2003, *How the West Was Won*, [CD], Atlantic), incorporates the riff from 'Walter's Walk', a song that had been recorded earlier in 1972 but which would not be released until 1982, on the band's final album, *Coda* (Led Zeppelin 1982, *Coda*, [LP], Swan Song).

27 This may be observed in various officially released live recordings of 'Dazed and Confused', including those from *DVD*, which included three versions, two recorded in 1969 and one in 1970 (Led Zeppelin 2003, *DVD*, [DVD], Atlantic and Warner Vision); *BBC Sessions*, recorded in 1971 (Led Zeppelin 1997, *BBC Sessions*, [CD], Atlantic); *How the West Was Won*, recorded in 1972; and *The Soundtrack from the Film the Song Remains the Same*, recorded in 1973.

This process inherently changed the nature of the work in live performance. Rather than simply providing instrumental affectations of sighing or crying, the two sections of the solo served as vehicles of psychedelic exploration; however, those elements of the studio recording characteristic of the intensified affective expression of a lament, the bowed descending minor third suggestive of sighing and the descending semibreve/minim motive of the second half of the solo invoking crying or wailing were what were specifically retained as aural signifiers of the studio original within extended live performances. Their expressive immediacy, coupled with melodic simplicity, made them the ideal figures with which to frame the larger-scale abstract improvisation. Similarly, the simplicity of the descending chromatic riff used as the accompaniment to all four verses in performance provided a familiar and easily accessible, yet also expressive, frame for the expansion of the dramatic two-part guitar solo. The return of the riff for the final verse at once signals the end of the instrumental improvisation and the return to the emotional world of the protagonist. This culmination parallels the subtly altered nature of the final verse of the studio recording, but, given the extensive improvisations undertaken in performance, the final verse now suggests resolution. Whilst balancing the opening verses, in performance, rather than being simply a reiteration of the anguish and sorrow of the 'blues lament', the final verse functions as a return to the familiar after a diversion through the unfamiliar. In this way, it assumes a sense of achievement and culmination, resolving the tension and suspense created by the extended period of unfamiliar improvisation.

Conclusion

In concert, then, 'Dazed and Confused' became far more than simply a 'blues lament'. With the foregrounding of the descending chromatic bass, intensified dramatic expression and affective invocations of sighing and crying, Led Zeppelin sharpened the focus on the lament-like characteristics of Holmes's original, thus not only providing a framework for, but also expressly enabling, the transformation of the work into a vehicle for extended psychedelic sonic improvisation. The significance of the lament origins of 'Dazed and Confused' to the potency of expanded improvised live performances serves as a case study in the use of familiar musical tropes as a foundation for experimental musical innovation, and an example of a nexus between aspects of divergent traditions and innovation in popular music.

Nun will die Sonn' so hell aufgehn: **Presence in absence**

Jonathan Powles

One of the initial tasks in approaching this paper was to define the characteristics of the idea of 'lament' in somewhat structural terms. In fact, this goal of articulating 'lament' as a concept, as opposed to merely letting the multiple meanings of the word resonate as they will, was, for me, a persistent irritation. Or perhaps it was more like one of those occasions when one forgets a name, or a word, that then remains frustratingly, infuriatingly on the tip of one's tongue, because the tantalising idea that underpins the concept of 'lament' is surely one of *absence*.

Every lament is an encounter with an absence. The classic, canonic and central laments are the elegies and threnodies that mark the felt absences of death. But, life being what it is, there are many other subjects for lamentation: lament for lost love, lament for lost youth, all the way to Beethoven's rage over a lost penny, which certainly qualifies as a lament, even if an infantile one. And what has been frustrating me in my definitional musings is that I cannot think of one single example of a lament that does not encounter the lost, the absent—either actual or potential.

The nature of this encounter with absence varies by context. A musical ritual of mourning usually serves to place an individual's grief in a communal context: to share, and to locate mourning within a cultural tradition. In the lament as ritual, private grief is made public through communal enactment.

In contrast, an artistic response to absence usually creates a presence: through art, music, poetry or an image of what or whom is lost is created within the work. In the lament as art form, from a real or literal absence, a figurative presence is generated: an image of the departed. Here, private grief is made public through communicative representation.

The majority of my paper concerns the nature of this communicative representation in the first of Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder*: 'Songs on the Death of Children.' The notion of 'presence' is loaded, theoretically speaking, and is a contested one, and in some senses this short song of Mahler's is about to become the battleground on which the theoretical struggle for presence will be waged. But first I'd like to fling a few visual and textural laments into the mix, to provide some depth and perspective on the relationship between presence and absence.



Figure 1 George Clausen, *Youth Mourning*, 1916

Source: Courtesy the author

Sir George Clausen painted *Youth Mourning* in 1916. Interpretation here is not problematic: the image is of youth, as a vulnerable, naked young woman, lamenting the dead young men of World War I. The kneeling figure in a ritual posture of grief, together with the partial cross, frames in the background the waterlogged shell-holes of a Flanders field. The interesting thing here is the portrayal of absence—in particular, the cross being truncated at the edge of the canvas tells us that the focus of the composition of the painting has been shifted to what is central, to what is even more important. The cross and the woman frame, enfold—cradle, if you will—what is at the centre of the painting. And what is central is...absent. A palpable absence. We could imagine the mourning

woman as Isolde, singing to a dead Tristan who only she can see. It is not that there is nothing at the centre of the painting: on the contrary, there is something, gone. A presence through absence.

Rather than my waxing lyrical about this conceptual inseparability of absence and presence in the lament, it is probably better to let Shakespeare do so for me. Certainly Harold Bloom would approve of letting art speak in place of criticism.¹ Shakespeare's 'Sonnet 64' is both a lament and a love song, and makes the point of presence in absence more compellingly than I could:

When I have seen by Time's fell hand defaced
The rich proud cost of outworn buried age;
When sometime lofty towers I see down-razed
And brass eternal slave to mortal rage;
When I have seen the hungry ocean gain
Advantage on the kingdom of the shore,
And the firm soil win of the watery main,
Increasing store with loss and loss with store;
When I have seen such interchange of state,
Or state itself confounded to decay;
Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminare,
That Time will come and take my love away.
This thought is as a death, which cannot choose
But weep to have that which it fears to lose.

'A thought...which cannot choose but weep to have that which it fears to lose' actually maps the absent onto the present by force—weeping in the presence of the beloved in the face of the inevitability of absence. There are two powerful presences in this sonnet: one is the speaker, invoking the personified force of time, ruin and destruction. The other is his beloved—but she is absent. She does not speak. Her presence is only affirmed, held, cradled, by the words describing her inevitable departure. There is, it seems, inhabiting the concept of the lament as artwork a structural pairing between presence and absence, in which the figure, the image of one gone, is enfolded or framed by what is present: the metaphor I have been using is that of 'cradling'.

This notion of cradling the lamented is useful in thinking about the first of Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder*. The original *Kindertotenlieder* were a group of 428 poems written by Friedrich Rückert in 1833–34 in reaction to the illness and death of his two children, Luise and Ernst. They were an essentially private

1 Bloom, Harold 1994, *The Western Canon: The books and school of the ages*, Harcourt Brace, New York.

set of laments, not intended for publication and only published after Rückert's death in 1872. Mahler chose five of the poems for his setting, which he wrote between 1901 and 1904. I want to look in detail at the first.

*Nun will die Sonn' so hell aufgehn,
Als sei kein Unglück die Nacht geschehn!
Das Unglück geschah nur mir allein!
Die Sonne, sie scheint allgemein!*

*Du mußt nicht die Nacht in dir verschränken,
Mußt sie ins ew'ge Licht versenken!
Ein Lämplein verlosch in meinem Zelt!
Heil sei dem Freudenlicht der Welt!*

Now the sun will rise as brightly
as if no misfortune had occurred in the night.
The misfortune has fallen on me alone.
The sun—it shines for everyone.

You must not keep the night inside you;
you must immerse it in eternal light.
A little light has been extinguished in my household;
Light of joy in the world, be welcome

Already we have several presences. Mahler's music enfolds and cradles the presence of the poet, himself gone, but allowed to speak through and with the music. And the poet inscribes a protagonist, the one who speaks and sings: a father who has lost his child in the night. Overwhelmingly, though, the most palpable presence in the song is the absent one: the dead child to whom the second stanza of the poem is (perhaps) addressed. Mahler's music cradles an image of the dead poet, whose poetic imagination enfolds an imagined grieving father, who speaks of, holds and cradles in words his absent child.

Now, at this point, as presences multiply alarmingly, it might be wise to invoke some theoretical and semiotic perspectives. The aim is to seek clarification, but the probable result will be no doubt to further complicate the issue. In a different domain—or possibly different—the battle between 'presence' and 'absence' is the central issue of theory and criticism of the late twentieth century. The deconstruction of what Derrida termed the 'illusory metaphysics of presence' is the first item on the post-structuralist agenda.² For the criticism of literature and the arts, Derrida's assault on presence—simultaneous to and cognate with Barthes' declaration of the death of the author—had the effect of rendering

2 Derrida, Jacques 1967, *De la grammatologie*, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris.

impossible the idea of authorial presence in a work.³ Meaning is generated through the interplay of texts, the constellation of signs and codes brought together and to bear by the reader or listener in the act of interpretation. The very idea of authorial presence—the notion that Mahler, or Rückert, is speaking to us through the words and music, bringing a privileged and essential meaning to the work—is called into question by the inherent nature of language itself (and here, we treat music as a language) to subvert its own meanings; meaning is always partial, incomplete, deferred, provisional, in an endless cycle of intertextual interpenetration that Derrida terms difference.

This post-structuralist and deconstructive position is theoretically compelling; however, it does have its opponents: John Searle was Derrida's most famous sparring partner in the world of philosophy, but in literary criticism the key figure is perhaps Harold Bloom. Bloom's concept of artistic meaning is so centred in the notion of the artist wrestling with tradition, with the oedipal ghosts of his or her predecessors, that some notion of real authorial presence by necessity underpins his conception of meaning. Christopher Norris described it well when he wrote:

Bloom [seems] torn between a defence of poetry which holds to the ethos of Romantic individualism, and a deconstructive poetics which tends to dissolve such themes into an abstract system of tropes and relationships. In the last resort, however, Bloom is always willing to invoke the terminology of 'voice', 'presence' and subjective origin which Derrida so resolutely tracks down to its metaphors.⁴

Less well known than Bloom is George Steiner. Steiner's 1989 essay *Real Presences*—subtitled *Is there anything in what we say?*—acknowledges the theoretical unarguability of a deconstructive position, but takes issue with it on ethical rather than theoretical grounds.⁵ I shall return to Steiner's intriguing position at the end of my paper.

In the Mahler, we can see representational and intertextual signification at work in the song at the most obvious and accessible level of interpretation of musical meaning. This is at the level I would term *mimetic semiosis*: the music makes imitative reference to ideas in the text, or to ideas that are easily inferred from the context, through the invocation of a referential musical language, to the vocabulary and grammar of which each listener has different and provisional access.

3 Barthes, Roland 1978, *Image-Music-Text*, Hill and Wang, New York.

4 Norris, Christopher 1982, *Deconstruction: Theory and practice*, Routledge, London and New York.

5 Steiner, George 1991, *Real Presences: Is there anything in what we say?*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

For instance, the repeated, paired couplets are a familiar musical figure, standing for, signifying 'sighing' and invoking musical texts from Dowland and Mozart to Wagner, for those able to understand the code. Second, the abrupt shifts of modality from major to minor evoke the shifts from light to dark in the poem, for listeners with even the most cursory familiarity with the affective references of Western music since 1500.

There are more specific intertextualities. The ascending chromaticism, descending diatonic minor vocal lines and tonic pedals all recall Schubert's *Der Tod und das Mädchen*—clearly a resonant and appropriate text for Mahler to evoke. There are other parallels with songs from the *Schwannengesang* cycle—Schubert's last. Once the door of intertextuality is open, of course, many visitors come flooding in—for instance, Kofi Agawu has observed the presence in the music of the *Kindertotenlieder* of Brahms-like developing variation, and harmonic practice that echoes Wagner's *Tristan*.⁶

One aspect of mimetic semiosis that draws attention to itself is Mahler's use of the repeated glockenspiel strokes. This recalls the sound of bells tolled to announce a death: the eponymous 'death knell'. Sometimes the age of the deceased dictated the number of bell strokes—and here, there are two strokes.

Semiotically, these bells are doing more than making a mimetic imitation of funeral bells. They are, of course, small and high—child-sized tolling, if you will—and quite specifically echo the text '*Ein Lämplein verlosch in meinem Zelt!*': a little lamp has gone out in my household. The little lamp is the soul of the child, and with these glockenspiel strokes Mahler offers an aural depiction of that childlike soul.

The graphic explicitness of this aural image of the soul is slightly trite. Indeed, it is possible to find it quite comic—although revealing that we do not do so. There is a visual analogy for this depiction that could be illuminating. I think what Mahler has done sonically is similar to what the director has done visually in the third *Harry Potter* film. There is an image of the soul leaving the body: a bright, white point of light—the visual analogue of Mahler's glockenspiel strokes.⁷ This is extreme mimesis—representation or metaphor driven to excess. It permits the most anachronistic intertextualities, between Mahler and Harry Potter, although I wouldn't go so far as to deny the aesthetic similarities between the two. It is also, in both cases, trite in the extreme.

So where does this leave us in terms of presence and absence in the lament? A surface-level investigation of semiosis, which highlights the intertextual

6 Agawu, V. Kofi 1983, 'The musical language of *Kindertotenlieder* No. 2', *The Journal of Musicology*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 81–93.

7 <<http://harrypotter.wikia.com/wiki/Soul>>

interplay of mimetic reference, quickly confirms a post-structuralist reading of presence in the musical text. There is a shifting, provisional and partial presence of Rückert, Mahler, the imaginary father and child conveyed through bells, sighs and overtly referential musical symbolism. It's not that difficult to follow the chain of intertextuality to find the presence of Schubert, Brahms, Wagner... or indeed Harry Potter.

Indeed, perhaps because of this lack of interpretative difficulty, the entire deconstructionist project left music relatively untouched, compared with literature and philosophy. The notion that referentiality in music is provisional, deferred, partial and incomplete is not exactly earth shattering—as it proved for language—as the specific nature of referential signification of music has always been problematic. On the contrary, traditionally, the quest for musical presence, for authorial voice, has been located in the domain of structure, in the musical syntagm, rather than the musical vocabulary. The presence of the composer has been observed in ideas like the unity and organicism of the musical work as a demonstration of compositional vision, or through the conceptual superstructures afforded by syntactical tools such as the leitmotiv or dodecaphonic organisation.

Seeing the work's structure, rather than referents, as the site of meaning is what I shall term allegorical semiosis. This terminology follows that of post-structuralist Paul de Man, who sought to re-prioritise structure—the 'rhetoric of pure figuration'—over symbolic or referential modes of meaning.⁸ What happens when we look for meaning in the syntactical structure of music, without reference to possible mimetic, intertextual or extra-musical signification, but equally without reference to pre-ordained codes of musical structural interpretation: sonata forms, presuppositions of unity whether motivic or harmonic, as well as more recent a priori music-analytic symbolologies such as gendered structures?

The results of this allegoric structural reading of the first of the *Kindertotenlieder* are significant. Structurally, the music is extremely predictable. There are two generative voice-leading principles at work. One is a classic Schenkerian descent from the fifth scale degree towards harmonic closure:



⁸ De Man, Paul 1983, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the rhetoric of contemporary criticism*, Routledge, London and New York.

But of course simple harmonic closure is never achieved. Rather, the upper voice resolves upwards by semitone (another 'sigh' in the mimetic plane). From this point of quasi-resolution then initiates the second generative voice-leading principle: a non-functional ascending linear chromatic motion that rises as high as the B-flat (the highest point, as an accented upper neighbour-note, of the original structural descent), at which point harmonic function kicks back in, the B-flat is reheard as a dominant minor ninth and the passage moves back towards the first principle of tonal resolution by stepwise descent.



This gesture essentially happens the same way four times in the song: each time there is a moment of discontinuity, a point at which the upward chromatic linearity overpowers the gravitational pull of the functional harmony. This discontinuity is paralleled at the cadence points, in which linear chromatic motion arbitrarily intrudes and disrupts the goal-directed voice leading.

The point is this: there is absolutely no rational—musical—reason for the change of modality that precipitates the upward chromatic motion and its consequent emotional intensification. It is precipitated by a musical *deus ex machina*—a sudden and entirely logically inexplicable assertion of lightness or positivity. This abrupt move from darkness to light entirely parallels the structural unfolding of Rückert's text: 'The misfortune has fallen on me alone. The sun—it shines for everyone.'

Theoretically, there is an important distinction here. The music is not symbolising grief, or giving some metaphorical representation of grief. Rather, we are given in the actual structure of the music a play of figuration that is that of grief, in abstract: the chaotic and unpredictable shift from hope to despair that characterises the structure of mourning. This is where the fine distinction is to invoke the notion of *allegorical semiosis*—the rhetoric of pure figuration—instead of representative mimesis.

We are nearly at the end, and have explored some of the theoretical issues to do with the location of meaning in the first of the *Kindertotenlieder*. We have looked at mimetic semiosis, representation, intertextuality, allegorical meaning and musical structure as the sites of the communicative power of Mahler's music. I would wager, however, that we have been left unsatisfied—that none of these

semiotic processes has adequately described what it is we understand from this music, and certainly none has captured the trope of presence in absence that seemed so intuitively compelling at the start of this paper.

In 'Real presences', George Steiner writes:

Face to face with the presence of offered meaning which we call a text (or a painting or a symphony), we seek to hear its language. As we would that of the elect stranger coming towards us. There is in this endeavour, as deconstruction would immediately point out, an ultimately unprovable hope and presupposition of sense, a presumption that intelligibility is conceivable and, indeed, realizable. Such a presupposition is always susceptible of refutation. The presence before us may be that of a mute (Beckett edges us towards that grim jest), of a madman uttering gibberish or, more disturbingly, of an intensely communicative persona whose idiom—linguistic, stylistic, hermetically-grounded—we simply cannot grasp.⁹

And here perhaps is the elephant in the room. This Mahler musical text comes towards us as a stranger, offering unprovable hope: that in this music, in these words, are cradled real presences, with whom we have genuinely transformative encounters—a grieving father, a lost child. The processes of signification are not, ultimately, what generate the most important meaning; it is ultimately *ontological semiosis*—the nature of being, the being-in-the-work, the presence and absence of real mourners.

What moves us, what makes the music profound, is that Mahler cradles in music Rückert's real and authentic grief. The grief is not yet Mahler's own; Mahler had lost no children when he composed the *Kindertotenlieder*. Sadly, he lost his four-year-old daughter soon after completing the piece, and wrote: 'When I really lost my daughter, I could not have written these songs any more.' And maybe this comment should alert us to what is at stake.

Steiner argues that while the deconstructive position is theoretically irrefutable, ethically we need to make a wager on the real force of ontological semiosis, on the power of being-in-the-work to be a communicative force, and thus on the value of the arts to be a genuine tool with which to understand the human condition. Steiner particularly emphasises the role of music in this wager:

Music makes utterly substantive what I have sought to suggest of the real presence in meaning where that presence cannot be analytically shown or paraphrased. Music brings to our daily lives an immediate

⁹ Steiner, *Real Presences*, p. 151.

encounter with a logic of sense other than that of reason. It is, precisely, the truest name we have for the logic at work in the springs of being that generate vital forms.¹⁰

And there I have to put to rest my own investigations into the semiosis at work in this little song of Mahler's. It feels like I have conjured up a theoretical maelstrom whirling around the still, calm centre of meaning in the song—which is the real, palpable presence of an absent child. And despite the luminous theoretical reputations of some of the spirits I have conjured—Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man, Harold Bloom, George Steiner—I might, in the end, leave the last words on the subject of the ontological question of the reality of presence to Harry Potter and Albus Dumbledore:

'Tell me one last thing,' said Harry. 'Is this real? Or has this been happening inside my head?'

Dumbledore beamed at him, and his voice sounded loud and strong in Harry's ears even though the bright mist was descending again, obscuring his figure.

'Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?'¹¹

10 Ibid., p. 218.

11 Rowling, J. K. 2007, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Bloomsbury, London, p. 579.

Nations of Song

Aaron Corn

Eye-witness testimony is the lowest form of evidence.

— Neil deGrasse Tyson, astrophysicist¹

Poets are almost always wrong about facts. That's because they are not really interested in facts: only in truth.

— William C. Faulkner, writer²

Whether we evoke them willingly or whether they manifest in our minds unannounced, songs travel with us constantly, and frequently hold for us fluid, negotiated meanings that would mystify their composers. This article explores the varying degrees to which song, and music more generally, is accepted as a medium capable of bearing fact. If, as Merleau-Ponty postulated,³ external cultural expressions are but artefacts of our inner perceptions, which media do we reify and canonise as evidential records of our history? Which media do we entrust with that elusive commodity, truth? Could it possibly be carried by a song?

To illustrate this argument, I will draw on my 15 years of experience in working artistically and intellectually with the Yolŋu people of north-east Arnhem Land in Australia's remote north, who are among the many Indigenous peoples whose sovereignty in Australia predates the British occupation of 1788.⁴ As owners of song and dance traditions that formally document their law and are performed to conduct legal processes, the Yolŋu case has been a focus of prolonged political contestation over such nations of song, and also raises salient questions about perceived relations between music and knowledge within the academy, where meaning and evidence are conventionally rendered in text.

This article was originally presented as a keynote address to the joint meeting of the Musicological Society of Australia and the New Zealand Musicological Society at the University of Otago in Dunedin, New Zealand, in December 2010. It was designed to be delivered as an integrated inter-media work in which spoken

1 deGrasse Tyson, Neil. 2008, 'UFO Sightings', *Neil deGrasse Tyson*. <<http://www.haydenplanetarium.org/tyson/watch/2008/06/19/ufo-sightings>> accessed 1 February 2012.

2 Faulkner, William C. 1957, *The Town*, Random House, New York, p. 88.

3 Merleau-Ponty, Maurice 1964, *The Primacy of Perception*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Ill., pp. 159–90.

4 All spellings of names and words from the Yolŋu languages follow the conventions used today throughout the Yolŋu communities of Arnhem Land (Zorc, R. David. 1996. *Yolŋu-Matha Dictionary*. Reprint. Batchelor, NT: Batchelor College).

words, projected photographs, recorded songs and only minimal projected text came together to make a case for music as a palpable vehicle for meaning, and thus knowledge, which was simultaneously reasoned and poetic. Much like a song itself, it deployed emotive poetical devices and repeated hooks, over overtly technical exegesis, to shape audience understanding.

Stephen Wild and Ruth Lee Martin invited me to redeliver this address for a new audience at One Common Thread, the International Council for Traditional Music Colloquium on Laments, at The Australian National University in Canberra in April 2011. Being largely concerned with the Yolŋu song tradition, Manikay, in which there is an intrinsic aesthetic of *warwu* ('sorrow, grief, sadness, worry'),⁵ my original keynote resonated well with the theme of the lament as a shared human form of expression. This article therefore demonstrates how Manikay expresses and mediates sacred relationships between living humans, the deceased and their ancestral forebears. Yet it also serves as a lament of my own for the morbidly high attrition within Australia of Indigenous song and ceremonial traditions that have been lost to the world since the British occupation of 1788, and the continuing endangerment of those that survive to this day.

Reflected in a Sound

Imagine me reflected in a sound.

There is a song in my mind that takes me to a place of great beauty and antiquity. As its melody undulates through my synapses, I can sense this place anew. I can feel the fine, white sands squelching between my toes, so soft and light it is like walking on a cloud. The sands whistle with the wind as it ripples across the bay, over the sandbars, and towards the adjacent island. The air tastes of salt, and, close to shore, a rip current emits a constant, gentle roar. In the brilliance of the sun silhouetted against an expansive white cloud, a lone gull cries out to her chicks nested on yonder island. With each beat of this song echoing somewhere between my ears, my footsteps take me from the water's edge to climb a steep, sandy embankment into a leafy grove. I sit here under the wide, low branches of a tamarind tree, where I can survey the soft sands, the rip current, the sandbars and the island before me.

Though I am far removed from the nearest city or town, other people surround me in this place—generation upon generation of them—and they watch me as I sit. I can see them paddling a canoe back to shore after a long day of hunting. My hunger piques as the aromas of roasting fish and boiling turtle eggs waft

⁵ Corn, Aaron 2009, *Reflections and Voices: Exploring the music of Yothu Yindi with Mandawuy Yunupijnu*, Sydney University Press, Sydney, p. 11.

over from their campfires. Children do backflips on the beach and build designs in the sand. They each move in rhythm with the song, which somehow seems to carry their combined voices as well—one voice made of many intertwining threads. Slowly they come together and file onto the beach carrying a flag of deep blue. They dance with vigour, and embed it deep into the sand. As the flag ripples in the wind, they call me by name. I now dance with them amid these abundant environs and, with the song in my mind, my own voice blends into theirs. Though this is not quite right. Because it is not really my voice at all, but rather an amorphous yet familiar voice of the one made of many.

Though I did once experience some of these things at a place I can recall having visited, this tableau is much more than a simple recollection. The remainder of what I describe here comes not from my own memories at all, but rather from the song itself—from the way that its lyrics, its melody, rhythms and form, and matching choreography reveal intimate details of place accrued through generation upon generation of dutifully curated knowledge. The song takes me to that beach as though I were standing there right now with the soft sands between my toes and all the other details I described. Yet now we face a dilemma. At this moment of realisation, I can offer no evidence whatsoever that any such thing is going on in my head—no proof of a song, or the place I say it describes. Even more spurious is the premise that, because of the song in my mind, I feel some kind of personal connection to this place and those who dwell there.

I have no evidence at all.

This is why I am fascinated by music—the common object of our studies—but particularly song: that combination of organised sounds particular to our species, which, in English, we call music and words. William S. Burroughs once described the word as a virus,⁶ yet song is perhaps the most viral of our cultural forms. By their very design, songs are both memorable and portable. They can slip into our psyches unawares and haunt us without warning. In infancy, they sing us to sleep. In childhood, they taunt us in the playground, and in adolescence and young adulthood, they express our desires and give release to our anxieties.

Whether we evoke them willingly or whether they manifest in our minds unannounced, songs travel with us constantly, and just as they are so easily internalised, they are also easily personalised. At the crossroads of memory and fancy, in the twilight between experience and imagination, songs frequently hold for us fluid, negotiated meanings that would mystify their composers. On the teenage mix tape of the past and the digital playlist of the present, we freely assemble them at will as authentications of ourselves at particular times

6 Burroughs, William S. 1962, *The Ticket That Exploded*, Olympia, Paris, p. 49.

and places, or into particular times and places, as fluid permutations of our sonic selves. At play here, there is also a constitutive social mechanism that takes us out of ourselves and lends us that fleeting sense of belonging to some intangible, greater whole. Our negotiated associations with these playlists to our lives enable us to identify and maintain bonds with others: with our kith and kin, with our communities and countrymen, with those who speak our language, and with our generational peers.

The changing times of Bob Dylan⁷ and Band Aid's bid to feed the world⁸ are now long gone. Yet it is worth remembering that more than once in human history, whether in the streets or via live simulcast, complete strangers have come together in the name of a good song. Public opinions and political persuasions can turn on these tides with startling alacrity, and usher in major social change. This is a remarkable phenomenon when you consider that our synaptic processes—the ones that enable us to sing silently in our minds—are so infinitesimal that they are all but imperceptible. Trivial though this may seem, take a moment to think about the multi-billion-dollar advertising industry that deploys all kinds of music, via all kinds of media, for the sole strategic purpose of swaying our feelings to influence our decisions. Of course, I am expounding quite generally to build a case for music as a palpable vehicle for meaning, and thus knowledge. So, to progress this argument further, I must now take us back in time to another beach entirely.

Another Beach Entirely

On 25 September 1996, I found myself on the beach at Gunyajarra in Arnhem Land on the far north coast of Australia. I was young and naive, I was absolutely sure of myself, and I was proud to be Australian. But that was before our government's dilution of the *Native Title Act*, its mandatory detention of asylum-seekers, its dissolution of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and its exemption of the NT Emergency Response from the *Racial Discrimination Act*. No, but in the mid 1990s, I still revelled in the afterglow of a progressive Australia that had finally, after two centuries, come to recognise the continuing native title of its own Indigenous peoples.

Songs by Midnight Oil,⁹ and Kev Carmody and Paul Kelly¹⁰ stirred my sense of social justice and support for Indigenous rights. But on the radio and the television, and in music stores nationwide, was another pervasive band of

7 Dylan, Bob 1964, *The Times They Are a-Changin'*, [LP], Columbia.

8 Band Aid 1984, *Do They Know It's Christmas?*, [Record single], Phonogram.

9 Midnight Oil 1986, *Diesel and Dust*, [CD], CBS.

10 Carmody, Kev and Kelly, Paul 1993, *From Little Things Big Things Grow*, [Record single], EMI.

musicians with a very simple message. They wanted constitutional recognition for the human rights and continuing sovereignty of all Indigenous Australians. The name of their band was Yothu Yindi. They wanted a treaty, and they wanted it now. Yothu Yindi's hit song 'Treaty'¹¹, from its second album, *Tribal Voice*, galvanised public opinion in Australia in the early 1990s, and helped to shape a political climate that permitted Indigenous native title claims to be assessed through the judicial system. The song's one stated aspiration, however, never eventuated, and, to this day, Australia has no treaty or constitutional recognition for Indigenous sovereignty of any kind, despite repeated Indigenous calls to this effect through parliamentary petitions in 1988, 1998 and 2008.

Mandawuy Yunupiḱu was the founding lead singer and composer of Yothu Yindi, and it was on our first meeting that I found myself at his house by the beach at Gunyaḱara back in September 1996. Since then, our relationship has influenced my work enormously. We have variously published together, given lectures together and made music together. In September 2005, I interviewed Mandawuy for the opening keynote of the Musicological Society of Australia Conference on Music and Social Justice in Sydney.¹² But perhaps most importantly, Mandawuy and I have travelled together through the vast living expanses of his people's remote homelands in Arnhem Land. Mandawuy's people, the Yolḱu of north-east Arnhem Land, define their ownership of these homelands, and in turn their very humanity, through their ability to sing and dance the traditional law of their ancestors generation after generation.

In the 1960s, Mandawuy's parents were central to the struggle against bauxite mining on their sacred homelands. Their seminal parliamentary petition of 1963 led them to the Supreme Court, where they presented evidence of traditional placenames, songs, dances and designs that, under their own Yolḱu law, clearly proved their sovereignty. The presiding Justice, Richard Blackburn, could indeed recognise that the Yolḱu possessed a system of law. Yet on 27 April 1971, on the very first morning of my own life, Blackburn instead ruled that this Yolḱu law had formed no part of Australian law at any time in history.

As a child of those times, Mandawuy could well have grown to face the world with cynicism or indifference; but instead, he chose to promote the ideal that Indigenous peoples and Anglophones could coexist in Australia in equity and mutual respect. He first achieved this through his work with schools in Arnhem Land in the early 1980s, where, as an assistant principal, he championed a bicultural curriculum that made it legitimate for Yolḱu children to be taught in both their own languages and English. This bold challenge to the Anglophonic homogeneity of Australian education has been threatened ever since, and most

11 Yothu Yindi 1991, 'Treaty', *Tribal Voice*, [CD], Mushroom, track 2.

12 Corn, *Reflections and Voices*, pp. 23–43.

recently, by the Federal Government decree that all formal schooling in the Northern Territory commence with four hours of solid tuition in English each day. This is despite the many endangered Australian languages that are still spoken among the Territory's Indigenous communities as a first language, and the typically limited exposure of their children to English before they commence school.

With the formation of the band Yothu Yindi in 1986, Mandawuy began to compose songs with which he theorised his bicultural model as an extension of the formal relationships that maintain balance and order among Yolŋu clans. His song 'Mainstream',¹³ in particular, on Yothu Yindi's debut album, *Homeland Movement*, refers to *ganma*—places where freshwater and saltwater currents owned by different Yolŋu clans of equal social standing are found to mingle in a balanced interaction that produces a yellow foam on the water's surface. Mandawuy's songs also frequently refer to the balance within Yolŋu society between a child's clan and a mother's clan, which the Yolŋu call *yothu-yindi*. A considered respect for different peoples and epistemological traditions and the renunciation of any one people's aims to assimilate another were the main messages that Mandawuy hoped would be taken away from these allusions. He further conceived of *ganma* as a new kind of intellectual space where the world was invited to share in Yolŋu perspectives in the hope of generating new kinds of intercultural exchanges and understandings with others.

It was in this spirit that Yothu Yindi's philanthropic arm, the Yothu Yindi Foundation, established the Garma Festival of Traditional Culture in 1999. After I met the eminent Indigenous scholar Marcia Langton at the first Garma Festival, she and I spent the next half-decade taking classes of undergraduate students from Melbourne and Sydney to this event to learn from our own Yolŋu mentors. It was also here that Mandawuy, Langton and I worked with Allan Marett to establish the annual Symposium on Indigenous Music and Dance, in 2002, and the National Recording Project for Indigenous Performance in Australia, in 2004. I now co-direct these initiatives with the Indigenous educationalist Payi-Linda Ford.

One from Many

Equally as prolific a mentor to me has been the Yolŋu elder Neparrŋa Gumbula: a de facto supervisor of my PhD, my academic colleague at the University of Melbourne and later at the University of Sydney, and the only Yolŋu investigator in history to have led a project funded by the Australian Research Council. We

13 Yothu Yindi 1989, 'Mainstream', *Homeland Movement*, [CD], Mushroom, track 1.

came into our relationship both ascribing to the kind of balanced bicultural exchange processes that Mandawuy has espoused. From our first meetings at Galiwin'ku in Arnhem Land in November 1997, Neparrŋa made it clear that my debt to him in return for tutelage as an elder would be repaid with knowledge and intelligence drawn from my own social and professional spheres. As I grew in my knowledge of the myriad musical resonances of Yolŋu society and law, Neparrŋa's own research networks also grew in return. This balance in our relationship has since enabled him to locate the earliest known collections of Yolŋu heritage in museums and archives worldwide, which include invaluable vast records of his own family's history. Steeped in generations of inherited Yolŋu law and knowledge, Neparrŋa now spends much of his working life correcting ethnographic inaccuracies found in the paper trail that follows these collections: all the minute details of his people's history and heritage that collectors documented inaccurately or failed to record.

From Neparrŋa's perspective, the privilege of his tutelage has always been a function of my adoption as his child. Newcomers conventionally misinterpret this common provision under Yolŋu law as a quaint customary nicety. Yet its intent is far more serious as it serves to reinforce that no-one, not even an adoptee into Yolŋu society, is above the law. Though I was certainly his student, Neparrŋa was definitely never my informant, as he might have been cast by an ethnographer of some previous generation. There was no etic neutrality in which we could find shelter either. There were only two Australians from disparate cultural and linguistic backgrounds trying to make sense of each other's emic perspectives, and attempting to generate a more balanced understanding of Australia's colonial legacy. At the time, we wrote:

Accepting that Yolŋu leaders have been and still are equal, if not leading, partners in research endeavours that draw on their hereditary knowledge, rather than casting them as mere sources of data without the capacity to think and engage with others theoretically, is a necessary part of decolonising and, indeed, humanising the academic project so that ownership of research processes and their outcomes can be shared by all contributors.¹⁴

Under Neparrŋa's tutelage, most of my education in Yolŋu law and knowledge has been through song, starting with originals by bands like Yothu Yindi that draw heavily on traditional themes and materials. But increasingly over the past decade, I have also been schooled in Manikay, the tradition of openly knowable songs and dances that Yolŋu have inherited from the original ancestors who

¹⁴ Corn, Aaron and Gumbula, J. Neparrŋa 2006, 'Rom and the academy repositioned: binary models in Yolŋu intellectual traditions and their application to wider intercultural dialogues', in Lynette Russell (ed.), *Boundary Writing: An exploration of race, culture and gender binaries in contemporary Australia*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, pp. 170–97, at pp. 190–1.

named, shaped and populated their sacred homelands. One of our ongoing projects has been to make comprehensive archival records of Neparrŋa and his siblings performing their own hereditary Manikay repertoire. To understand these songs in any depth, it was not enough for me to record them, or even to deconstruct them analytically. I was encouraged by Neparrŋa and his family to learn how to dance and how to accompany them on *yidaki* (didjeridu), and to study the meanings of their lyrics through transcription and English translation. It was only through these processes that I could begin to know Manikay in the way that even a Yolŋu child can take for granted—through an embodied synthesis of gnosis and praxis.

On our many shared travels interstate and overseas, Neparrŋa and I came to perform the Manikay series for the homeland of Baripuy quite frequently, and it is through this teaching, in particular, that I have learnt much about the processes and poetics of Yolŋu law and knowledge that would have been difficult for me to understand by any other means. Through the knowledge these songs carry, I have come to know how string made from possum fur symbolises the souls of the recently deceased—never-ending and ever-travelling in the lake at Gapuwiyak—protected by the poison spines of attendant eel-tailed catfish schooling along its spiral path. Emus stomp the earth with a loud whomp, and soak their feathers as they drink from a freshwater stream where the air is alive with the sounds of babbling water and small croaking frogs. The path of the stream's current reveals a floor of white clay—the same white clay that elders gather and comb into the hair of youths being readied for initiation into adulthood. Tortoises comb through waterweeds lining the lake floor at Gapuwiyak, which are as white as the hair of the elders. They are detectable only when the air bubbles they exhale break the lake's calm surface with an audible blub. Sulphur-crested cockatoos perch in lofty paperbark trees and sob for the dead, while flocks of red-winged parrots whistle overhead as they make their way to feast upon ripe, wild plums in a simultaneous celebration of the death that comes from life and the life that comes from death.

This could easily begin a description of a Yolŋu acoustemology in the school of Steven Feld¹⁵ for all the elements are there: the sounds of an environment in which humans live overlapping with and echoed in the musical forms that we create. Yet also active here is a deeper level of signification embedded within the heterophonic texture of the Manikay form. Just as no two individuals of a species in nature are ever exactly the same, neither are any two iterations of any individual Manikay song item. Even when the songs are performed by two or more singers in unison, each singer follows the same melodic and lyrical templates for a performance, yet is free to realise these in a multitude

15 Feld, Steven 1990, *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, weeping, poetics, and song in Kaluli expression*, Second edn, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia.

of different ways over rhythmic anchors provided by *bilma* (paired sticks) and *yidaki* (didjeridu). Together, their voices give the illusion of one comprising many: delicately intertwined voices gracefully permutating around the idea of a unified melody, but full of ever-shifting and ever-resolving dissonances. Songs like these exist for each Yolŋu homeland, and when Neparrŋa and I made our first recordings of the Baripuy Manikay repertoire with his family at Djiliwirri in June 2004, they described how the ancestors who remain eternally present and sentient there were watching us from the stream running behind. The hairs on their necks tingled in response, for in Yolŋu epistemology, when people sing Manikay, their voices are not theirs alone, but rather mingle with those of the ancestors themselves.¹⁶

Such are the nations of song where humanity is defined, ancestral lineages are reckoned and ownership rights over country are evidenced through the human ability to sing and dance in the traditions of ancestors. This system of codifying generations of knowledge about the natural forms and ecologies found on country enabled humans to survive and thrive in Australia for scores of millennia, and gave rise to formal musical structures that echo the simultaneously individuated aesthetic roughness found in natural forms.

Consider all the nuanced resonances and complexities that a universal map of the Manikay tradition might reveal: all the crosscutting relationships among its thousands of discrete song subjects, each linked to multiple sites across hundreds of homelands owned by dozens of different Yolŋu clans, who are related to each other through a universalising network of sprawling family ties. Consider how these songs assert the humanity and ancestry of the thousands of people within those clans who presently own the Yolŋu homelands, and the thousands upon thousands more from whom they trace descent. Consider how all the species inhabiting and interacting amidst the varied ecologies of these homelands are each recorded in multitudinous songs of the Manikay tradition, and how their subjects span all the classical Yolŋu media in a way that allows for a song to be danced, a dance to be painted and a design to be sung with seamless intelligibility.

Finally imagine how all those who sing Manikay take stock words and phrases, and take stock melodies and rhythms, to assemble each new iteration of a song in their own individuated ways, and all within an aesthetic tradition that nurtures endless adaptation. Even the lyrics of Manikay, which comprise cryptic strings

16 Corn, Aaron with Gumbula, J. Neparrŋa 2007, 'Buḏutthun Ratja Wiyinymirri: formal flexibility in the Yolŋu Manikay tradition and the challenge of recording a complete repertoire', *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, vol. 2007, no. 2, pp. 116–27, at pp. 116–17.

of names and archaic words, are explicitly designed to offer no straightforward narrative linearity, and can be sequenced quite differently by each singer within each new performance.

These structural ambiguities can also be found in *Crossing Roper Bar*, an opus by the Australian Art Orchestra¹⁷ directed by Paul Grabowsky and Benjamin Wilfred, which, through years of deep listening and experimentation, has grown to marry the aleatory of Manikay with the indeterminacy of jazz. Needless to say, it changes significantly with each performance, refusing to submit to easy notation, analysis and objectification. For those of us who grew up reading music from the page, it can be difficult to accept that the idea of a single work can be so amorphous and embrace such broad variances. Yet in reality, this happens on some scale with all music either intentionally or circumstantially. As Grabowsky himself argues, even when we listen to the same recording of a work over and over again, it changes over time because we ourselves grow and age.¹⁸ Within the Manikay tradition, however, the variations found within natural forms are so deeply embedded aesthetically that its structures deliberately echo this organic growth and decay. The series of Manikay songs led by Benjamin Wilfred on which *Crossing Roper Bar* is based deals with this theme explicitly. Its first song subject is the ancestral ghost Djuwalparra, as he looks for wild honey amid the forest canopy on the Yolŋu homeland of Njilipidji for which Wilfred is a hereditary owner. In its later subjects, Djuwalparra's voice becomes the wind and, finally, the cry of the masked lapwing in lamenting the dead. His pervasive presence in the Njilipidji series acknowledges the natural biological cycle through which life ends in death and decay to create and sustain other life.

The Unfound Spear

This is but a small sample of the richness that Manikay holds and the creativity it inspires. Before the British occupation of 1788, such nations of song formed vast bodies of polity that spanned the Australian continent and, even amidst Australia's capital cities, their legacies live on today. Though the majority of Australians today may not recognise a mastery over one's hereditary songs, dances and ceremonies as desirable in a political leader, this nonetheless remains central to the classical ideal and contemporary practice of leadership in many Indigenous communities nationwide. Often I wonder what the world's Anglophone societies would be like if we expected our politicians and executives to be similarly illuminated.

17 Australian Art Orchestra 2010, *Crossing Roper Bar*, [CD], Australian Art Orchestra.

18 Grabowsky, Paul 2010, The complete musician, viewed 3 February 2012, <<http://www.anu.edu.au/vision/videos/901>>

In the early 1960s, as the Yolŋu struggle against mining was just taking form, William S. Burroughs was contemplating the viral nature of words and Bob Dylan began vanishing into a folk tradition of his own invention. Also at that time, the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty were challenging us to think of human cultural expressions as products of our bodily entwining with the world—the source of our silent inner perceptions that render the meanings we ascribe to the world inseparable from our own existence within it.¹⁹ As such, our externalised cultural expressions are but artefacts of these perceptions, and, depending on the epistemological constructs of the many diverse cultures in which we live, some we reify and canonise as evidential records of our history and some we do not. In Yolŋu epistemology, Manikay is indeed considered a medium that can project the human mind into the various Yolŋu homelands its repertory describes. This is precisely because the Manikay repertory is accepted by Yolŋu to be an evidential record of their homelands as observed by the original ancestors who dwelt there, and as handed down to their present descendants over countless generations.

Here, I am drawn back to the place of great beauty and antiquity that my mind sang silently into cognisance as this article began—that place of whistling soft sands and sea breezes, rip currents and sandbars, and tamarind trees and turtle hunts. This nation of the blue flag is the homeland of Luṅgutja on Arnhem Bay to which I travelled in June 2005 with another influential Yolŋu colleague, Djanḡirrawuy Garawirrtja. As a senior hereditary owner and ceremonial leader for Luṅgutja, Djanḡirrawuy knew all the Manikay for Luṅgutja, but, having been raised in the Yolŋu town of Galiwin'ku, had never before been there. Through his songs, however, he nonetheless demonstrated an intimate knowledge of his country, and would sometimes comment that '[e]very time I sing these Manikay, I go there in my mind'.

Djanḡirrawuy led the Manikay performance that we recorded there with his family, and chose the precise spot where we would sit for its significance in Luṅgutja's songs. We sat on the beach facing the sea from which the white sands gave way to the sacred waters of Muṅurru in which a rip current gently roared before us. Further out lay the two sandbars that shelter the souls of Djanḡirrawuy's clan in a shallow strait between the mainland and the island beyond. Behind us, atop a steep, sandy embankment, was the tamarind tree, with its wide, low branches, where the maiden ghost Wurrathithi sits in the shade and eternally mourns the dead. Before we began recording songs of Luṅgutja's sacred waters, Djanḡirrawuy made the ancestors who reside there a traditional offering of tobacco. By the day's end, he was delighted that the ancestors had recognised him as a true descendant of their lineage by offering up to our party so rich a feast of turtle eggs.

19 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, pp. 159–90.

Occasionally I come across colleagues or acquaintances who quip that a people can only remain indigenous when they still live permanently on their traditional lands. Yet does not our species cultivate and internalise songs precisely because they are so intrinsically portable, and therefore enable us to perpetuate endearing links to places from which we have moved, or been involuntarily removed? The Manikay tradition is built on this understanding. The human mind can carry country and ancestors from one generation to the next, and realise their agency anew every time their songs are performed formally in ceremonies or even informally. In Yolŋu epistemology, the corporate ancestral record passed to humanity through Manikay endures while the memories of individuals fade. Years later at the Garma Festival in August 2010, Djangirrawuy elucidated on this mechanism further: 'Once, a spear was thrown from Yilpara to Lungutja, where it hit the cliffs and turned them red with blood. But nobody now can find the exact place where that spear landed. It can only be found in your mind when you sing it in Manikay.'

Such perspectives are neither fanciful nor trivial. They reveal our inherited and enculturated biases towards the various kinds of media to which knowledge can be ascribed. Which would we consider capable of supporting fact: a book, a photograph, a spreadsheet or perhaps a world ranking of top universities? Which do we entrust with that most elusive commodity, truth? Could it possibly be a song? As someone who has formally studied music of one kind or another since the age of four, I find these questions intriguing. They challenge our notions of what knowledge is and where we accept that evidence can be manifest, and they expose the prejudices we face when our studies of music are measured against disciplines that chiefly vest meaning in text. Had the society of my birth been more accepting of this possibility then perhaps Justice Blackburn would have ruled in favour of Mandawuy's parents, and they would never have experienced the anguish of seeing their homelands desecrated by mining. Perhaps all those repeated calls for a treaty that recognises the sovereignty and human rights of Australia's Indigenous peoples might, by now, have precipitated some constitutional reform.

Imagine Mandawuy's father saying that his people's roots run deep into country and that the names called out by the original ancestors to demarcate these places are legally enshrined in Manikay. Imagine Justice Blackburn wanting to see evidence of fence lines and mapped boundaries, and deeds of title over property.

Imagine me reflected in a sound.

Imagine Mandawuy's mother saying that her people prove their lineages and hereditary ownership in country through their ability to perform the law: the

names, songs, dances and designs handed down from the original ancestors. Imagine Justice Blackburn wanting to see evidence of genealogies and registers—a paper trail reaching back before the British occupation of 1788.

Imagine me reflected in a sound.

Imagine Mandawuy himself saying that his people do not care—that they continue to pass on their law regardless of its rejection and trivialisation by the Supreme Court. Imagine Justice Blackburn ruling that this law forms no part of Australian law at any time in history.

Imagine me reflected in these sounds.

There are those in our society, perhaps in the majority, who believe that, without a textually recorded history, a people such as the Yolŋu can hold no traditional sense of nationhood and law. So, all things being equal, it lamentably boils down to this. One person's ephemeron is another's foundation. One person's art is another's law: paintings on bodies versus books bound in leather; song versus scripture; our minds, embodied in word and deed, versus theirs.

The Song of Farewells

Voices of the blue-flag nation still ripple through my mind. But now they sing of *djāpana*, the coral sunset—a lament that farewells loved ones who are absent or lost. I am no longer on the beach at Luṅgutja with its whistling soft sands, but rather sitting in my office at The Australian National University as these words I type. From the window behind me in the hot, dry sun of a November afternoon, I can see Capital Hill and the Australian flag flying atop Parliament House. Outside my office door, on the balcony overlooking the stairwell, a blue flag stands to remind me of business unfinished and debts unpaid. I wonder if people will understand the interpretative risks taken here to interrogate this problem through the praxis and poesis, and the intimacies and imperceptibilities of songs.

My Yolŋu colleagues constantly tell me that all of our thoughts and experiences have always existed nescient in the human form, yet are only revealed to us in the now in particular permutations for particular purposes. This is indeed the lesson of Manikay with its cryptic and ever-permutating realisations. All we have in this reality are the physical resources we encounter and our common will to pass our corporate knowledge for manipulating them into posterity. Beyond this, it falls to each new generation to build on our cumulative knowledge from the past to create the new.

This is not so different from the scientific precept that the universe is ordered unto immutable physical constants and that the goal of human discovery is to unlock and harness their secrets. Natural phenomena that our ancestors once found mysterious, like bacteria and electricity, are now established and understood as commonplace fact. What cannot we explicitly prove due to present limitations of human understanding? Perhaps the workings of songs within us, and the interiorised spaces of the mind they stimulate, are so difficult to quantify because we do not yet fully understand ourselves either physiologically or psychologically. The mind's capacity for song, with all its multitudinous forms and associations, encourages us not to dismiss too hastily every enduring ancestral truth that perhaps cannot yet be quantified.

Yet songs are indeed powerful. They have the power to soothe, the power to persuade, the power to provoke, the power to educate and the power to lament. They have the power to insinuate themselves into our inner selves, and they have the power to convey meaning over vast stretches of time and space, and to recall distant memories that were perhaps never ours. The burgeoning bodies of literature and practice in music therapy, psychology and education that are built on our cognitive responses to these stimuli are not a random phenomenon. Songs are integral to the way that we make sense of the world, and vest our lives and communities with embodied meanings in it. As a species, we are wet-wired for song. We habitually construct and project ourselves through the creation and assemblage of songs throughout our lives. We reflect ourselves in them and, in turn, they reflect us.

Reflected in their sounds, we are each a nation of song.

In Memory

These silent words are my lament for the many Indigenous song and ceremonial traditions, like Manikay, that thrived on the Australian continent before the British occupation of 1788. As I draw to a close, I remember another child of Lunḡutja reflected in the coral sunset. Born in 1950, Djirrimbilpiḷwuy Garawirrtja was Djangirrawuy's older brother who, from the mid 1960s onwards, was an avid pioneer of new music and broadcasting in Arnhem Land. It was at his invitation that I first travelled to Galiwin'ku in August 1997. He remained an innovator until his untimely death in May 2009, with his YouTube video of the Chooky Dancers from October 2007 having sparked the first Yolḡu Internet sensation.²⁰ Now he has passed between the sandbars, I dedicate this article to him. It was his song all along.

20 Chooky Dancers 2007, 'Zorba the Greek Yolḡu style', *YouTube*, viewed 23 February 2012, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-MucVWo-Pw>>

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