

“THIS MURDER DONE”: MISOGYNY, FEMICIDE AND  
MODERNITY IN 19<sup>TH</sup>-CENTURY APPALACHIAN MURDER  
BALLADS

A Thesis  
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Christina Ruth Hastie  
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“When all is said, it is to and for our daughters and their generation that we write. We want to tell them what we know. We wish them to understand what impelled us to fight to learn it—what it, and most especially, they, mean to us.”<sup>1</sup>

-Carroll Smith-Rosenberg

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<sup>1</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 7.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis contextualizes Appalachian murder ballads of the 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-centuries through a close reading of the lyric texts. Using a research frame that draws from the musicological and feminist concepts of Diana Russell, Susan McClary, Norm Cohen, and Christopher Small, I reveal 19<sup>th</sup>-century Appalachia as a patriarchal, modern, and highly codified society despite its popularized image as a culturally isolated and “backward” place. I use the ballads to demonstrate how music serves the greater cultural purpose of preserving and perpetuating social ideologies. Specifically, the murder ballads reveal layers of meaning regarding hegemonic masculinities prevalent in 19<sup>th</sup>-century and turn-of-the-20<sup>th</sup>-century Appalachian culture.

This work also explores the biases and agendas of the early folksong projects in the United States. Examining the arguments of early scholars, I consider the American tradition in juxtaposition to the earlier British forms of music. Rejecting earlier scholarship that argues for the relatedness of British and American balladry, I find that ballads associated with, and circulating in, the United States instead reflect a new cultural idiom grounded in the beliefs of those who sought a conservative Christian aesthetic and way of life in the southern Appalachian mountains.

The murder ballads witness that Appalachia, specifically in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century period of industrial change, was defined by essential tensions between cultural traditions of the past and emerging notions of American modernism. This tension is met in the songs with responses of violence against women whose life situations—marked by sexual freedom—are the very depiction of a new cultural modernism that threatens the hegemony of the past.

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## CHAPTER I

### Discovering Appalachian Ballads

My own foray into the field of musicological research began with an interest in ballads of Scotch-Irish origin and their various transformations in the United States. Grappling with the seemingly endless possibilities within this realm of song, I initially felt lost in a world of music steeped in centuries of rich historical tradition. While taking a graduate class concerned with the music of Appalachia, I encountered a small body of songs known as “murder ballads.” I found myself drawn to these ballads, with their haunting lyrics and often-graphically-violent themes. In order to connect my ideas more thoroughly to a feminist paradigm, I also undertook graduate work in women’s studies to supplement my musicological efforts and thesis research.

My fascination with murder ballads stems, in part, from their extreme nature. Though modern popular music is rife with themes of violence, I felt a shocking disturbance over the explicit brutality described in centuries-old ballads. Indeed, the lyrics of the murder ballads did not align with my own popularly-influenced preconception of Appalachian people as a kindred and passive “folk.” Ethnomusicologist Tomie Hahn describes the power of the “extreme” on our senses and why we are drawn to forms of entertainment well outside popular ideas of normalcy, the mainstream, or even safety.<sup>2</sup> Hahn claims that experience of the “sensually extreme” provides us with an opportunity for disorientation that helps us define not only our own boundaries, but our understanding of the world around us as well. While Hahn’s work particularly addresses the sensory encounters that occur in the arena of monster trucking, her assertions parallel

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<sup>2</sup> Tomie Hahn, “It’s the Rush’: Sites of the Sensually Extreme,” *The Drama Review* 50, no. 2 (2006): 88.

aspects of my own experiences with the murder ballads. Hahn posits that the senses “enable us to construct parameters of existence.”<sup>3</sup> Similarly, in the instance of the murder ballads, I explore how these songs construct and reflect the parameters, identities, and understandings of social life in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Appalachian America.

Because the term “ballad” encompasses a vast collection of definitions, it requires clarification for purposes of this study. I borrow part of G. Malcolm Laws’ definition of a “popular ballad,” to mean a “narrative song, usually anonymous, which depends upon oral tradition for its preservation. The ballad must tell a story, it cannot be primarily a lyric expression of emotion.”<sup>4</sup> Within the frame of my thesis, a ballad is a narrative folksong that dramatizes or remembers specific events, including those that are historically factual as well as stories that are fictive or mythological. The story involves human beings in whom, as Laws asserts, audiences “can take a personal interest.”<sup>5</sup> Ballads generally employ certain characters, some patterned after stock types who evoke specific emotions from the audience, such as sympathy, compassion, disdain, contempt, or fear.

The ballad story typically advances chronologically, in four-line stanzas of what Laws refers to as “simple diction.”<sup>6</sup> The murder ballads I discuss favor a simple vocabulary that enhances their accessibility and effectiveness. Invariably, a ballad articulates a short, plotted narrative that ends conclusively. Historical ballads were generally transmitted without reference to instrumental accompaniment and were usually

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> G. Malcom Laws, *American Balladry from British Broad-sides* (Philadelphia: The American Folklore Society, 1957), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

sung *a cappella* before a small group. Notably, according to common performance technique, ballads require the singer to suppress her individual personality in order to let the story shine through. The detached vocal delivery style is a practice addressed by the ballad singers themselves, as articulated by the Arkansas ballad singer Almeda Riddle:

You have to put yourself *behind* the song. By that I mean get out of the way of it. *Present* your story, don't *perform* it...The difference between our most popular "folksingers" and me, they do perform and put too much of themselves into it. I just get behind it. I don't want any of Almeda Riddle in there. Let's get the picture of Mary Hamilton, the weeping, betrayed girl, before the public. And if your ballad is good enough, it'll hold them without anything that you do. You don't have to put any tricks to your voice or anything else, if you sing it with feeling.<sup>7</sup>

In this way, ballads are musical stories whose appeal lies in the straightforward narration of lyrics that are, as Jon Finson asserts, "documents of a broader American history."<sup>8</sup>

I focus the corpus of the Appalachian murder ballads through a feminist lens to provide a lyric analysis of these song texts. In this way, I further both the scholarship of musicology and women's studies where my work, as Elizabeth Engelhardt asserts, continues a commitment to "politicized scholarship—a belief that academic writing, conversation, and support for activism can make the world a more socially just place."<sup>9</sup> A close reading of the ballad texts allows me to reflect upon historical Appalachia's responses to culturally transgressive women. In turn, such an investigation carries positive implications for continuing research on violence in contemporary music, particularly because song themes today draw from the legitimization of misogyny preserved by musical genres of the past.

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<sup>7</sup> Roger D. Abrahams, ed. *A Singer and Her Songs: Almeda Riddle's Book of Ballads* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), 122-23.

<sup>8</sup> Jon W. Finson, *The Voices That Are Gone: Themes in Nineteenth-Century American Popular Song* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), xii.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth S.D. Engelhardt, *Beyond Hill and Hollow: Original Readings in Appalachian Women's Studies* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2005), 7.

The term “feminism” affixes itself to many meanings, and my study of the murder ballads provides an opportunity to clarify and situate feminist thought in music. My connection to feminist scholarship predates my interest in murder ballads, and serves me well in an investigation of these songs. Namely, I use aspects of feminism to uncover the bias, sexism, and misogyny of previous ballad scholarship and of earlier Appalachia. I am specifically drawn to the feminist idea that seeks to expose Freudian-based ideas of patriarchy that subjugate women to male power and dominance. I seek to further the feminist goal of revealing (and thus, dispelling) misogynistic ideas about how power is construed between genders and socioeconomic classes. Such an interest aligns with the feminist interest in power construction that Amy Allen explains:

Insofar as feminists are interested in studying power, it is because we have an interest in understanding, criticizing, challenging, subverting, and ultimately overturning the multiple axes of stratification affecting women in contemporary Western societies, including (but not limited to) sexism, racism, heterosexism, and class oppression.<sup>10</sup>

My work accomplishes this objective by using the songs to illuminate hidden historical ideas of androcentrism and the “male as normative” belief that foregrounds much scholarship within the social sciences. I am also interested in how these deeply entrenched ideas of patriarchy have shaped the lives of American women in the past—a history that continues to shape the feminine experience today.

Particularly, the lyric song texts allow me to draw from contemporary feminist scholarship concerned with femicide. Occurring in the murder ballads as works of fiction (as in the British broadsides and the American archetypal ballads discussed in Chapter Two) and in ballad accounts of real historical murders (discussed in Chapter Four),

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<sup>10</sup> Amy Allen, *The Power of Feminist Theory: Domination, Resistance, Solidarity* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), 2.

femicide is a type of intimate violence that hallmarks this song tradition. First coined by feminist scholar Diana Russell in the 1970s, “femicide” refers to the historical and contemporary misogynist murders of women. As Russell and Jane Caputi state:

The murders of women by husbands, lovers, fathers, acquaintances, and strangers are not the products of some inexplicable device. Murder is simply the most extreme form of sexist terrorism. A new word is needed to reflect this political understanding... *femicide* best describes the murders of women by men motivated by hatred, contempt, pleasure, or a sense of ownership of women.<sup>11</sup>

My work is concerned with rewriting histories that gloss over the patriarchal or misogynistic natures of American society that continue to restrict women. Thus, my textual analysis of murder ballads reveals layers of meaning regarding hegemonic masculinities prevalent in 19<sup>th</sup>-century and turn of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century Appalachian culture.

Popular at a time of great industrial change and economic growth in the eastern United States, the murder ballads represent a regional response to emerging ideas that infiltrated even the most rural parts of the country. Through a contextual analysis of the murder ballads, I supplement scholarship concerning southern Appalachia. Popular consciousness still attaches this region to notions of “backwardness,” poverty, and illiteracy—along with a beloved image of the good-natured but simple-minded “hillbilly.” Indeed, a description of this nature may call to mind popular films such as the 2000 Oscar nominee, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* Like the murder ballads, the surface of the film appears to perpetuate caricatures of southern life and experience, featuring stereotyped antics carried out by loveable characters. However, upon closer analysis, the film and the ballads speak to deeper cultural themes. According to Rob Content et al., popular consciousness still readily dismisses the realities behind Hollywood

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<sup>11</sup> Diana Russell and Jane Caputi, "'Femicide': Speaking the Unspeakable," *Ms.* Vol.1, no. 2 (1990): 35.

glamorization of rural living; films like *O, Brother* and songs such as the murder ballads must be understood in terms of the more meaningful truths that teach us “to understand life as a series of moral trials.”<sup>12</sup>

Carefully placed social ideals present within the murder ballads reveal historical Appalachia as a far more complex society than popularly thought. The murder ballads witness that Appalachia, specifically in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century period of industrial change, was defined by essential tensions between cultural traditions of the past and the emerging notions of American modernism. This tension is met with responses of violence against women whose life situations, marked by sexual freedom, are the very depiction of a new cultural modernism that threatens the hegemony of the past. In responding to social changes and sexual threats, the murder ballads demonstrate the vestiges of a highly codified social agenda—one both challenged and persistent, and one deeply rooted in the ideals and practices of misogyny and patriarchy.

### **Scope and Parameters**

The murder ballads speak to a multifaceted complex of cultural influences, a situation that requires an explicit description of my research criteria. In order to delimit this study, I define my song set by a specific subject matter enacted through stock characters of a certain demographic in a fixed time period and geographic location. Moreover, within this study, the lyric texts remain the focus of analysis and discussion. As Joseph Donatelli asserts, “texts, far from being fossilized or disembodied, exist as specific cultural products which are as highly constructed and socialized as folklorists

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<sup>12</sup> Rob Content, Tim Kreider, and Boyd White, “*O Brother, Where Art Thou?*,” *Film Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (2001): 42.

have shown orality to be.”<sup>13</sup> While my work recognizes the ballads as narrative musical entities and acknowledges that the tunes have worked alongside the lyric texts in creating a fluid and enduring tradition, I do not provide melodic analyses of the various tunes attached to the murder ballads. Instead, my work is more interested in the social aspects of “musicking,” a term created by Christopher Small to assert that “music is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do.”<sup>14</sup> Other scholars such as Norm Cohen agree that “it makes more sense to define folk music in terms of its social role or its means of dissemination rather than its intrinsic characteristics.”<sup>15</sup>

Specifically, I am interested in the creative process of the ballads and in contextualizing their lyrics. Though the ballad authors cannot be identified, and their original tunes are lost among the many variations documented (and undocumented) by early folksong scholars, the literary mechanisms present in the texts of the murder ballads remain available for contemporary study. My inspiration for a text-based analysis includes Alan Dundes’ call for investigations of folklore that seek to contextualize stories. As he states, one of the most disheartening aspects of folkloristics “is the persistent lack of analysis or interpretation...without attention to context of possible meaning(s) of such texts.”<sup>16</sup> By focusing on the texts of murder ballads, I reveal the deeper cultural issues addressed within the songs that are masked on the surface by the

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<sup>13</sup> Joseph Donatelli, "'To Hear with Eyes': Orality, Print Culture, and the Textuality of Ballads," in *Ballads and Boundaries: Narrative Singing in an Intercultural Context*, ed. James Porter (Los Angeles: Regents of the University of California, 1993), 348.

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Small, *Musicking* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 2.

<sup>15</sup> Norm Cohen, *Folk Music: A Regional Exploration* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005), 1.

<sup>16</sup> Alan Dundes, "Bloody Mary in the Mirror: A Ritual Reflection of Pre-Pubescent Anxiety," *Western Folklore* 57, no. 2/3 (1998): 119.

lyrical evocation of sympathy and tragedy—a phenomenon that often results in the masking of greater cultural implications. Such an approach to the ballads is affirmed by Finson who states, “lyrics written during a given time period are tokens of the songwriter’s views and of his or her belief that such a sentiment will be well received by the prospective audience.”<sup>17</sup>

As a whole, my work acknowledges the melodies as participants in this oral song tradition, important to the memorization process, and significant in the conveyance of textual meaning. Together, the melodies and texts have created a tradition of music-making powerful in the cultivation of an Appalachian identity and community. However, as Gail de Vos asserts, “The element of music is one that is conspicuously absent from most of the reworkings of these ballad stories.”<sup>18</sup> Indeed, many of the ballad anthologies published by the early-20<sup>th</sup>-century ballad scholars underscore variations of ballad texts and their dissemination, but provide minimal documentation of the tunes.

However, recognizing the importance of tunes to the ballad tradition, and the possibility of further research that might draw upon my foundational work with the lyrics, I offer a resource index of the anthologies that document one or more tunes for each murder ballad examined in this thesis. Additionally, I provide a publication date and a selection of 20<sup>th</sup>-century recordings for each song in order to illustrate the complex circulation and identity of the murder ballads. The index may be found after the lyric appendices in this thesis.

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<sup>17</sup> Finson, *Voices That Are Gone*, xii.

<sup>18</sup> Gail de Vos, *Stories from Songs: Ballads as Literary Fictions for Young Adults* (Westport: Libraries Unlimited, 2009), xvii.

### Definition of the Song Set

My research set derives in part from my particular definition of the contested notion of “murder ballad.” Within the genre of ballads, which we have established as narrative story-songs, there exists a small corpus of compositions known as “murder ballads.” It is difficult to discern the actual number of murder ballads in existence, because the songs are classified under many different titles by folklorists such as Francis Child, G. Malcolm Laws, Olive Burt, and Louise Pound. In seminal works like Laws’ *Native American Balladry*, Pound’s *American Ballads and Songs*, and the Child anthologies,<sup>19</sup> murder ballads have been defined as songs in which a homicide takes place, is discovered, and is followed by a rendering of justice. In these murder ballads, women and men alike are the criminals and the victims. Ballads containing a single female victim are often referred to as “murdered-girl” ballads or “murdered-sweetheart” ballads, and have been broadly grouped under “Murder Ballads,” or “Ballads of Unfaithful Lovers.”

Within these generic categories, violence against women, male hegemony, patriarchy, and feminine victimization are effectively masked. Instead, the listener often associates the “murders” in the ballads as the necessary result of conflict, or as a tragic restoration of order to a universe in which sexually free women cannot exist. Reading the ballads to decipher their subtly embedded meanings and agendas finds support from anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who denotes culture as a “historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in

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<sup>19</sup> Francis James Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads: In Five Volumes* (Northfield, MN: Loomis House Press, 2001).

symbolic forms by means of which (persons) communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes for life.”<sup>20</sup>

In the canon of previous scholarship, I find the classifications of murdered-girl ballads misogynistic, even if not intentionally so, as they gloss over the significance of violence against women, relegating brutality toward women as inevitable plot devices in the “murdered-girl” or “murdered-sweetheart” scenario. Though I recognize that the phrase “murder ballad” may serve in broader contexts as an umbrella term to describe murder of all sorts, I use the term to reference those songs in which a young woman is brutally murdered by her young male lover or sweetheart. His motivations for committing the crime are generally linked to the idea that his victim’s sexuality threatens to compromise his reputation. Thus, the murdered-girl embodies the anti-example of prevailing social expectations of behavior. In order to protect his own self-interests, the male lover feels compelled to take the young woman’s life.

My selection of songs for study relies on G. Malcolm Laws’ 1957 *American Balladry from British Broad-sides*,<sup>21</sup> and his 1964 anthology, *Native American Balladry*.<sup>22</sup> While I recognize the acclaimed English ballad scholar, Francis James Child, as the progenitor of American projects and discuss his contributions to balladry in Chapter Two, the encyclopedic nature of Laws’ work on the American ballads and British broadsides remains most useful to my study. In his *Native American Balladry*, for example, Laws defines several different ballad types. He distinguishes “Ballads About Criminals and

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<sup>20</sup> Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System,” in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, ed. Michael Banton (London: Routledge, 1966), 3.

<sup>21</sup> Laws, *American Balladry from British Broad-sides*.

<sup>22</sup> G. Malcom Laws, *Native American Balladry: A Descriptive Study and a Bibliographical Syllabus* (Philadelphia: The American Folklore Society, 1964).

Outlaws,” from “Murder Ballads”—a genre he identifies as one in which “murders are usually unmotivated in the ballads, apparently because of the taboo against the mention of pregnancy or illegitimacy. This is in sharp contrast to Child balladry, which is usually frank and explicit where sex is concerned.”<sup>23</sup> I have chosen Laws’ compendium because it offers a comprehensive selection of the American murder ballads and British broadsides in my study, offering a larger picture of their cultural transmission and popularity in particular regions of the United States.

Laws’ work synthesizes that of many other scholars and numerically classifies all of the ballads within my research set. In this way, his anthologies help me to frame my project as an identifiable group of songs under a common theme. However, where Laws’ anthology deals with the interrelationships of the ballads by examining their similarities and possible relatedness, I consider each murder ballad as its own autonomous statement and reject the premise of stemmatic relatedness. While I utilize other sources to obtain full texts of the ballads, owing to Laws’ fragmented texts, I still find his work the most significant of the American scholars. While others chose to focus their collections on specific regions, such as Louis W. Chappell’s *Folk-Songs of Roanoke and the Albemarle*<sup>24</sup> and Paul Brewster’s *Ballads and Songs of Indiana*,<sup>25</sup> Laws’ anthology covers all areas of the United States in which ballads have been collected, thus readily encompassing all of Appalachia.

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<sup>23</sup> Laws, *Native American Balladry*, 21.

<sup>24</sup> Louis W. Chappell, *Folk-Songs of Roanoke and the Albemarle* (Morgantown, WV: The Ballad Press, 1939).

<sup>25</sup> Paul G. Brewster, *Ballads and Songs of Indiana*, Indiana University Publications Folklore Series (Bloomington: The University of Indiana Press, 1940).

Herein, I also propose that the ballads gradually reflect emerging feminist perspectives and technologies. The nuanced appearance of multiple modernisms (i.e. trains, telegrams, war, and sexual ideologies) speaks to the shifting culture of Appalachia. My research on the ballad collectors and their respective compilations reveals my forbearers to have exercised a wide range of biases toward balladry. Laws is no exception and in fact his collection well illustrates many of the biases that he inherited from earlier folk projects. Rather than rejecting his work, I find in Laws' collection an opportunity to address and remedy some of the problematic tendencies at the root of his project.

The murder ballads I employ are formulaic in their composition, a crucial characteristic of their underlying misogynistic and patriarchal natures. My song set employs specific thematic elements, chronological events, and several stock characters: the female murder victim, her male lover-murderer, and often the victim's grieving parents. In the typical scenario, a young woman is lured away from her dwelling by her male lover to a secluded spot—a ploy often accomplished through a pretext of discussing marriage or a proposed elopement. Presumably, she is pregnant. Once the couple goes away together, the male lover kills his sweetheart either to solve the problem of pregnancy or to punish her for her sexual excesses as he perceives them. Oftentimes, he disposes of her body in or near a body of water, such as a river. The concluding stanzas generally follow one of two outcomes. In some cases, the perpetrator admits his crime and pays for it with his life, most commonly through a trial leading to his condemnation or execution. Alternatively, he is acquitted of his crime or escapes legal retribution entirely, and gains his freedom through his masculine resourcefulness.

Drawing upon these parameters, my set is now definable. I begin with the British ancestors upon which many scholars assert the American murder ballads are based. To examine scholarly ideas concerning the relatedness of British and American song, I include a brief analysis and comparison of *The Gosport Tragedy/The Cruel Ship's Carpenter* (re-titled in the United States as *Pretty Polly*), and *The Wexford Girl/The Oxford Girl/The Cruel Miller* (re-titled in the United States as *Knoxville Girl*).

However, the focus of my study largely rests with my analysis of the American murder ballads, and specifically those that are tied to actual historical murders. I focus on these songs because they corroborate the realities of women's subjugation in historical Appalachia. I begin with a brief analysis of *The Jealous Lover* and *The Banks of the Ohio*. I read these ballads as archetypal models and progenitors of the American songs. My American song set includes *Omie Wise* (1808), *The Murder of Laura Foster* (1866), *Pearl Bryan* (1897), *Nell Cropsey* (1901), and *Lula Viers* (1917). The following table arranges the ballads in a chronological order and reflects the order in which they are addressed in my thesis. I also provide references to the numerous sources from which I have gathered full texts of each song. A full citation of each item referenced appears in the bibliography.

Table 1.1 Murder Ballads Analyzed

| Ballad Name                                                           | Number in G. Malcolm Laws' <i>Native American Balladry</i> (1964) or <i>Ballads from British Broad-sides</i> (1957) | Discrepancies                                                                                                                                                              | Text Source for Analysis                                                                               |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>The Wexford Girl/Oxford Girl/ The Cruel Miller/ Knoxville Girl</i> | P35 (BFBB)                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                            | G. Malcolm Laws, <i>Native American Balladry</i> , 1964, p. 267.                                       |
| <i>The Gosport Tragedy/The Cruel Ship's Carpenter</i>                 | P36A (BFBB)                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                            | From the Roud Folk Song Index.                                                                         |
| <i>Pretty Polly</i>                                                   | P36B (BFBB)                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                            | Paul G. Brewster, <i>Ballads and Songs of Indiana</i> , 1940, p. 298.                                  |
| <i>The Jealous Lover</i>                                              | F4 (NAB)                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                            | Arthur Palmer Hudson, <i>Folkongs of Mississippi</i> , 1936, p. 185-86.                                |
| <i>On the Banks of the Ohio/The Banks of the Old Pedee</i>            | F5 (NAB)                                                                                                            | Noted by Laws as combining elements of <i>The Jealous Lover</i> , <i>Knoxville Girl</i> , and <i>Pretty Polly</i>                                                          | Mellinger Edward Henry, <i>Folk-Songs from the Southern Highlands</i> , 1938, p. 220.                  |
| <i>Omie Wise</i>                                                      | F31 (NAB as "Naomi Wise")                                                                                           | Laws also classifies other versions of this song entitled <i>Poor Omie/ John Lewis/Little Omie Wise</i> under the F4 label, in conjunction with <i>The Jealous Lover</i> . | Transcribed from Doc Watson's recording, <i>The Best of Doc Watson 1964-1968</i> , 1999. <sup>26</sup> |

<sup>26</sup> The lyrics for *Omie Wise* can also be found in Alan Lomax, *Folk Songs of North America in the English Language* (Garden City, NY: Dolphin Books, 1960), 268. I have chosen to transcribe Doc Watson's performance of the ballad because of my personal attachment to the recording, which sparked my interest to the murder ballad genre. The differences between the two versions are minimal.

Table 1.1, Continued

| Ballad Name                       | Number in G. Malcolm Laws' <i>Native American Balladry</i> (1964) or <i>Ballads from British Broadsides</i> (1957) | Discrepancies                                                                                             | Text Source for Analysis                                                                                |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>The Murder of Laura Foster</i> | F36 (NAB)                                                                                                          | Laws classifies another version of this song as <i>Tom Dooley</i> under F36A                              | Frank C. Brown, <i>The Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore</i> , 1952-1961, p. 707-10. |
| <i>Pearl Bryan</i>                | F1B, F2, and F3 (NAB)                                                                                              | Each number recounts a different textual variation of this ballad.                                        | Anne B. Cohen, <i>Poor Pearl, Poor Girl!</i> , 1973, p. 65-66.                                          |
| <i>Nell Cropsey</i>               | F1C (NAB)                                                                                                          | This ballad is classified under the F1 label along with <i>The Jealous Lover</i> and <i>Pearl Bryan</i> . | Louis W. Chappell, <i>Folk-Songs of Roanoke and the Albemarle</i> , 1939, p. 110, 115-116.              |
| <i>Lula Viers</i>                 | F10 (NAB)                                                                                                          |                                                                                                           | Jean Thomas, <i>Ballad Makin' in the Mountains of Kentucky</i> , 1939, p. 150-52.                       |

### Time Period and Demographic

As illustrated by the historical facts tied to the American murder ballads, the songs within my study span just over a century, from the early 19<sup>th</sup>- to the early 20<sup>th</sup>-centuries. The earliest murder ballad I examine is based upon the historical murder of Naomi Wise in 1808; the latest occurring is based upon the murder of Lula Viers in 1917.

This time span supports my reading of the song texts as a response to an increasingly modernized American society, both socially and technologically.

Further, the historical events that inspired the songs suggest a particular demographic. The history reflected by the songs overwhelmingly depicts scenarios of lower working-class white women and their gentrified or upper-middle-class white male lovers; therefore my song set explicitly refers to this subset within the broader Appalachian American population, and to the geographic areas in which the murders occurred and the ballads circulated.

Moreover, the time period encompassed by my work demonstrates how gender and cultural ideologies were both changing and spreading in some aspects, and remaining steadfast in others. Though Christianity inherited a deeply-embedded and long-standing tradition of misogyny, Raewyn Connell notes that in 19<sup>th</sup>-century America, “religion was being displaced by science as the major frame of intellectual life. Nineteenth-century science was actively concerned with problems related to gender.”<sup>27</sup> In the construction of new social hierarchies, emerging ideologies partially focused upon gender divisions. New ideas met, in part, with theories of social progress proposed by male intellectuals intent on preserving patriarchy; as Connell asserts, Auguste Comte notably claimed that women were an essential part of “the coming utopian society—but only if they remained in their proper sphere as comforters and nurturers of men.”<sup>28</sup> Thus I position the 19<sup>th</sup>-century as an era essentially concerned with the changing social life in the United States—a transformation witnessed on artistic, regional, and cultural levels.

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<sup>27</sup> Raewyn Connell, *Gender in World Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2009), 33.

<sup>28</sup> Cited in *Ibid.*

## Region

Geographic location is another important criterion for my work's scope and parameters. In centering my ethnoscape upon the southeast region of the United States, the songs within my research set speak to Appalachia as both a region and a culture. Therefore, it is necessary to define what I mean by the term "Appalachia."

Appalachia has been, and continues to be, described, depicted, and defined in innumerable ways. With regard to its geographical parameters alone, Appalachia is subjected to many different definitions. As described by the Appalachian Regional Commission, "official" Appalachia "includes some three hundred and ninety-seven counties in thirteen states."<sup>29</sup> Appalachia is usually further divided by sub-area, with the segment known as the Southern Highlands stretching from Virginia to Alabama. Moreover, a definition of Appalachia inherently suffers from its stereotyping as a kind of idyllic culture, inhabited by a romanticized people, yet one also plagued by poverty and desperation.

My concern is not so much with *where* Appalachia is, but rather *how* Appalachia is constructed. The region has been taken to mean that area of the southern United States that encompasses a specific mythological frame of mind more than any specific terrestrial limit. This supposedly Appalachian "frame of mind" situates the region as an idyllic pastoral, inhabited by a uniform people and culture. Such notions are furthered by historiographers like Raymond Bial, who asserts that the "duality of the mountains as

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<sup>29</sup> Cited in Bill J. Leonard, ed. *Christianity in Appalachia: Profiles in Regional Pluralism* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1999), xvi.

isolators and protectors has shaped the character of Appalachian people.”<sup>30</sup> Further, Appalachia is discussed as a literary frame of mind; as Richard Drake notes, “many are those who consider Appalachia a mysterious region.”<sup>31</sup> John Alexander Williams positions Appalachia as “a screen upon which writers, artists, and savants for several generations have projected their fears, hopes, regrets, and enthusiasms about America present and past.”<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, historically, Appalachia has been defined by its stark contrasts to the “abolitionist” North, as perceived by 19<sup>th</sup>-century writers (and noted proponents of slavery) such as George Fitzhugh. His claims about the purity and success of southern culture situate the community as harmonious and lacking in violent activity. Fitzhugh’s comments are especially interesting as they pertain to the incidence and prevalence of murders, exemplified by his assertion that:

Northern newspapers are filled with the sufferings of poor widowed needlewomen, and the murders of wives by their husbands. Woman there is in a false position. Be she white, or be she black, she is treated with kindness and humanity in the slave-holding South.<sup>33</sup>

Such declarations suggest that, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, regional identity was supremely important to southern citizens; their contrasting opinions about the perceived failings of the North coincide with views about southern ideals, cultural norms, and practices. Consequently, the dichotomy between northern and southern culture has persisted into

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<sup>30</sup> Raymond Bial, *Mist over the Mountains: Appalachia and Its People* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997), 9.

<sup>31</sup> Richard B. Drake, *A History of Appalachia* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001), vii.

<sup>32</sup> John Alexander Williams, *Appalachia: A History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 8.

<sup>33</sup> George Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South, or the Failure of Free Society* (Richmond, VA: A. Morris Publisher, 1854), 213.

the present day, shaping our popular conceptions about these American regions and the people who inhabit them.

In order to provide a geographical frame, I understand Appalachia to include parts of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the Great Smoky Mountains, the Allegheny Mountains, the Cumberland Plateau, and the Great Appalachian Valley. This tightly-woven pattern of alternating peaks and basins is essential to understanding Appalachia as a culture, for it has created the geographical isolative factor essential to its perceived unique cultural makeup. More specifically, the murder ballads in my song set especially emphasize regions of Kentucky and North Carolina as sites of the actual crimes that generated the resulting ballads. Further, the ballads in my study have been reported and collected as popular tunes in Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee and Georgia, as well as areas outside of Appalachia, such as Mississippi and Indiana.

The inhabitants of Appalachia trace their beginnings through both the Cherokee Indians and the first European settlers of English, Scotch-Irish, and German descent. As historian Jean Thomas points out, “there came a day at the close of the Elizabethan era when minstrels and other folk as well grew weary of the oppression of their kings and set out across the sea to seek a home in the new world.”<sup>34</sup> The settlers of Appalachia brought with them the tradition of their balladry; folksongs from home, as well as newly composed ballads, began to take on the flavor of this new principality in the mountains.

The majority of Appalachia’s European settlers were poor, entering the region to establish their own farms. Yet Appalachia is more than farmland. I find useful Wilma Dunaway’s assertion that Appalachia consists of a large area of land distinguished “by its

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<sup>34</sup> Jean Thomas, *Ballad Makin' in the Mountains of Kentucky* (New York: Oak Publications, 1939), 7.

diverse mix of non-slave holding farms and enterprises, small plantations, active small town commerce and external trade, mixed farming, light manufacturing, and extractive industry.”<sup>35</sup> A strong appreciation for kinship also defines Appalachia as a people, for its settlers remained powerfully attached to their communities, farms, and families. As Bial notes, this sense of community is “evidenced by their love for a land for which they fought so hard.”<sup>36</sup> This study seeks to move away from defining Appalachia as a romanticized ideal, instead illuminating it—through its songs—as a region based on strong ideas of faith, community and survival.

### **Methodology**

My thesis engages scholarship and methodologies of Appalachian regional studies, musicology, literary analysis, and women’s studies. I view the lyrical composition of the murder ballads as one device through which Appalachian women’s experiences have been, by and large, silenced throughout the history of the United States. As gender studies scholar Barbara Ellen Smith posits:

The history of Appalachia is a drama written largely about men...women have been extras, hidden behind quilts and sunbonnets in tradition-bound domestic roles that have supported their husbands, sons, and fathers as they transformed the region and made its history.<sup>37</sup>

My work is ultimately informed by contemporary feminist musicological perspectives that read musical works for their gendered implications and focus on revealing how feminine musical subjects have been silenced by heteronormative and misogynistic hegemonies.

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<sup>35</sup> Wilma A. Dunaway, *Women, Work, and Family in the Antebellum Mountain South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1.

<sup>36</sup> Bial, *Mist over the Mountains*, 23.

<sup>37</sup> Dunaway, *Women, Work, and Family*, 1.

This study combines three methodologies: a close, contextualized reading of the texts; an emphasis on orality as a vital characteristic of the ballads in their preservation and perpetuation; and a feminist perspective that reveals and resists the power of masculine hegemony in culture. First, a contextual reading and analysis of the song lyrics addresses common thematic elements among the ballads. I interpret these elements to reveal misogynistic messages that illustrate the fate of women who are the anti-example of the idyllic female. In addition, by addressing numerous thematic elements as vehicles that preserve culturally significant ideals, a close reading of the ballads allows me to address issues of regional and female identity.

The fundamental features of the songs circumscribe conventions of space, class, and sexuality to position the male character on the side of Christian rightness. My analysis reveals the Appalachian town as an iconic symbol of power and normativity, and the outside world as a venue of danger for women. The idea of liminality emerges within the songs, where towns represent structures within whose walls violence and murder cannot happen. Rather, these crimes must occur in the uncertain space outside the town's protection. A contextual reading of the songs also reveals another liminality: the woman's inability to exist wholly on the pedestal or in the pit—she is precariously on the threshold of both spaces.

The songs posit brutality as an act outside codified space where a vestige of the conflicts between men and women's social statuses persist. The clashing of socioeconomic class is heavily featured in the murder ballads. The texts demonstrate the gentrified male lover as the violent actor; he stands on the right of sexual behavior and punishes women for their sexual promiscuity. Throwing her body in a river, he

symbolically washes away the perceived immoralities of woman and the sin of extramarital sex. In turn, this act of cleansing represents a baptismal shadow of Christian morality, and is just one religious or moral thematic element employed within the texts. J. Roberta Coffelt agrees that women's sexuality is tied to water and to death caused by drowning, stating that it "is a frequent mode of death for female literary characters because of the strong symbolic relationship between female sexuality and water. Drowning has long been a punishment for sexually transgressive women in literature."<sup>38</sup>

The songs allow for a specific reading of Appalachia as a kind of borderland. Inasmuch as the region is somewhat an imaginary place, true geography matters less than the ideas associated with southern mountain culture—which reveal both truths and falsities. My contextual analysis of the murder ballads draws upon similar close readings of song texts by Ernest Bloch, Simon Gaunt, and Gale Sigal. Though Sigal's work focuses on the 12<sup>th</sup>-century French troubadour *pastourelles*, her assertions parallel my own. As she states of the women present in the lyrics of the *pastourelles*, "the shepherdess's relation to the court, an institution that purports to protect the lady, reveals not only the country girl's vulnerability but the precarious place reserved for all women in the troubadour's lyric landscape."<sup>39</sup> Similarly, a contextual reading of Appalachian murder ballads allows for a mapping of the relationships between men and women, their identities, and the cultures and places that claim to protect and serve them. Thus, I reveal

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<sup>38</sup> J. Roberta Coffelt, "She 'Too Much of Water Hast': Drownings and Near-Drownings in 20th-Century North American Literature by Women" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of North Texas, 2001), 2.

<sup>39</sup> Gale Sigal, "Courtied in the Country: Woman's Precarious Place in the Troubadours' Lyric Landscape," in *Text and Territory: Geographical Imagination in the European Middle Ages*, ed. Sylvia Tomasch and Sealy Gilles (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 185.

Appalachia as a borderland of United States culture that contributed to the definition of America's accepted social praxis.

Second, I recognize orality as a characteristic of the ballads that both ensures their survival and perpetuates their messages. Orality is important within this study because the murder ballad singers rely upon it; it is the cultural medium of the people who sing, know, and pass on these songs. Orality was also significant in the projects of the early folklorists and ballad collectors. As Richard Dorson problematically assumes, the text “comes from the lips of a speaker or singer and is set down with word for word exactness by a collector, using the method of handwritten diction or mechanical recording.”<sup>40</sup> Orality drives not only the tradition of cultural transmission among Appalachian singers, but influences the interstice of written traditions when the ballads were collected and preserved by academics in the late 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-centuries. The murder ballads in turn illustrate how orality negotiates the transmission of these texts and their implications.

Moreover, my work situates orality as a type of cultural medium that takes the place of literacy in its pedagogical function of teaching moral lessons. Orality facilitated the teaching function of the ballads, which, like the stained glass windows of medieval churches, tell stories in order to inculcate ideas of right and wrong. As Walter Ong suggests of orality, “wherever human beings exist they have a language, and in every instance a language that exists basically as spoken and heard, in the world of sound.”<sup>41</sup> Importantly, Ong posits language as an overwhelmingly *oral* phenomenon; his

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<sup>40</sup> Richard M. Dorson, *Buying the Wind: Regional Folklore in the United States* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), 1.

<sup>41</sup> Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 7.

elucidation demonstrates the power of the murder ballads as an effective vehicle for preserving the folkways, traditions, and cultural beliefs of Appalachia. In turn, the preservation of these “oral texts” enables a continued tradition of kinship, inasmuch as the nonliterate peoples of historical Appalachia have relied upon modes of oral transmission as a means of knowledge, news, and the distribution of cultural ideals and beliefs.

Third, I use a feminist lens to analyze the emerging feminist context of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which posed a threat to the established hegemony of the past. For the purposes of this study, I am most concerned with feminism’s emergence from the central phenomenological experience of “womanness”—that is, the experience of women that has been socially constructed and subjugated by its very anatomical nature. Herein, I use the scholarship of several feminist philosophers and musicologists that examines how women’s historical realities and experiences have been distorted or repressed.

As addressed by scholars like Susan McClary, the powers of women are pitted and subjugated against those of men. This phenomenon encompasses a wide historical scope. From the songs of the 12<sup>th</sup>- and 13<sup>th</sup>-century troubadours, to the operatic librettos of Mérimée, to the Appalachian murder ballads, textual elements that lay at the foundation of each storyline are irrevocably linked to notions of control and mastery. As McClary states of Bizet’s *Carmen*, “the battle that really interests the text is the battle between the sexes. From the very beginning Woman is marked as the enemy.”<sup>42</sup> Drawing upon her idea that the “battlefield itself, the territory that obsesses the text, is none other than her body, as the text constantly raises the question of who shall own it while

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<sup>42</sup> Susan McClary, *Georges Bizet Carmen*, Cambridge Opera Handbooks (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 4.

describing those who are fighting over it,”<sup>43</sup> I read the Appalachian murder ballads as similar, territorial negotiations of power. Like Carmen, the women of the Appalachian murder ballads are textually constructed as manifestations of evil that threaten not only male hegemony, but the agency of men themselves. Just as Don José’s murder of Carmen “becomes a last act of desperation, the act necessary to reassert order and control,”<sup>44</sup> the male lover’s murder of his Appalachian sweetheart illustrates a parallel desire to restore order to the universe through the destruction of chaos that a woman’s sexual, emotional, and intellectual freedom represents.

Such feminist perspectives are additionally useful to my work as they help illustrate the shift from Celtic ballads to their American counterparts. The ancestors of the American murder ballads relied upon ideas of pagan spirituality that allowed female victims to exact revenge upon their wrongdoers, thereby raising the feminine voice as one of strength and power. As murder ballads more broadly influenced American songs, the latter increasingly silenced the woman’s voice. As David Atkinson asserts, there are a number of British ballads “in which the sin of murder is brought home to its perpetrator,” and in which murder is “brought to light by supernatural means—most specifically by a supernatural manifestation of the corpse.”<sup>45</sup> This phenomenon is most readily seen in ballads like *The Cruel Ship’s Carpenter* (analyzed in Chapter Two). Yet scholars have related the American ballad *Pretty Polly* to *The Cruel Ship’s Carpenter*, even though no supernatural manifestation of the corpse occurs. The thematic reinterpretation found in *Pretty Polly* illustrates the American reliance on a Puritan aesthetic that reifies women’s

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>45</sup> David Atkinson, "Magical Corpses: Ballads, Intertextuality, and the Discovery of Murder," *Journal of Folklore Research* 36, no. 1 (1999): 1.

subjugation. Through a feminist reading of the ballads, I champion a corrective reading, one absent among earlier ballad scholars who employed positivist ideologies, exercised outdated biases toward rural folk as a simplistic people, and relied upon problematic sexual and gender assumptions.

### **Review of Literature**

This study is an interdisciplinary research project. My study of the Appalachian murder ballads reads the songs as narratives of a codified Appalachian social structure and questions related patterns of gender and power. First, because the work of early ballad collectors has greatly informed my project, I recognize the problematic nature of earlier scholarship and offer alternative points of view. In particular, I evaluate research that uncovers various fictions perpetrated in the ballad texts, and by ballad collectors who failed to collect the tunes as part of their fieldwork activity. Second, I discuss scholarship on domesticity and ideas of a feminized private sphere as these pertain to Appalachian life and stereotypes about it. Finally, I consider scholarship concerned with a specified regional identity central to southern Appalachia, including gendered southern social codes that distinguish these communities from their northern counterparts.

The ballad collection project was a political one, and one meant to emphasize Appalachian America as derivative of British culture. Moreover, the early ballad projects valued this phenomenon as precious, unique to southern Appalachia, and one that was disappearing because of modernity. Essentially, the audience of the early folklorist was other institutionally-educated people with European values. Therefore, the very aim of these projects and the collectors themselves was one of fiction, as historical Appalachian folksong itself has very little to do with ideas stemming from intellectual movements and

educational institutions. Truthfully, Appalachia does not wholly equal English ancestry. The early ballad collector Cecil Sharp illustrates this fiction of English peasantry rather well, in characterizing the Appalachian people he encountered as “English peasants in appearance, speech, and manner...I should say that they are just exactly what the English peasant was *one hundred or more years ago*.”<sup>46</sup>

The selectivity of the early ballad projects also perpetuates a kind of fiction. If a song used language that found ill favor among the ballad collectors, it was dismissed and left out of the anthologies—a practice that illustrates the deliberate shaping of ideas surrounding who the people of Appalachia really were, and what their tastes were. Known for omitting songs or portions of songs from his anthologies that he found “tasteless,” Francis James Child is among those scholars who, as William Roy asserts, rejected songs as “inappropriate, drivel, or salacious,” thus illustrating the ways in which early academics appropriated “for themselves the music that qualifies as that of the folk.”<sup>47</sup> Though some scholarship has relegated Appalachia and its tradition of balladry to a subcategory of southern fiction, I argue against this notion. Rather, I show how each murder ballad, whether it is explicitly related to an actual murder of a young woman or not, speaks to reality. Murder ballads thus act as historical records of popular social ideals in southern Appalachia.

The tendency to read murder ballads as examples of pure fiction resists the implications of a violent fate for a “nice southern lady,” and fails to apply feminist criticism to these musical texts. At the height of their popularity, the murder ballads

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<sup>46</sup> Olive Dame Campbell and Cecil J. Sharp, *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians* (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1917), 148.

<sup>47</sup> William G. Roy, *Reds, Whites, and Blues: Social Movements, Folk Music, and Race in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 56.

employed a common theme in southern literature that, as Laura Patterson notes, comments on women's "domestic duty to simply make good and favorable matches that would bring honor to their families."<sup>48</sup> The trope of familial and societal expectations is a highly reflective literary tool, considering its popularity in a time when flirting was discouraged for its sexual implications and the impact that the behavior of daughters, wives and mothers had upon the social standing of each family unit. The multiple modes of sexual discourse reflected in the lyrics reveal changing climates of sexuality in America and the changing sexual and domestic roles for women. The reality of murder ballads, on the other hand, holds what Patterson would call "a thorough complexity" as well as "its own internal historical patterns."<sup>49</sup>

In regard to the theoretical concept of domesticity, my thesis draws on the work of several feminist scholars, including Laura Patterson, Lora Romero, and Wilma Dunaway. These feminist perspectives reveal instances of gender stereotyping detrimental to reading the ballad texts, in addition to revealing the myriad ways in which historical women (both real and fictional) have negotiated their statuses in patriarchal societies.

Patterson's discussion of gender stereotypes furthers my claim that these stereotypes are long-lasting vessels of social code. Because of the "seemingly longer shelf life for gender stereotypes"<sup>50</sup> in the American South, the women of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century murder ballads face an exacerbated and highly-codified gender identity within the lyric texts. Indeed many such gender codes persist to this day, as evidenced by the continued

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<sup>48</sup> Laura Sloan Patterson, *Stirring the Pot: The Kitchen and Domesticity in the Fiction of Southern Women* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2008), 12.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

tradition of debutante balls, region-specific magazines like *Southern Living*, and similar phenomena. Furthermore, my lyric analysis of stereotypes in the murder ballads invokes a discussion of Anne Cohen's classifications of the stock characters within the ballads, including "The Murdered Girl," "The Lover-Murderer," and "The Grief-Stricken Families."<sup>51</sup>

My investigative study of the murder ballads looks at domesticity as it relates to a particular image of womanhood. This idea is influenced by the imagery of the ideal woman, and how she evolved throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century to favor what Patterson calls "essential qualities of the mind (such as modesty, thrift, generosity, and patience) over title, status and wealth."<sup>52</sup> It is these "essential qualities of the [female] mind" that were so popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and are present in the character of the murdered-girl ballads. As described by Fitzhugh:

So long as she is nervous, fickle, capricious, delicate, diffident and dependent, man will worship and adore her. Her weakness is her strength, and her true art is to improve that weakness...if she be obedient, she is in little danger of maltreatment; if she stands upon her rights, is coarse and masculine, man loathes and despises her, and ends by abusing her.<sup>53</sup>

I consider murder ballads as a song tradition through which larger social and cultural issues central to 19<sup>th</sup>-century Appalachian folkways may be discussed. In examining these murder ballads, I find Lora Romero's discussion useful, that 19<sup>th</sup>-century southern writers were pointing to "the deep division between two identities, portraying sexuality and domesticity as contradicting forces requiring many women to make a

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<sup>51</sup> Anne B. Cohen, *Poor Pearl, Poor Girl! The Murdered-Girl Stereotype in Ballad and Newspaper* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1973), 12.

<sup>52</sup> Patterson, *Stirring the Pot*, 12.

<sup>53</sup> Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South*, 214-15.

choice between the two.”<sup>54</sup> Romero effectively illuminates this era as “saturated with many new ideas, including new ideas about sexuality, sexual practices, and women’s sexual roles.”<sup>55</sup> I argue that the murder ballads experienced an upsurge in popularity, composition, and performance at a time when, according to Romero, “the ideal of individual, unfailing sexual ‘purity’ for women would begin to falter and morph into new and multiple patterns of sexuality.”<sup>56</sup>

Portrayals of women in the Appalachian murder ballads are fractured images in the sense that they represent, as Patterson notes, a stereotyped entity that is not wholly accurate, false, or authentic.<sup>57</sup> Appalachian murder ballads thus present a unique cultural complexity as well as their own internal historical pattern. In addressing the murder ballads as indicative of a complex patriarchal Appalachian culture, my work aligns with Wilma Dunaway’s assertions about the failure of scholarly literature to “produce revisionist analysis that attacks a century of accumulated stereotypes about Appalachian females.”<sup>58</sup> I acknowledge, as does Dunaway, that the “journey toward a meaningful analysis of Appalachian women is made more difficult by the need to overcome the burden of a century of outdated assumptions about their character flaws and about their debilitating isolation.”<sup>59</sup> Feminist analysis, in this regard, is both needed and appropriate to overcome entrenched stereotypes. However, as many feminist scholars have already noted in their discussions of American women, I agree that this research is complicated

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<sup>54</sup> Lora Romero, *Home Fronts: Domesticity and Its Critics in the Antebellum United States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 81.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>57</sup> Patterson, *Stirring the Pot*, 3.

<sup>58</sup> Dunaway, *Women, Work, and Family*, 2.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

by the plethora of male-dominated and male-privileging historical records and productions. Following Pat Beaver, who asserts that, “Appalachian history has been constructed out of masculinist narratives,”<sup>60</sup> my study rewrites a particular history from a feminine perspective.

My work is also influenced by Daniel Cohen’s concept of the American “beautiful female murder victim.” While a further discussion of this image as a common motif in murder ballads is addressed in Chapter Three, Cohen has made a useful contribution to literature that addresses 19<sup>th</sup>-century American social practices by linking a “small upsurge of sexual or courtship-related homicides to much broader shifts in popular sexual behavior reflected in changing rates of premarital pregnancy.”<sup>61</sup> Cohen attributes this phenomenon to a “posited breakdown in ‘traditional’ rural courtship practices and the development of more ‘modern’ attitudes and behaviors.”<sup>62</sup> Using this claim, murder ballads may be read as a response to changing cultural opinions and practices inasmuch as they were, at the time of their composition and popularity, a medium through which commentary was made, and which perpetuated ideas of patriarchy. Cohen’s literary and social-historical evidence also points to the years surrounding the turn of the nineteenth century, a fact that strengthens the claim that murder ballads reflect and preserve a changing American culture. This in turn is useful to my own study, which positions this phenomenon as representative of the American southern Appalachian region as well. In recognizing this tendency in historical records of

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<sup>60</sup> Cited in John Lang, ed., *Appalachia and Beyond: Conversations with Writers from the Mountain South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), xix.

<sup>61</sup> Daniel A. Cohen, "The Beautiful Female Murder Victim: Literary Genres and Courtship Practices in the Origins of a Cultural Motif," *Journal of Social History* 31, no. 2 (1997): 277.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

the region, I provide a history of Appalachia that addresses men as participants in a well-established patriarchal society, while addressing women as those who have been subjugated to that order.

Through textual analysis, murder ballads operate as an ideological tool for establishing regional identity. As Catherine Albanese asserts, Appalachia is particularly suited to this kind of study because “its identity is marked and striking, shaped by its physical boundaries and relative isolation from the rest of the country.”<sup>63</sup> However, the geographic isolation of Appalachia has never been as extreme as popularly believed, as illustrated by elements of emerging technologies and transportation systems within the lyrics of the murder ballads. As J.M. Mancini asserts, it has been tempting for generations to assume the historical South as “the last vestige of premodern authenticity,” and to see it as an isolated region “where folk divided their electricity-free evenings between playing murder ballads on homemade banjos and sitting around waiting for the end-times.”<sup>64</sup> Instead, Appalachia’s regional identity is the larger cultural phenomenon responsible for its isolative character. As Patterson says, regional identity “adds layers of tradition and folkways to domestic practices.”<sup>65</sup> The regionalism associated with southern Appalachia is one that supplies an overarching frame within which religion and culture come together.

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<sup>63</sup> Catherine Albanese, *America: Religion and Religions* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1981), 222.

<sup>64</sup> J.M. Mancini, "'Messin' with the Furniture Man': Early Country Music, Regional Culture, and the Search for an Anthological Modernism," *American Literary History* 16, no. 2 (2004): 209.

<sup>65</sup> Patterson, *Stirring the Pot*, 3.

Historian John Mayfield discusses the southern gentleman as “the subject of an ambivalent expression of how antebellum southern men defined themselves.”<sup>66</sup> Though his text discusses how the icon of the southern gentleman was used as a work of humorous fiction, Mayfield also discusses what he terms the “dominant fiction of the antebellum South,” which tied patriarchy to the power and authority of men “whose view of themselves was simple and stable.”<sup>67</sup> He continues, “Simplicity is the dominant trait of patriarchs,” positing that men dominated things “by sheer bulk, force, and a single-minded conviction that God put them on earth to rule.”<sup>68</sup> Given his sole focus upon southern manhood, I use Mayfield’s work to illustrate that my own study extends the scholarship on Appalachia to comment on woman-to-man relationships and woman-to-woman relationships, instead of solely privileging man-to-man connections.

I disagree with Mayfield’s assertion that historical male connections to patriarchy and dominance is a fictive phenomenon, as my work takes issue with the claim that simplicity was the dominant characteristic of patriarchs. Rather, I posit that *dominance* was the dominant trait of southern gentlemen, who, by the very nature of their religious beliefs, assumed it was their birthright to rule by violence or force. I also take issue with Mayfield’s argument that “we know quite a bit about women by looking at how they defined themselves in relation to men.”<sup>69</sup> My argument, in keeping with that of other feminist historical scholars, posits that women had no other *choice* but to define themselves in relation to men’s social positions, as women of this particular time period

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<sup>66</sup> John Mayfield, *Counterfeit Gentlemen: Manhood and Humor in the Old South* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009), xiii.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

were placed into a silenced otherness; Appalachian women represented a faction that had no power to speak against the might of men. Yet, instances of women's many modes of self-expression and self-assertion are prevalent in Appalachia, as discussed in Chapter Three.

Preferring to use the term "manhood" instead of "patriarchy," Mayfield first asserts that "manhood" is a "shifty term, not easily pinned down"<sup>70</sup> and one that can hardly be viewed as a constant. He then, however, declares, "manhood's driving force is the need to dominate. It may express itself through class, race, sex, violence, risk taking, or some other outlet, but always at its core it is focused on competition with other men."<sup>71</sup> Here Mayfield condones dominance by referring to it in an essentialist way that makes it seem an inherent, natural force exclusive to men. He stresses that it ultimately serves another male audience, through competition or sheer negotiation of power. Thus he excludes the impact that male dominance has had on marginalized groups such as women.

Exploring the writings of Occitanian male troubadours, Simon Gaunt asserts, "even in the many texts where troubadours apparently address women, they may well be concerned with their relationship with other men."<sup>72</sup> Gaunt's statement finds a historical parallel in Mayfield's discussion of men's need for dominance as one that stems directly from their relationships with other men and the need to display masculinity. Moreover, Gaunt's claim that "for most troubadours, only the male view of love was

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., xv.

<sup>72</sup> Simon Gaunt, "Poetry of Exclusion: A Feminist Reading of Some Troubadour Lyrics," *The Modern Language Review* 85, no. 2 (1990): 311.

interesting...masculine relationships, rarely relationships between the sexes,”<sup>73</sup>

illuminates Mayfield’s language again, and reveals problems where such assertions fail to address how women fare within this context.

In this way, Mayfield would emphasize a reading of the murder ballads as a representation of man and *his* feelings, actions, and opinions as though they are of utmost relevance for a male audience. Mayfield uses the term “patriarchy” to admit that it “may be more or less accurate in describing women’s experiences of men in the home, but they [terms like patriarchy] do not always reflect men’s experience of each other, where the competitive instinct is strong and life is an endless rivalry for dominance.”<sup>74</sup> Thus, Mayfield’s study privileges the male-male experiences over the male-female experiences as he works to define social roles. Mayfield clearly aims to situate male dominance in ways that inform our understanding of southern antebellum men and their behaviors. Yet, his approach, and its privileging of male relationships over interactions with women, emphasizes the very need to interrogate how such dominance patterns affected women in the antebellum South.

Finally, Mayfield posits that the real spirit of southern manhood is “confused, tentative, situational, self-fashioned, and always in search of the right pose or ‘presentment.’”<sup>75</sup> I can only agree with the last piece of this definition, as southern men were constantly aware of their public stature and reputation. A close feminist study of the murder ballads, however, shows that the murders of young women at the hands of their lovers of the “gentlemanly” class clearly refute any ideas of men’s confusion and

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Mayfield, *Counterfeit Gentlemen*, xv.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

tentativeness when reputations were threatened. Instead, the murder ballads show a highly codified, functional, and deeply entrenched patriarchal society in America, focused on the power of men at an enormous cost to the autonomy of women. My work sheds light on that facet of the Old South, which, as Mayfield explains, presents “the region as...patriarchal, honor-bound and conservative—a perspective that stresses class and race above all else.”<sup>76</sup> But the songs also serve certain functions for women’s relationships with one another and become a vehicle for emerging feminisms.

### **Chapter Overview**

While my analysis of the Appalachian murder ballads reveals aspects of their identity heretofore unaddressed by ballad scholarship, Chapter Two of this study contains a necessary history of the ballad tradition in America and Britain. Herein, I discuss how previous scholarship has positioned the British broadside as a precursor to the American ballad. Ultimately, I position the English ballad as a distinctive genre apart from the American counterpart. Providing an overview of the broadside tradition, I introduce the importance of thematic elements employed by broadside composers; themes of love, violence, and morality are the common traits of a successful composition.

Chapter Two contains a discussion and analysis of *The Gosport Tragedy/Cruel Ship’s Carpenter (Pretty Polly)* and *The Wexford/Oxford Girl (Knoxville Girl)*. My discussion of ballad traditions de-emphasizes the idea of “ballad families”—a concept heavily prized by my forbearers. An analysis of murder ballads such as *The Cruel Ship’s Carpenter* and its American counterpart, *Pretty Polly*, reveals the many ways in which

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., xiii.

they are ultimately unrelated songs, thereby illuminating some of the problems grounded in early ballad scholarship.

This discussion includes prevalent thematic elements such as the frequency of a revenge or comeuppance scenario on behalf of the murdered sweetheart in the British ballads. That the murdered girl is often depicted in vengeful activities through spiritual or supernatural means is of great significance to this study. These brief analyses reveal not only the raw canvas from which the American murder ballads were created but also further positions the silent American female victim in stark contrast to the powerful imagery of revenge exacted by her Celtic predecessor.

Chapter Three provides a brief history of women in Appalachia, beginning in the settlement days of its Scotch-Irish inhabitants. I address women in Appalachia with regard to four major facets of history. I first discuss the value, importance, and significance of romantic relationships in order to reveal some of the complexities facing southern women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Second, I examine the daily rituals and realities of women living in this particular region of the United States, leading up to and during the time of the murder ballads' composition and popularity. The daily social and living customs of Appalachian women prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century reveal some of the issues concerning social change in America. Third, I examine the importance of religion to life in historical Appalachia, as these ideologies directly governed the behaviors of both men and women. Such a discussion also reveals popular perceptions of crime, for religious ideology was a potent influence upon the interpretation of law and its practice. Finally, I address instances of Appalachian women's self-assertion and self-expression to illustrate the emerging agency of women that is mirrored in the texts of the murder ballads.

Chapter Four contains my analyses of the American murder ballads. I foreground the realm of American murder balladry by discussing *The Jealous Lover* and *The Banks of the Ohio* as generic songs that comprise the common elements, characters, and scenarios of American murder ballads, particularly those based on historical events. I then investigate the 19<sup>th</sup>-century historical murder ballads, which include *Omie Wise*, *The Murder of Laura Foster*, and *Pearl Bryan*. Next, I examine the 20<sup>th</sup>-century murder ballads, *Nell Cropsey* and *Lula Viers*. The order of my analysis is intended to show how both the emerging feminist perspective of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and advancing technologies reframes the formula of the murder ballads, changing their messages, warnings, and impact. Among the many cultural themes addressed in Chapter Four, such as the issues surrounding abortion, venereal diseases, and socioeconomic classes, I discuss some aspects of criminal sociology in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as it illuminates the importance of justice as it is sought in the ballad song texts, and how audiences valued these processes of reparation.

Chapter Five offers a summation of my findings concerning the historical implications of uninvestigated forms of misogyny, and how these preserved cultural codes continue to reify a construction of social power that hinders the roles of women. I discuss the murder ballads' role in shaping Appalachian cultural identity, commenting on the region as both a fiction and reality. I ultimately discuss the murder ballads as exemplars of a highly codified and gendered perspective—one that has been championed and endorsed through the reduction of women to a socially *déclassé* role.

Today the murder ballads continue to exist in the canon of traditional, or “folk”, American music. They are closely associated with a romanticized revivalist movement to

preserve the musics of our past that are thought to reveal traditional American values. A closer reading of the murder ballads unveils truths about historical Appalachia that debunk popular myths concerning its idyllic nature—a myth that extends to its people as a kindred and unsuspecting “down home” mountain folk. Alternatively, my analysis of the murder ballads offers an interpretation of this enigmatic region as one that operated under a regimented and hierarchal social regime. Moreover, I position historical Appalachia as locale that used sophisticated methods to respond to threats that endangered its carefully constructed values.

The continued popularity of murder ballads attests to the potency and effectiveness of the oral tradition. In this regard, an investigation of the Appalachian murder ballads will assist ethnomusicologists foraying into research projects that concern perspectives from the ballad singers themselves. Such a research study would supplement mine in demonstrating the continuing relevancy of murder ballads as a song form that perpetuates both realities and fictions of historical Appalachia. For now, my research project of the murder ballads seeks to redress the ballad scholarship of the past that positions these songs under disorganized and sexist taxonomies of discourse. It is my belief that the murder ballads survive as vessels of cultural significance that speak to the complexity, patriarchy, and liminality of a not-so-bygone culture.

## CHAPTER II

### Introduction

The modern researcher and listener alike enter an intensely nuanced culture when venturing into the field of American music commonly called “Appalachian balladry,” “mountain music,” or the perennial favorite, “old-timey music.” Inevitably, any experience with this genre brings about myriad questions: Whom does this canon of music represent? From where does it come? How has the content of the repertoire been evaluated, collected, selected, and preserved? How have we come to conceive of that classic American musical style known ambiguously as “folk?” David Whisnant finds these queries at the crux of the problem of deciphering and negotiating the cultural “Otherness” of the people that this music represents. Seeking to answer how “educated ‘cultural workers’ perceived, manipulated, and projected the culture of mostly rural, lower-class working people in the southern mountains during the half-century after 1890,”<sup>77</sup> Whisnant positions the cultural survival (and revival) of this music as part of a greater cultural politic. Such a politic has been, and continues to be, interested in preserving a canon of music acclaimed as possessing the essence of American values and taste.

Yet the canon of balladry is rife with issues of class, race, and gender. According to Benjamin Filene, enthusiasts feel that these songs offer “a way of piecing together a wide-ranging historical narrative of prime importance”<sup>78</sup> and thus continue to participate

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<sup>77</sup> David Whisnant, *All That Is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), xiii.

<sup>78</sup> Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music*, Cultural Studies of the United States (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 2.

in popularizing its contents. This chapter discusses several elements essential to an understanding of the ballad tradition. I begin with an overview of this heritage by considering the definition of ballads—a starting place that reveals many more problems than solutions. My account illustrates that the early collectors placed songs into categories based more upon national agendas and personal biases than on demonstrable historical fact. In particular, the ballad projects of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries are essentially defined by earlier 19<sup>th</sup>-century notions of cohesiveness that assert the ownership and identity of the ballads as purely derivative of British and Celtic folkways.

My discussion of the biases particular to the early ballad scholars and collectors explains their choices in assembling the collections, and their representations of the people who “own” the ballads as an idealized folk. As Roy attests, early collectors viewed folk music as the music of the people, not of any single person. Thus, they compiled as many song texts and variants as possible under the belief that such a practice afforded them the opportunity to “capture the ‘true essence’ [and] not the rendering of any contemporary performer, who necessarily had been tainted by modernity.”<sup>79</sup> In naming the ballads, and in assigning their places of origin, the early song collectors deliberately privileged a sense of authenticity and homogeneity.

To illustrate the complexities of how ballads have been named, labeled, and categorized, the second section of this chapter offers an analysis and comparison of the British and American murder ballads that have been previously positioned by ballad scholars as related songs. Here I deal with the idea of the “ballad family,” particularly in the case of the often-accepted relationship between British murder ballads such as *The*

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<sup>79</sup> Roy, *Reds, Whites, and Blues*, 59.

*Oxford Girl* and *The Wexford Girl*, and the American song, *The Knoxville Girl*. Likewise, I examine the scholarship regarding the British song called *The Gosport Tragedy*, or *The Cruel Ship's Carpenter*, as related to the American murder ballads collectively known as *Pretty Polly*.

Overall, I reject the idea of the “ballad family” as one that overly emphasizes the relationships between American and British songs. As Georgina Boyes notes, “The view that a pure and spontaneous stream of artistic expression derives from ‘folklife’ or ‘country traditions’ or ‘organic communities’ provides the sub-text for almost all discussion of the condition of historical and contemporary artistic production.”<sup>80</sup> My findings address the bias toward organicism prevalent among earlier ballad scholars working as late as the mid-1960s. Further, I tie this notion to a tradition of positivism in academia and as an idea harmful to contemporary ballad research.

I thus offer an alternative view of the British murder ballads in their connection to American songs—one that reveals the far greater complexities of their interrelations than has been previously addressed. My perspective instead favors alternative interstices and categories that are less colonial and positivistic. This call for new categories seeks to reflect Appalachia as a culture that is rich, nuanced, and demonstrative of patriarchal narratives. Moreover, a redress of the old positivistic song categories is essential to revealing Appalachia’s interaction with a larger American environment, particularly in how the region’s songs mingle with technology, travel, and emerging modernist and feminist ideologies. While I acknowledge that their English ancestry certainly influences American songs, I favor a reading of the ballads that emphasizes a distinctly American

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<sup>80</sup> Georgina Boyes, *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology, and the English Folk Revival*, Music and Society (New York: Manchester University Press, 1993), 3.

culture; Appalachian ballads are not simply a carbon copy or linear continuation of British songs.

Arguing for fluidity, multiplicity and orality, I place the ballads in the context from which they come instead of championing any idea of “fixed tune categories,” or “ballad families.” The interrelationships among the ballads reveal that songs travel and change, and reflect community investment in the tradition, rather than demonstrating a one-dimensional culture purely based on oral tradition. The ballad tunes particularly demonstrate the ambiguities of this phenomenon, as iterated by the early collector Maud Karpeles, who states, “owing to the scarcity of records we can seldom trace the continued identity of a tune over a long period of time, even within its country of origin.”<sup>81</sup>

Further, I argue that the Appalachian ballads do not suggest a lack of interaction with the outside world. Rather, I read the murder ballads as historical responses to current affairs made by the people who wrote, performed, and circulated the songs. Some of this response still couches the ballads in traditional patriarchy even while reflecting emerging industrial and feminist perspectives. The nature of the ballads—through their interactions, travels, and distribution—defy the kinds of classifications that have been imposed upon them, particularly because those classifications come from well-entrenched biases surrounding Appalachia, 19<sup>th</sup>-century America, and historical Britain.

### **Ballad as Construct: Problems of Origin and Definition**

What exactly *is* a ballad? Is it orally transmitted? Is it specific to a certain region or culture? How have we arrived at our understandings of this song type? As Dave Harker asks, “aren’t they those songs which are sung in folk clubs, or get taught to

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<sup>81</sup> Maud Karpeles, *An Introduction to English Folk Song* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 4.

children at school—simple, unaccompanied tunes, with words about country life, seafaring, love and perhaps the odd one dealing with mills, mines, and masters?”<sup>82</sup> In essence, the idea of “ballad” already represents a kind of construct, as it ties to the problematic notion of “folk,” which itself suffers from a similar ambiguity and multiplicity of provenance, identity, and definition.

In considering how the definition of “ballad” has changed over time, I address the larger notions of “folk” and “folk music,” of which ballads are a part. My examination includes how these ideas have developed and changed over the years before arriving in our hands and ears today. To offer a multi-layered and nuanced understanding of “balladry,” and of “folk music” generally, I deal with several of the biases contained within early ballad projects, which stem from the prejudices held by earlier scholars and collectors. Herein, I align my ideas with those of Whisnant, who states, “the vast array of ‘culture work’ that was being done in the Appalachian region from the 1890s onward both overlooked and masked the cultural politics of the profound social, economic, and political changes that were afoot.”<sup>83</sup> A closer look at some of the cultural workers in Appalachia at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and their projects reveals a growing manipulation of this regional culture that undeniably exposes ideological differences in addition to class inequalities.

Because my thesis centers on the perceptions and implications of late 19<sup>th</sup>-century ballads, my discussion of the problems surrounding “folk culture” focuses upon the earliest folk project of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, which fueled all subsequent

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<sup>82</sup> Dave Harker, *Fakesong: The Manufacture of British "Folksong," 1700 to the Present Day* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1985), ix.

<sup>83</sup> Whisnant, *All That Is Native and Fine*, xx.

projects. I begin with a discussion of the very concept of “folk music.” Positioning folk music as a problematic notion, William Roy explains:

The broader the conception of folk, the vaguer the sense of who is not “the folk” or what music would not be “folk music.” So the folk of folk music are typically identified by a narrow sense of “folk,” some subset of the population—less urban, sophisticated, or cosmopolitan.<sup>84</sup>

Thus, the dizzying web of meaning, definition, and perception surrounding “the folk” and their music stems from more than a century of tangled usages and transformation. As a historical starting place, Roy notes that the idea of folk is a European import borrowed by intellectuals, whose “nostalgic meanings of folk music initially had more affinity with a conservative critique of modernism, affirming simple, rural life in the face of industrialization and urbanization.”<sup>85</sup>

Symonds explains that, in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century, “collecting, publishing, and preserving traditional oral ballads became both profitable and fashionable.”<sup>86</sup> As a western European notion, the idea of canonizing “the folk” and their music stems from the 19<sup>th</sup>-century idea of romanticism, which incorporated notions of “folk” derived from German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder’s (1744-1803) assertions. Drawing upon his ideas concerning the peasant way of life, Benjamin Filene explains that Herder “offered a way to escape the Enlightenment’s stifling emphasis on reason, planning, and universalism.”<sup>87</sup> In turn, scholars like the Englishman Francis James Child felt that the music of ordinary people reflected a cultural expression fundamentally distinctive from the music of the elite;

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<sup>84</sup> Roy, *Reds, Whites, and Blues*, 52.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>86</sup> Symonds, *Weep Not for Me*, 14.

<sup>87</sup> Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, 10.

Child was one of many intellectuals who felt it necessary to understand folk culture as a means of securing what Filene calls a “distinctively national cultural voice.”<sup>88</sup>

Francis James Child (1825-1896) stands at the fore of the early ballad collecting movement. A Harvard professor of rhetoric and English literature, Child developed an interest in the connection between antiquity and the modern world. He then decided to collect English and Scottish ballads—a project that would result in immense anthologies of ballads, tales, and romances.<sup>89</sup> As Roy asserts, Child “did more than codify vernacular culture. He defined what a ballad and, for many, what an authentic folk song was.”<sup>90</sup> Child’s venture sparked the ballad collecting movement that moved to the United States in the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century. As his work became the foundation for American scholars and their own projects, Child’s anthologies, Roy notes, became the cornerstone against which all other ballads were judged; as he states, “a ‘Child Ballad’ continues to be the standard against which authenticity of folk music is measured.”<sup>91</sup>

Child’s work and philosophies notably employed considerable biases. Known for omitting songs or portions of songs from his anthologies that he found “tasteless,” Child also exercised class bias by viewing scholarship as an important project for intellectuals who could not leave the ballad form to “the ignorant and unschooled mass.”<sup>92</sup> Moreover, his work reveals a tendency toward objectification in his heavy use of printed materials and manuscripts in making his claims. As Norm Cohen affirms, “Child himself was not a field collector but relied heavily on published British collections. Unfortunately, he never

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>89</sup> Roy, *Reds, Whites, and Blues*, 56.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>92</sup> Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, 13.

published a clear statement of his principles for inclusion and exclusion.”<sup>93</sup> Nonetheless, when American scholars turned to similar projects in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, their frame of reference entirely depended upon the British canon established by Child.

### **The Early Folk Project in the United States**

[The] folk movement in the mountains...seeks the recognition and preservation of all that is native and fine...we would like to have the people recognize the worth and beauty of their songs; we would like to have the singing of these songs encouraged in all the mountain schools and centers; we would like to have them displace the inferior music that is now being sung there...the people have already begun to be somewhat ashamed of their songs; they need to have them appreciated by outsiders.

Olive Dame Campbell to Cecil Sharp, 20 December, 1916<sup>94</sup>

A closer look at the biases of the early collectors and their tactics for collection reveals certain truths surrounding our folk music canon. Commenting on the scholarly collectors of Appalachian songs, Loyal Jones asserts, “the self-proclaimed ‘experts’ on Appalachia...are usually frauds or are deceived by the appearances on which they happen to focus at the moment.”<sup>95</sup> These earliest collectors operated under the assumption that Filene calls an “unselfconscious, unmediated, and wholly uncommercial mode of musical expression,”<sup>96</sup> which is quite flawed in its presumptions about what constitutes American “roots” music.

Notions of musical purity took on greater value at a time when isolated cultures were becoming few and far between in the industrial boom of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From a 21<sup>st</sup>-century perspective, the modus operandi of early ballad scholars such as Louise

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<sup>93</sup> Cohen, *Folk Music: A Regional Exploration*, 4.

<sup>94</sup> Cited in Whisnant, *All That is Native and Fine*, 103.

<sup>95</sup> Cited in W.K. McNeil, ed. *Appalachian Images in Folk and Popular Culture* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995), xi.

<sup>96</sup> Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, 3.

Pound seems archaic and naïve. Pound makes a distinction between popular songs like *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, that are “the property not of the folk in certain sections and groups, but of the people of the United States,” and the songs of the southern Appalachians that “other regions of America and other classes of people do not know at all.”<sup>97</sup> Ballad collectors’ motives reveal the creation of cultural meaning, their world perspectives and values, and attitudes toward the past. Filene supports an examination of these issues, asserting that an exploration of “how dichotomies of pure/impure and authentic/inauthentic have been constructed”<sup>98</sup> aids in understanding how American music has been shaped.

The small group of enthusiasts interested in mountain folk music in America focused their efforts on locating and collecting song texts for publication in scholarly journals. However it must be noted that, in late 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Appalachia, invasion of mountain culture did not rest solely with ballad collection performed by academic outsiders. As Whisnant effectively summarizes:

There were four profoundly important, interrelated processes going on in the mountains—and in the South generally—at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: economic colonization by northeastern capital; the rise of indigenous resistance among workers and farmers; the discovery of indigenous culture by writers, collectors, popularizers, and elite-art composers and concertizers; and the proliferations of (mostly Protestant) missionary endeavors.<sup>99</sup>

Influenced by British song scholarship, American scholars actively sought mountaineers who knew the songs classified by Child. As a result, American folk song was canonized almost entirely upon the publications of “Child ballads,” at the expense of other songs that Child had not found, or had excluded for failing to meet his criteria.

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<sup>97</sup> Pound, *American Ballads and Songs*, xviii.

<sup>98</sup> Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, 3.

<sup>99</sup> Whisnant, *All That Is Native and Fine*, 6.

Conspicuously, the tunes of the ballads are mostly absent from the early scholars' collections, missing even more so from those arguments that tie the British and American song corpuses together through ideas of ballad familism. As Joseph Donatelli contends, the reception of balladry "was directed by an elitist culture that was committed to the medium of the printed book and the transmission of stable literary texts."<sup>100</sup> Under the ideology that only texts could serve as the locus for true meaning, tunes were dismissed as secondary mechanisms of narrativity.

American scholars wished to see their own culture as derivative of European, and namely British, values. Pound furthers this idea in her anthology by stating, "American folk-song as a whole has been imported from the Old World...something of Old World legend and romance is echoed in these immigrants from the British Isles which have found a home in a new land."<sup>101</sup> Articles by intellectuals of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were published under names like "British Ballads in the Cumberland Mountains", Hubert G. Shearin's 1911 manifesto. These types of early journalistic pieces further illuminate a strict desire to tie the folkways of Appalachia to Britain. As Shearin states, "the folk-lore of the British Isles yet lingers here untouched and unchanged...in another generation or two," the ballads will be "but a memory in the mountains."<sup>102</sup>

Cecil Sharp (1859-1924), the Englishman who arrived in the Appalachian Mountains in 1916 to collect ballads, conducted work firmly grounded in positivistic approaches. Esteemed by others as an authority on British folksong, he used his academic prowess to advance the notion that the Appalachian mountains were enriched solely by

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<sup>100</sup> Donatelli, "To Hear with Eyes," 347.

<sup>101</sup> Pound, *American Ballads and Songs*, xxvi, xxxii

<sup>102</sup> Hubert G. Shearin, "British Ballads in the Cumberland Mountains," *The Sewanee Review* 19, no. 3 (1911): 313.

British ancestry. In England, Sharp had served as a music teacher at the Ludgrove School, and as Principal of the Hampstead Conservatoire of Music.<sup>103</sup> He became a leading authority on English folk music following his criticism of England's Folk Song Society. As Maud Karpeles notes in his biography, "He criticized the Folk-Song Society for its comparative inactivity and claimed that it had done little to further the objects for which it was founded."<sup>104</sup>

As asserted by Filene, "to Sharp and the revivalists, folk culture offered a way to knit society back together and return it to a simpler era—a peaceful time in which community bonds were held securely in place by class deference."<sup>105</sup> This bias reflects Sharp's belief that the England he deeply cared for had disappeared. The music of Appalachian people offered a way for him to return to an idyllic British past: as Filene states, "in his depictions of the mountain people he encountered, Sharp reinforced myths about the Britishness of America's folk song heritage,"<sup>106</sup> which allowed him to liken Appalachian mountaineers to an idealized vision of old English folk. His work would later fully recognize, publish, and perpetuate these narrow ideas about who "owned" the music of the mountains, particularly when he met Mrs. Olive Dame Campbell, who was already actively working to preserve southern mountain culture.

These romanticized accounts of southern Appalachian mountain music reinforce ideas of the region's isolation and solidify notions that Appalachia has been—and remains—stuck in the time warp of Old England. Moreover, the positioning of

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<sup>103</sup> Maud Karpeles, *Cecil Sharp: His Life and Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 15, 21.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>105</sup> Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, 23.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

Appalachia as an idyllic locale finds its roots in pastoralism, a notion explained by Jane Becker as “the illusory conception [of] the transition from rural to industrial society as a fall from innocence into disorder and the assumption that we must look back to the past to find an organic society.”<sup>107</sup> Statements by Sharp that Appalachians were “English peasants in appearance, speech, and manner...I should say that they are just exactly what the English peasant was *one hundred or more years ago*”<sup>108</sup> reveal his powerful influence upon the establishment of an American “folksong” canon. Such biases employed by an earlier generation of scholars reveal the limitations of our conception of Appalachian balladry, and by extension, American folk music.

The early song collectors furthered the idealization of Appalachian culture as representative of a plain, hard-working, spiritual, and upstanding people. The cultural workers saw singing as a central element of daily Appalachian life that tied together ideas of identity, community, and religiosity. In turn, they conflated these ideas and connections, particularly those working in the settlement schools (discussed below). In this way, scholarly accounts both recognized and perpetuated imagery of hymnody and balladry as “a major theme of nineteenth- and twentieth-century romanticism”<sup>109</sup> that took hold in academia. Scholars like Sharp furthered ideas of the region as “the last lingering remnant of the old village life; a survival of the times when the village had a more or less independent existence.”<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Jane S. Becker, *Selling Tradition: Appalachia and the Construction of an American Folk* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 21.

<sup>108</sup> Campbell and Sharp, *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians*, 148.

<sup>109</sup> Roy, *Reds, Whites, and Blues*, 58.

<sup>110</sup> Quoted in Harker, *Fakesong*, 180.

Insisting that mountain culture was the locus of America's "authentic" folk music, early scholars bolstered the idea that Appalachian Americans were a subset of British ancestry that not so coincidentally reflected the heritage of the ballad collectors themselves. The number of 19<sup>th</sup>-century scholars sustaining this myth is vast; it is illustrated in the assertions of writers such as George Laurence Gomme who stated in 1883 that the folk in Appalachia were survivors of "the period of history when English social life was represented by a net-work of independent self-acting village communities"<sup>111</sup>—a homogenous culture that, according to Sharp, "built its own church, hanged its own rogues, made its own boots, shirts and wedding rings, and changed its own tunes."<sup>112</sup> A dedication to this false sense of authenticity has depicted folk music, and Appalachia itself, as a homogeneous realm inhabited by the same people from top to bottom.

Ideas of homogeneity applied not only to nation and class, but also to race. The early American ballad collectors worked in a time when racial boundaries were contested; the reality that ballad scholarship largely ignores the contributions of African-American culture has larger implications. This oversight by the ballad collectors effectively dismissed any consideration of, or place for, African American music within a pure (white) American folk heritage. As Paul Harvey agrees, the dismissal of African American musical culture was part of a much larger phenomenon in which "urban elites cordoned off high culture from unruly spectators, pronounced the formation of a canon of great literature, and depicted the South as a hopelessly backward, albeit appealingly

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<sup>111</sup> George Laurence Gomme, *Folk-Lore Relics of Early Village Life* (London: Elliot Stock Publishing Company, 1883), vii-viii.

<sup>112</sup> Quoted in Roy, *Reds, Whites, and Blues*, 58.

romantic, region of ignorant whites and primitive blacks.”<sup>113</sup> In this way, our established canon of folksong does not reflect many cultural forces that have substantially contributed to southern Appalachian mountain music. As Filene states, “the most significant effect the myth of the white ballad singer had was to help block African-American folk music from gaining a central place in the canon of America’s musical heritage.”<sup>114</sup> Thus, the blatant prejudices and obsessions that placed “the folk” in the cradle of a British diasporic phenomenon resulted in an inaccurate picture of Appalachia, America, and their diverse musical sensibilities.

### **Women Working in the Canon**

Women’s engagement with the cultivation and perpetuation of the American folk music canon is both multiple and complex. Though small in number, female ballad collectors working in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century furthered the growing body of literature on the subject. Men have not been the sole actors in furthering the myth of American music’s white and British purity. The work of women scholars like Olive Dame Campbell (1882-1954),<sup>115</sup> Maud Karpeles (1885-1976),<sup>116</sup> and Louise Pound (1872-1958),<sup>117</sup> retains a certain presence and potency in the literature. Olive Dame Campbell’s contribution rests largely upon her prolific activities as a folk song collector and with the Settlement School movement in the South; Maud Karpeles is most remembered for her collaboration with Cecil Sharp in their song-collecting excursion to southern Appalachia

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<sup>113</sup> Paul Harvey, *Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identities among Southern Baptists, 1865-1925* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 78.

<sup>114</sup> Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, 27.

<sup>115</sup> Campbell and Sharp, *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians*.

<sup>116</sup> Karpeles, *Cecil Sharp: His Life and Work*.

<sup>117</sup> Pound, *American Ballads and Songs*, Louise Pound, *Poetic Origins and the Ballad* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962).

in the early 1900s; Professor Louise Pound retains professional respect for her academic publications on balladry, and for serving as the President of the American Folk Song Society from 1925-1927. As Filene emphasizes, Pound “operated in the more scholarly camp of the early folk song movement.”<sup>118</sup> Pound’s work particularly illustrates the wish to see the ballads as indicative of national unity and cohesiveness. As she states, the aim is “to display the typical songs and ballads liked by the people and lingering among them.”<sup>119</sup>

Though from a modern perspective many of the ballads carry overt misogynistic messages, the scholarship of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century women fails to address these issues. Their interests lay in preserving their own perceptions of a particular people, and they were therefore unconcerned with the cultural meanings of the songs themselves. This idea finds support among scholars like Filene, who asserts that the ballad collectors “usually made no effort to contextualize a song, to explain its importance in mountain culture, or to comment on the mountaineer who sang it.”<sup>120</sup> Further, early female ballad scholars worked under the influence and popularity of a neo-positivist philosophy. Such an ideology reflected Auguste Comte’s earlier positivism, which held that women were an essential part of “the coming utopian society—but only if they remained in their proper sphere as comforters and nurturers of men.”<sup>121</sup>

Though their work is based on the ideologies of men, one cannot dismiss that the activities of early female ballad scholars witness to their participation in first wave feminism, fashioning places for themselves in the blossoming world of academic studies

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<sup>118</sup> Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, 20.

<sup>119</sup> Pound, *American Ballads and Songs*, xiii.

<sup>120</sup> Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, 16.

<sup>121</sup> Connell, *Gender in World Perspective*, 33.

and professional pursuits. Moreover, the work of women in the rural southern settlement schools (discussed below) reflected, as Jess Stoddart asserts, “the special concerns of southern reform, the conservative cultural context in which southern women reformers operated, and the attitudes and beliefs common to the first generation of women who entered leadership roles in the public sphere.”<sup>122</sup>

A reliance on positivism and essentialism manifests in the work of female ballad collectors. Olive Dame Campbell worked extensively to supplement the work of her husband and that of Cecil Sharp, while Maud Karpeles attributes the inspiration for her work directly to Cecil Sharp’s lectures, frankly admiring Sharp’s ideas.<sup>123</sup> The work of early female ballad scholars reveals a small yet significant corpus of research and song collection with a dichotomous nature. In part, their work represents the beginning of women’s visibility in a male-dominated academic and public sphere. On the other hand, the songs they were preserving subjugate and diminish women’s identities and experiences, as seen in the texts of the murder ballads.

Olive Dame Campbell’s contribution to the commodification of the Appalachian “folk” and their music remains important today. Notably, her ideologies and extensive documentation of work and travel occurred in collaboration with Cecil Sharp. Spanning from approximately 1908 to the early 1950s, Campbell’s diverse array of cultural activities in the southern mountain regions of the United States demonstrate what Whisnant refers to as “systematic cultural intervention.”<sup>124</sup> This notion refers to individuals and institutions that intentionally penetrate, intervene, and interact with a

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<sup>122</sup> Jess Stoddart, *Challenge and Change in Appalachia: The Story of Hindman Settlement School* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 2.

<sup>123</sup> Karpeles, *Cecil Sharp: His Life and Work*, xi, 140.

<sup>124</sup> Whisnant, *All That Is Native and Fine*, 13.

culture in some specific way thought to be desirable or good. Campbell most readily illustrates this concept with regard to her visits at the Hindman Settlement School in Knott County, Kentucky, which was one of the earliest attempts to establish an educational and social environment for the inhabitants of the rural mountains. As Roy notes, these “rural settlement schools [were] funded by urban elites.”<sup>125</sup> As Sandra Barney further explains, settlement workers “attempted to prepare their clients to receive the coming industrial order by teaching them work skills and promoting an attachment to scientific principles.” She adds that Hindman “offered the most significant application of these principles and ambitions in Appalachia and became the standard for rural settlement programs in the mountains.”<sup>126</sup>

The Hindman School was founded in 1902 in eastern Kentucky by Katherine Pettit, May Stone, Curry Breckenridge, Katherine Christian, Laura Campbell, and Eva Burner, and later inspired Campbell to become a collector of mountain music. The activities at the Hindman School illustrate how white, middle-class women responded to what they perceived as a debilitated culture. As Roy states, the “settlement house organizers sought to help Appalachians out of poverty through education.”<sup>127</sup> Campbell’s participation in this movement resulted in her establishment of The John C. Campbell Folk School, which she directed for twenty-five years.<sup>128</sup>

Though the settlement schools all emphasized “simple things,” such as the preparation of food, sewing, table setting, and temperance lessons, music was accorded a

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<sup>125</sup> Roy, *Reds, Whites, and Blues*, 62.

<sup>126</sup> Sandra Barney, *Authorized to Heal: Gender, Class, and the Transformation of Medicine in Appalachia, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 90.

<sup>127</sup> Roy, *Reds, Whites, and Blues*, 62.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

special place in the curricula. At Hindman, Curry Breckenridge played the parlor organ for her students—an instrument unknown to the mountain populace—while Eva Bruner taught songs to her kindergarten students.<sup>129</sup> As Virginia Chambers attests, “perhaps the most intriguing feature of the operation of Hindman Settlement School, from earliest days, has been the emphasis placed on indigenous music.”<sup>130</sup>

In this way, the settlement schools became the locus of the cultural projects conducted by early ballad scholars. As Chambers affirms, the cultivation and continuation of the music culture of Appalachian people was:

A vital force in the dissemination of mountain music. From Katherine Pettit’s interest in the ballads to the encouragement given children to sing for each other, from the collection of songs to performance of indigenous music throughout the U.S., the school has served as an agency for the propagation of music and other mountain arts and crafts.<sup>131</sup>

Though many folk song collectors like Campbell and Sharp passed through the settlement schools during their fieldwork tours of the mountains, gleaning many songs from the wealth and diversity of the students, the schools were more than just a convenient site for song collection. As Chambers confirms, “students also learned from and contributed to the music in the schools. Music was part of mountain life...[and] instruction was a simple process that involved singing in dormitories and at parties and informal gatherings.”<sup>132</sup>

Though recent scholars have touted Olive Dame Campbell as the more “humane”<sup>133</sup> of the folk collectors, her work suffers where it intersects with that of Cecil Sharp. Namely under question here are the motives behind this collaborative effort to

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<sup>129</sup> Virginia Chambers, "The Hindman Settlement School and Its Music," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 21, no. 2 (1973): 137.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Whisnant, *All That Is Native and Fine*, 105.

publish an anthology of songs reflective of British and historical English culture. This project is especially interesting when one considers that Campbell's view of the southern mountain culture changed quite drastically between her early efforts and her retirement. As Whisnant asserts, Campbell "worked to comprehend the connection between culture and the intricacies of politics, economics, and social structure in the Appalachian region. It was a connection sought by few of her culture-worker contemporaries."<sup>134</sup> However, the eventual publication of Campbell and Sharp's anthology of English folk songs in America reveals their essential negligence of social context and the folk songs' racial heritage.

Though dedicated in its aims to present a collection of beloved and representative "folk songs" to the American public, unaffected by advancing technologies and modernisms, the Campbell-Sharp collection of 1917<sup>135</sup> was, according to Whisnant, not "a completely satisfactory document."<sup>136</sup> It reflects many of the biases employed by the earliest academics working on the canonization of American balladry, and it also excludes several types of music—namely, religious music, instrumental music, and other genres of popular song. Thus, the decision of the ballad scholars to offer only those songs for publication that reflect a white, "pure," or British peasant ancestry is directly responsible for the later classifications and names of the ballads in the mid 20<sup>th</sup>-century. Indeed, the second folk project—or Folk Revival—continued to perpetuate these narrow, specific representations of the people who "own" the ballads as an idealized rural folk untouched by the modernizing world around them.

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>135</sup> Campbell and Sharp, *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians*.

<sup>136</sup> Whisnant, *All That Is Native and Fine*, 118.

Our canon of American folk music, whether classified as “traditional,” “authentic,” or “pure,” reflects the biases of early ballad collectors who wished to emphasize their own cultural heritage while diminishing the contributions of other cultural groups. Even though much of the canon’s music and lyrics reflects ideas of patriarchy, shadows of Christian morality, and overt misogyny, women have been no less active than men as workers striving to popularize its contents and ensure its survival. I agree with Whisnant, who reads the work of the earliest folk project as endeavors “based upon a flawed reading of local culture, as well as upon a naïve change.”<sup>137</sup> For female scholars, folk song collecting represents less of an acceptance of patriarchal ideals and more of a reality in which preserving British ancestry was more important than the cultural contexts and implications of the songs themselves. Overall, women’s participation in the early canonization of America’s folk music and heritage illustrates many of the same racial, political, and social biases and agendas embedded within the works of their male peers. Thus, women scholars have been just as culpable as men in framing the ballads as representative of British, white traditions.

#### **The Ballad Family: The “Relatedness” of British and American Murder Ballads**

While the premise of a close relationship between the English broadsides and the American murder ballads has gained acceptance by many ballad scholars, the song-family idea upon which this relationship is based is faulty and further reflects the biases of the early collectors. The tendency to relate the two genres comes directly from the wide-ranging scholarly reverence for Child’s work that continues today. The idea of explicit relatedness of British and American ballads is partially responsible for the

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 11.

continued myth that Appalachian songs are purely derivative of British (and thus, of Child) ballads. As Albert Friedman proudly contends in his 1956 work:

Child found 305 distinct ballads in British tradition, some in as many as 25 versions. His thick five-volume collection is the basic repository of the folk ballad in English, and it is customary in ballad books to refer to a Child-type ballad by the number it bears in the Child collection.<sup>138</sup>

Indeed, he goes on to say that, “thanks to the diligence of the American collectors, it is now clear that the Child ballad survives more numerous in the United States and Canada than in the countries of its origins.”<sup>139</sup> Scholars such as Pound intentionally organized their anthologies under this assumption. Indeed, she notes in her publication of ballads that, “variant texts have been introduced, to illustrate the multiple forms which may be assumed by a single ballad.”<sup>140</sup>

I argue that the American ballads should instead be considered on their own terms as reflective of American culture and experiences, rather than strictly as songs continuing the tradition of British ancestry and English values. As Satu Grünthal confirms, “ballads are self-reflexive, constantly mirroring their own tradition, conventions and values. In this mirroring they simultaneously change, distort, and preserve their own image and generic history.”<sup>141</sup> While the American songs may, as Grünthal asserts, see themselves “in the mirror of [the] genre’s tradition,”<sup>142</sup> I suggest that such ideology does not serve the American ballad canon, as it obscures the specific cultural meanings of the genre.

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<sup>138</sup> Albert B. Friedman, ed. *The Viking Book of Folk Ballads of the English-Speaking World* (New York: The Viking Press, 1956), xi.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Pound, *American Ballads and Songs*, xiii.

<sup>141</sup> Grünthal, “Borders of the Ballad Genre,” 7.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

Coming from the wider genre of songs called “broadsides,” a small canon of British murder ballads has been tied to those circulating in specific regions of United States. As Albert Friedman notes, “Broadsides were...the urban counterpart of the folk ballads.”<sup>143</sup> Laws provides a useful definition of this historical genre, referring to them as “printed journalistic pieces which were widely sold in the British Isles (and elsewhere) over a period of four hundred years from the 16<sup>th</sup>-century onward.”<sup>144</sup> This general definition serves my analysis of the broadsides.

The business of broadside production was immensely important and prevalent in historical bourgeois British life, and many ballads were written in this tradition and sold as single-sheet pieces—hence the name, “broadside.” As Friedman asserts, “vendors of broadside ballads took up their pitches in the streets of London and provincial towns...the ballads they sold for a penny or half-penny apiece were printed in three to six columns on one side of a sheet of paper.”<sup>145</sup> An immensely successful commercial product and ephemeral in nature, not all broadsides survived long enough to pass into American folk music. As David Gregory notes, “many fell flat when issued and quickly became nothing more than historical documents...it is important to remember that the successful ones were a small minority.”<sup>146</sup> The broadside tradition experienced a lucrative, if short-lived, existence in America as well. According to Friedman, from approximately 1840-1880, “broadsides and songbooks made up of broadside material

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<sup>143</sup> Friedman, ed. *Viking Book of Ballads*, xxvi.

<sup>144</sup> Laws, *American Balladry from British Broadsides*, 2.

<sup>145</sup> Friedman, ed. *Viking Book of Ballads*, xxvi.

<sup>146</sup> E. David Gregory, *Victorian Songhunters: The Recovery and Editing of English Vernacular Ballads and Folk Lyrics, 1820-1883* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2006), 4.

were the stock in trade of several prosperous publishers in New York and Philadelphia as well as Boston.”<sup>147</sup>

However, the broadside tradition would eventually be replaced with new kinds of ballads consisting of rhymed accounts of newspaper stories and current events. The American murder ballad emerged from this tradition and, as will be seen in Chapter Four, the songs relied upon the heavy use of editorial comment coupled with pronounced moral assertions. Ballad peddlers steadily employed suspense, violence, and love to captivate their customers with sensational plots. As Harker contends:

Printed songs appeared in substantial numbers as broadsides, chapbooks (‘cheapbooks’) and small songbooks or ‘Garlands,’ but they almost always did so anonymously. Even the printers did not inevitably print their name or address, especially if the songs were likely to incur official displeasure.<sup>148</sup>

To this genre of music we owe our knowledge of the popular English murder ballads called *The Wexford/Oxford Girl* (Laws P35) and *The Cruel Ship’s Carpenter/The Gosport Tragedy* (Laws P36A).

During the second folk project of the 1950s and 1960s, academics tied the aforementioned English ballads to the American songs known as *The Knoxville Girl* and *Pretty Polly*, respectively. These connections are evident in G. Malcolm Laws’ anthology, illustratively named *American Balladry from British Broad­sides*. However, Laws is not the only scholar to link British and American folksong; it is equally asserted by the scholars who have published anthologies on the premise of this direct cultural connection, like Albert B. Friedman,<sup>149</sup> Henry M. Belden (Missouri),<sup>150</sup> Phillips Barry

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<sup>147</sup> Friedman, ed., *Viking Book of Ballads*, xxvi.

<sup>148</sup> Harker, *Fakesong*, xiii.

<sup>149</sup> Friedman, ed. *Viking Book of Ballads*.

(New England),<sup>151</sup> Frank C. Brown (North Carolina),<sup>152</sup> John A. Lomax (Texas),<sup>153</sup> Vance Randolph (The Ozarks),<sup>154</sup> and many others.

Scholars working as late as the 1950s and 1960s chose to follow the entrenched ideas concerning British cohesiveness that were established in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by Cecil Sharp. Thus, the academic writings of the second folk project perpetuate rather than investigate and critically reconsider how we have come to read southern mountain music as a pure vestige of English culture. The idea of the ballad family, or as Evelyn Wells would have it named, “the ballad tree,”<sup>155</sup> underpinned the folk revival; this concept stems from the principle that *all* American ballads and folksongs are modeled and built from an English tradition. As Wells contends, “the traditional ballad has always maintained this balance, building on its past,” and “the ballad tree, rooted in the past, living today, will send forth its branches into tomorrow.”<sup>156</sup> The remainder of this chapter discusses selected English broadsides that have been categorized as the antecedents of American murder ballad. I include a reflection upon their possible origins, their previous inclusion in various anthologies by earlier ballad scholars, and an analysis of their

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<sup>150</sup> Henry M. Belden, *Ballads and Songs Collected by the Missouri Folk-Lore Society*, 2nd ed., vol. 15, The University of Missouri Studies (Columbia, MO: The University of Missouri Press, 1955).

<sup>151</sup> Phillips Barry, *The Maine Woods Songster* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939).

<sup>152</sup> Frank C. Brown, *The Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore*, 7 vols. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1952-1961).

<sup>153</sup> John Lomax, *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* (New York: Sturgis & Walton Company, 1910).

<sup>154</sup> Vance Randolph and Floyd C. Shoemaker, *Ozark Folksongs*, 4 vols. (Columbia, MO: The State Historical Society of Missouri, 1946-1950).

<sup>155</sup> Evelyn Kendrick Wells, *The Ballad Tree: A Study of British and American Ballads, Their Folklore, Verse, and Music* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1950).

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

lyrics—a threefold study that effectively dispels the idea of “ballad families” and Appalachia’s strict adherence to English models of songwriting.

**Comparing *The Oxford/Wexford Girl* (Appendix I) to *The Knoxville Girl* (Appendix II)**

*The Oxford Girl* and *The Wexford Girl* are identified as British broadsides, yet their dates and exact places of origin remain obscure. Moreover, their relationship even to each other remains ambiguous; it appears that the texts of these songs are identical, with “Oxford” versus “Wexford” as the interchangeable feature of the ballad. As Laws notes of these songs, “no satisfactory method exists for the precise dating of most traditional ballads of broadside origin.”<sup>157</sup> The business of dating these songs rests in making educated guesses, and placing the ballads along a continuum of dates. Broadside balladists generally agree that writing these texts reached its height during the 17<sup>th</sup>-century, began to decline in the 18<sup>th</sup>, and became most obscure and peripheral by the 19<sup>th</sup>-century.<sup>158</sup> Thus, arguably all of the song texts discussed in this chapter have undergone innumerable variations and transformation—a phenomenon that further complicates dating a ballad or ascertaining which of its many texts was published first.

As Laws states, *The Wexford/Oxford Girl* effectively illustrates “the rewriting of a ballad in the same stanzaic form and more of the normal variation which occurs in tradition.”<sup>159</sup> The story employs the ever-popular theme of a love affair that ends in the female character’s murder. There are three different variants in broadside form available for study of which, as Laws contends, “the oldest of these and presumably the original is

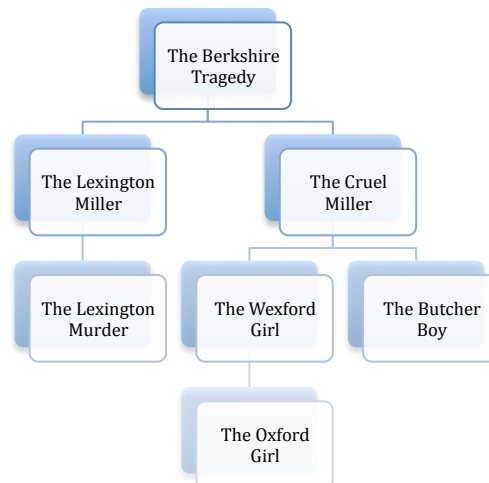
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<sup>157</sup> Laws, *American Balladry from British Broadsides*, 54.

<sup>158</sup> Friedman, ed. *Viking Book of Ballads*, xxvi.

<sup>159</sup> Laws, *American Balladry from British Broadsides*, 104.

‘The Berkshire Tragedy; or the Wittam Miller.’”<sup>160</sup> This song has also gone by the names *The Lexington Miller*, and *The Cruel Miller*. As an illustration of this confusing intermingling of names and variations, Laws provides the following flow chart:



**Figure 1.1 Variations of *The Wexford/Oxford Girl***<sup>161</sup>

Laws classifies this ballad in his anthology under the primary name, *The Wexford Girl*,<sup>162</sup> although the two texts he provides correspond rather with the names *Oxford* and *Lexington*. However, as we have already established that the interchangeable feature of the song is its location, the text of this ballad preserves Laws’ title of the song as *The Wexford Girl*, even though the ballad *text* names Oxford as its location.

Here I challenge the broadside ballad’s posited connection to the American murder ballad called *The Knoxville Girl*. Overall, a number of differences distinguish the broadside from the American murder ballad, substantial enough to posit the two as independent songs.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 267.

Perhaps most notable at first glance is the difference in length between the two pieces. The broadside is rather long, with an impressive forty-four stanzas of poetry and is thus expansive even by the broadside genre's tradition. *The Knoxville Girl* instead consists of a twelve-stanza text, and logically results in a pared-down story. One can certainly recognize certain similarities between the two pieces. In both versions, the murderer finds himself covered in blood, which he attributes to a nosebleed when questioned. Further, both songs fail to assign a name to the female victim. However, greater thematic differences between the two songs invite further attention.

For example, the identification of the murderer varies from text to text, called "John" in the broadside (Appendix I, stanza 6.3) and "Willie," in the American murder ballad (Appendix II, stanza 3.3). An examination of the murderer's name in each song text emphasizes the clash of different socioeconomic classes between the murderers and their victims. In the broadside, "John," is identified as a well-cared-for youth, whose parents have provided him with what is presumably an apprenticeship with a miller (stanza 3). Though a respectable and hard-earning living, a mill job informs the reader of John's working-class stature. Alternatively, the nickname "Willie" in the American murder ballad is reminiscent of royalty, wealth, and nobility in its formal relation to "William." The name "William" derives from the Germanic *Wilhelm*, "the shield or defense."<sup>163</sup> Concerning the name's tie to royalty and aristocracy, the *Oxford Dictionary of First Names* notes that the name "William" is a survivor of ancient names used in the Germanic languages, and is one of the popular names borne by a number of England's

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<sup>163</sup> William Arthur, "William," in *An Etymological Dictionary of Family and Christian Names* (New York: Sheldon, Blakeman & Co., 1857), 290.

royal family members.<sup>164</sup> Though no other clue is given to the American murderer's class status, it is reasonable to assume that the Knoxville criminal commands a higher socioeconomic power than his female victim.

Strikingly, "Willie" of the American murder ballad displays considerably less remorse than does "John" of the British broadside, a fact that points to a subtle sense of entitlement, justice, and immunity that Willie may feel, given his royal name and higher socioeconomic status. Contrarily, the broadside murderer seems capable of a great deal of remorse. This is illustrated by his repeated proclamation that his hands are forever stained "in the blood of innocence" (stanza 17.1-17.2), and his frank concession that he beat his victim "until her Life away I took, which I can never restore" (stanza 14.3-14.4).

Thus, each murderer views his circumstance, and the consequences that follow, quite differently. The murder-narrator of the broadside states in stanza 22 that, feeling immensely sorry for his crime, he:

Lay trembling all the Night,  
For I could take no rest,  
And perfect Flame of Hell did Flash,  
Within my guilty Face.

The broadside narrator is a remorseful kind of criminal who cannot rest because he acknowledges that his act of evil *must* be paid for with his own destruction. Indeed, the guilt shows in his face, personified by the flames of Hell. The "trembling" he experiences emphasizes this fear and remorse.

By contrast, the murder-narrator of the American ballad states in stanza 10 that, pleading a headache that sends him to bed, he:

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<sup>164</sup> Patrick Hanks and Flavia Hodges, "Introduction to the First Edition," in *A Dictionary of First Names*, ed. Patrick Hanks, Kate Hardcastle, and Flavia Hodges (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), xvi.

Rolled and tumbled the whole night through,  
 As trouble was for me.  
 Black flames of Hell around my bed  
 And in my eyes could see.

The American murderer's dreams of Hell derive from the troubles that await him when he wakes. Because the Knoxville murderer has not yet shown any remorse or guilt, it seems that his "rolling" and "tumbling" results not from an acknowledgement of wrongdoing but from his realization that, *if* his crime is discovered, Hell will ultimately be his fate. Thus, his only sorrow comes from getting caught, and not from killing the Knoxville girl.

Significantly, the broadside known as *The Wexford/Oxford Girl* is marked by a distinct spiritual or religious aura compared with the text of the American murder ballad, *The Knoxville Girl*. In the former, undertones of Christianity pervade the text, exemplified most by the murderer-narrator who invokes images of "Hell" and "Satan," as in stanzas 9 and 25, respectively:

Oh! Cursed be the Day,  
 The Devil then did me persuade,  
 To take her life away...

...But Satan did me still persuade,  
 I stifly should deny:  
 Quoth he, there is no witness can,  
 Against thee Testify.

The broadside criminal makes use of "the Devil made me do it" motif as an excuse to explain the murderous actions for which he is clearly remorseful. In this way, since an all-powerful evil force controls his actions, the broadside victim's murder is not solely about the narrator killing his lover in a state of rage. The religious imagery present in the

broadside ballad removes some of the blame from the murderer and simultaneously solicits a certain amount of sympathy for the now-repenting young man.

Likewise, the several references to “Heaven” and “God” mark this broadside with a distinctly spiritual texture. Lines such as 28.1 (“But Heaven had a watchful eye”), 42.1 (“Lord grant me grace while I do stay”), and 44.1 (“Lord, wash my hateful Sins away”) illustrate the spirituality of both the murderer and the culture within which his crime takes place. I find the spiritual mood of the broadside significant, considering that the piece would have been popular in a period of time where the world was thought to operate by deities and supernatural forces. Moreover, the religious tone of the broadside starkly contrasts with the later text of the American murder ballad.

Conversely, the text of *The Knoxville Girl* appears firmly in the realm of 19<sup>th</sup>-century modernism, as it is virtually devoid of the kind of dedication to spirituality employed by the broadside murderer. Where the broadside murderer explains that evil forces have caused him to sin, the Knoxville murderer does not invoke “Satan” or the “Devil” as an explanation for his crime. Interestingly, he justifies his murderous actions in worldly terms, in stanza 6, by stating:

Go down, go down, you Knoxville girl,  
With dark and roving eyes;  
Go down, go down, you Knoxville girl,  
You can never be my bride.

In this way, the text of the American ballad demonstrates a type of logic based not in the supernatural but in the laws of societal expectations. The speaker assumes the murder of a promiscuous or “roving-eyed” woman is justifiable according to contemporary social mores.

The presence of mothers in the ballad texts provides further opportunity to contrast the two songs. In the broadside, the listener is acquainted with the victim's mother, who first pleads with the soon-to-be murderer to wed her pregnant daughter and save her daughter's reputation (stanza 7), and then grieves for the loss of her beloved child in the context of the murderer's prosecution and invocation of justice (stanzas 23-26). Thus, with the insertion of the grieving parent, we are introduced to an important stock character type in balladry. As Anne Cohen explains, "certain stereotyped characters and situations appearing in 19<sup>th</sup> century popular literature suggest contemporary social ideas."<sup>165</sup> A further discussion of such stock characters appears in Chapter Four.

Alternatively, the American murder ballad is entirely disinterested in the victim. Not only is she unnamed, murdered, and thrown into the river, she has no loving or grieving parents to mourn for her or to invite the listener's sympathy for her untimely demise. Instead, sympathy is invoked for the murderer by the presence of *his* mother, who is confronted by the blatant evidence of her son's crime in stanza 8:

Saying, "Dear son, what have you done  
To bloody your clothes so?"

The later American murder ballad clearly displays a disregard for the Knoxville girl's death, her family, and their place within the town's social hierarchy. Instead, the plot of *The Knoxville Girl* illustrates what happens to women who choose the wrong kind of men with whom to fall in love. In the American ballad, the woman is comparatively depersonalized; instead of her grieving parents, the listener is acquainted with the murderer's stricken kin.

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<sup>165</sup> Cohen, *Poor Pearl, Poor Girl!*, 6.

Both main characters in *The Knoxville Girl* have been exaggerated, in opposite ways as compared with their ancestors in the broadside text. The murderer has, in essence, become more evil by not feeling remorse for his crime and perhaps resting upon the safety accorded to him by his higher social status. Meanwhile, the female murder victim recedes, effectively becoming less of a person and more of a shadow. Thus, the female victim of the Knoxville murderer is employed only in the abstract, to depict the kind of anti-example of the idyllic woman prized under Victorian ideals of behavior.

Finally, I call attention to differences most readily seen in the beginnings and endings of the two song texts. The broadside begins with a call for the audience's attention: "young men and maidens all give ear, unto what I shall now relate; O mark you well, and you shall hear, of my unhappy fate," (stanza 1, lines 1-4). These lines signify the importance of the moral lesson contained within the song. As a conclusion, and after much repentance and invocation of Christian ideals and principles, the broadside narrator ends with, "young men take warning by my fall, all filthy lusts defy" (lines 43.1-43.2). This caution specifically addresses the male population and foreshadows the harm that comes to women and men alike when men are dishonorable and sinful. In stark contrast, the American murder ballad provides no address to men or women to take warning and heed the greater moral message, nor does the song specifically address men's failings in their duty to protect and honor women. Rather it returns to the mundane world, to the prisoner in his cell, without engaging the larger spiritual repercussions of his situation.

**Comparing *The Gosport Tragedy/The Cruel Ship's Carpenter* (Appendix III) to *Pretty Polly* (Appendix IV)**

Invoking different kinds of imagery and cultural meaning, the clash between the texts of broadsides known as *The Gosport Tragedy/The Cruel Ship's Carpenter* and the American murder ballad called *Pretty Polly* furthers my argument against the presumed familial relations among English and American songs. Numbered by Laws under the genre named "Ballads of Unfaithful Lovers,"<sup>166</sup> *The Cruel Ship's Carpenter* is tied to *Pretty Polly* under "P 36B."<sup>167</sup>

The British song has been called *The Gosport Tragedy* by many singers of this ballad text. Laws provides the explanation for this relation under his description of ballad number P 36A, "The Cruel Ship's Carpenter A (*The Gosport Tragedy*),"<sup>168</sup> where he explains that, within this particular text, "the girl's parents hear the news, find her body, and bury it in the Gosport churchyard."<sup>169</sup> For purposes of investigating the connections between the American *Pretty Polly* and the English song *The Cruel Ship's Carpenter/The Gosport Tragedy*,<sup>170</sup> I provide lyrics for the broadside in Appendix III.

Relating the broadside to the American murder ballad called *Pretty Polly*, Laws explains: "a further reduction of this text has resulted in a briefer traditional form in which the girl is called Pretty Polly and in which William, or Willie, says 'I was digging

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<sup>166</sup> Laws, *American Balladry from British Broadsides*, 247.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 269.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 268.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> As Laws does not provide a full text of either song, the lyrics herein come from The Roud Folk Song Index, maintained by The English Folk Dance and Song Society. This ballad text in the database is found under Roud number 15. Accessed from <http://library.efds.org/cgi-bin/query>, May 27, 2011.

your grave the best part of last night.”<sup>171</sup> The American text of *Pretty Polly* is found in Appendix IV.

Though there are similarities between the American and British songs—namely, the name of the murder victim and the disposal of both victims’ bodies in earthen shallow graves instead of water—I find little other material that could merit an assertion that the songs are related or that the American murder ballad is directly modeled after the English broadside. While it is true that both ballads display marked brutality, and both illustrate that, as Symonds states, “the road to marriage, or sexual pleasure, is often blocked by violence,”<sup>172</sup> the differences between the two texts are striking. Most interesting is the displacement of the impersonal narrator in the English broadside in favor of the one in the American murder ballad, who tells the story at close range and is always at hand with subjective and pious reflections.

The central differences between the songs rest in the broadside’s use of supernatural elements and a vengeful Polly character juxtaposed to the submissive behavior and more-worldly milieu of the American Polly. Within the text of *The Cruel Ship’s Carpenter*, elements of the supernatural appear in the form of Polly’s ghost, spirit, or specter which comes back to expose her murderer’s crime and seek a violent revenge for her wrongful death. As Friedman asserts, “The older British ballads, like fairy tales, owe part of their charm to the peculiar twilight atmosphere in which the stories unfold...the American ballad “folk” have a more firm grasp on reality and fact.”<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Laws, *American Balladry from British Broad-sides*, 269.

<sup>172</sup> Symonds, *Weep Not for Me*, 51.

<sup>173</sup> Friedman, ed., *Viking Book of Ballads*, 3.

I read Friedman's statement as outlining the split between pagan and Protestant belief systems. The supernatural disappears in Appalachian songs because, as a major principle of pagan belief, ideas concerning superstition fail to align with the Protestant doctrine that took hold in Appalachia. Thus, the American ballads are more reflective of real American experiences and technologies—railroads, telegraphs, etc.—instead of favoring fantastical elements found in European (namely, British) fairy tales. Because the American ballads dismiss supernatural elements, they are firmly grounded in contemporary American culture that favors the inclusion of modernisms and technologies.

The English broadside called *The Cruel Ship's Carpenter* illustrates songs in which, as David Atkinson asserts, "a murder is committed and an attempt is made to conceal it, but it is subsequently brought to light by supernatural means, most specifically by a supernatural manifestation of the corpse."<sup>174</sup> In this way, *The Cruel Ship's Carpenter* successfully employs elements of titillation, shock, and horror mixed with a moral aftermath. As Atkinson states, this outcome "can be understood in terms of inversion followed by the eventual restoration of order."<sup>175</sup>

Though only encompassing the last lines of the British ballad, Polly's retribution leaves the listener with the lasting imagery of the victim's might and potency as seen in stanza 9:

Now as he was turning from captain with speed,  
He met with his Polly, which made his heart bleed.  
She ripped him and tore him, she tore him in three,  
Because that he murdered her baby and she.

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<sup>174</sup> Atkinson, "Magical Corpses," 1.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.: 3-4.

However, the Polly of the American murder ballad possesses none of the same strength, wit, or cunning. Instead, the listener is introduced to a passive and submissive sweetheart, who displays those very Victorian qualities so prized in 19<sup>th</sup>-century American culture: timidity, weakness, and fragility. Though the lyrics stress that Polly throws her arms around her murderer and “suffered no fear,”<sup>176</sup> Polly’s state of mind may at best be described as naïve or passive, illustrated by her simple question in stanza 4, lines 2 and 4, “how could you kill a girl who loves you so dear?”

In the last stanzas of *Pretty Polly*, made popular by The Stanley Brothers,<sup>177</sup> the murderer justifies his murderous actions through the complaint that Polly’s “fast reputation” is troublesome to his own social status:

“Polly, pretty Polly, that never could be.  
Polly, pretty Polly, that never could be,  
Your fast reputation’s been trouble to me.”

He stabbed her through the heart and her heart’s blood did flow  
He stabbed her through the heart and her heart’s blood did flow  
And into the grave Pretty Polly did go.

He went to the jailhouse and what did he say  
He went to the jailhouse and what did he say  
“I’ve killed Pretty Polly and I’m tryin’ to get away.”

Though other writers on these ballads have not explicitly addressed it, the disappearance of the supernatural in *Pretty Polly* is significant in that it illustrates the literal silencing of women living in 19<sup>th</sup>-century America, who now were unable to speak freely neither in life nor in death. The erasure of the supernatural also reflects a certain dismissal of European pagan beliefs; thus the American murder ballad called *Pretty Polly*

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<sup>176</sup> Appendix C, stanza 4

<sup>177</sup> The Stanley Brothers, *The Complete Columbia Stanley Brothers*, Legacy/Columbia Records.

serves as a direct response against ghostly or metaphysical elements and against ideas related to women's strength and tenacity. In this way, I disagree with Friedman's statement that the American ballads "obviously stem from a culture rich in folk beliefs and dominated by several order of supernatural beings."<sup>178</sup> Instead, I argue that while the American settlers of Appalachia were the descendents of Celtic people who believed in elements of the supernatural, their songs show an explicit dismissal of those beliefs, and thus no longer "stem" from British culture. Instead, American murder ballad composers distilled their texts to reflect Christian ideas, particularly favoring patriarchal religious imagery that effectively controls and limits the autonomy of women.

### **Conclusions**

While the colonists who came to the United States from England and the British Isles in the 17<sup>th</sup>-century undoubtedly carried a tradition and repertoire of popular songs and ballads, the sole heritage of Appalachian Americans was *not* British. Moreover, the range of music to be found in historical Appalachia was not only the music of a whitewashed and passive "folk." Rather, such contrasts of the region and of the music were instigated and perpetuated by a vast number of cultural workers interested in the southern Appalachian United States. Ballad collectors drawn to the isolative qualities of the region sought to perpetuate an idyllic pastoral removed from the harsh realities of modernism and industrialization.

The very problem in understanding how American "folk culture" has been constructed rests in the complicated process by which Appalachia was marketed as *tradition*. As Becker asserts, "'tradition' refers to the past, of course, but also to the way

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<sup>178</sup> Friedman, ed. *Viking Book of Ballads*, 3.

in which the past is transmitted; it refers to the passing down of knowledge from generation to generation and implies value and veneration.”<sup>179</sup> As believed by many working in Appalachia, access was only granted to the world of tradition through the “folk,” who immersed themselves in it simply by living and practicing their daily rituals, of which singing and storytelling were among the most potent.

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<sup>179</sup> Becker, *Selling Tradition*, 1.

### CHAPTER III

“The most outstanding feature of Appalachian women in the nineteenth century is the fact that we know so little about them.”<sup>180</sup>

-Milton Ready

#### Introduction

Women and their life experiences and stories are strikingly absent from the historical record. This underrepresentation is widely acknowledged by many feminist scholars. Indeed, until very recently, those women who *do* appear in historical texts are those who achieved unusual prominence, such as Susan B. Anthony and Margaret Sanger; namely suffragists, activists, and outspoken radicals. As Henrietta Yurchenco affirms, few historians “bothered to write about the accomplishments of the unglamorous poor, of the disadvantaged women with no public image, living out their lives in the seclusion of their homes.”<sup>181</sup>

Feminist scholars call for a redress of women’s general absence from history and recognition in literature. As Simon Gaunt states, “until literary history has been rewritten from a feminist perspective there will remain a vast amount of unexposed patriarchy in our literary heritage.”<sup>182</sup> I agree with the need to correct historical records that gloss over the innumerable merits found in the experiences of the “ordinary woman.” Important as they are to the understanding of how women’s rights and freedoms have developed, we limit the possibilities of historical analysis by solely focusing upon women who had the means, resources, and determination to mark their place in time.

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<sup>180</sup> Milton Ready, "'Forgotten Sisters': Mountain Women in the South," *Journal of Appalachian Studies Association* 3 (1991): 62.

<sup>181</sup> Henrietta Yurchenco, "Trouble in the Mines: A History in Song and Story by Women of Appalachia," *American Music* 9, no. 2 (1991): 209.

<sup>182</sup> Gaunt, "Poetry of Exclusion," 310.

The historical erasure of rural-living American women, like those in 19<sup>th</sup>-century southern Appalachia, yields powerful and harmful implications. The little knowledge of Appalachian women that we *do* find in historical literature is usually clouded by the same biases and myths that surround the region and people as a whole. I agree with scholars such as Wilma Dunaway, who asserts:

The journey toward a meaningful analysis of Appalachian women is made more difficult by the need to overcome the burden of a century of outdated assumptions about their character flaws and about their debilitating isolation in the separate spheres of their homes.<sup>183</sup>

This chapter discusses three major facets of 19<sup>th</sup>-century southern Appalachian women's lives: romantic relationships and sexuality, daily life rituals and experiences, and the importance of religion in the establishment of a feminine and social identity. As Mary K. Anglin asserts, previous historical accounts of Appalachia "fail to render gender relations with the same degree of complexity" typically found in discussions of class factions and racial identities; instead, "at best [they offer] a partial vision of women's activities."<sup>184</sup> Indeed, we are left to conclude that in historical Appalachia, rules about gender were underscored by well-embedded traditions of familism, and as Anglin contends, "history was the province of men."<sup>185</sup>

My investigation seeks to contextualize the experiences of Appalachian rural women and to foreground their fates as depicted in the texts of the murder ballads. A consideration of women's overwhelming subjugation concerning their sexualities and

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<sup>183</sup> Dunaway, *Women, Work, and Family*, 2.

<sup>184</sup> Mary K. Anglin, "Lives on the Margin: Rediscovering the Women of Antebellum Western North Carolina," in *Appalachia in the Making: The Mountain South in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Mary Beth Pudur, Dwight B. Billings, and Altina L. Waller (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 187.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

relationships, daily lives, and religious experiences in historical Appalachia reveals and reflects many of the same realities faced by all of the female murder ballad victims discussed in Chapter Four.

A final section of this chapter, however, recognizes women's daily means of self-expression and instances of their self-assertions and efforts to fight back against the patriarchal and misogynistic cultural order. Here my discussion foregrounds the behaviors illustrated by the female characters in the supporting roles of the murder ballads, such as the mothers and sisters of *Pearl Bryan* and *Lula Viers*. Although recognizing that, as Dunaway contends, "because of their racial, ethnic, and class diversity, Appalachian women cannot be reduced to a single homogenous group who shared the same gendered hierarchical space,"<sup>186</sup> here I primarily consider the plights of white rural women, who are the demographic of the murder ballads themselves. In examining women's historical realities, I illustrate the many ways in which deeply entrenched ideas of patriarchy have shaped the lives of American women in the past—a history that continues to shape the feminine experience today.

A secondary focus of this chapter rests with dismantling the social construct often called the "myth of Appalachia." As Mary Beth Pudup asserts, "much of what is believed to be known about the life and people there is actually knowledge about a complex intertextual reality, 'Appalachia.'"<sup>187</sup> In further deconstructing relevant mythologies, this chapter undresses ideas of Appalachia as an American landscape isolated in a "backwoods" realm of ignorance.

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<sup>186</sup> Dunaway, *Women, Work, and Family*, 15.

<sup>187</sup> Mary Beth Pudup, "Introduction," in *Appalachia in the Making: The Mountain South in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Mary Beth Pudup, Dwight B. Billings, and Altina L. Waller, eds. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 2.

This brief history of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Appalachian women's realities further reveals the paradoxical nature of the region's culture and the murder ballads themselves. Based on true-life events, the ballad texts make selective use of each woman's historical reality. At the same time, they continue a tradition that primarily aims to caution young women against socially unacceptable behavior.

### **Struggles with Love, Relationships and Sexuality**

A discussion concerning the sexualities and the relationships of women is one of the largest issues underexplored by academia. As the major impetus for a plethora of new medical, popular, and academic literature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women's sexuality is an important topic for study. As Carroll and Charles Rosenberg write,

Men hopeful of preserving existing social relationships...employed medical and biological arguments to rationalize traditional sex roles as rooted inevitably and irreversibly in the prescriptions of anatomy and physiology.<sup>188</sup>

Thus, the ideal Victorian woman's personality traits—nurturance, morality, domesticity, and passivity—were, as the Rosenbergs contend, “all assumed to have a deeply rooted biological basis.”<sup>189</sup>

In the shift from Victorian ideals and the “Cult of True Woman”<sup>190</sup> to a newly industrialized and sexually autonomous American society in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, women's negotiation of sexual identity became increasingly complicated across the nation—even for those living in a geographically “isolated” Appalachia. Starting at the beginning of this phenomenon, and as Carl Degler contends, “if there is one fact

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<sup>188</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and Charles Rosenberg, "The Female Animal: Medical and Biological Views of Woman and Her Role in Nineteenth-Century America," *The Journal of American History* 60, no. 2 (1973): 333.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 334.

<sup>190</sup> Barbara Welton, "'The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,'" *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1966): 152.

concerning the 19<sup>th</sup>-century about which everyone feels confident, it is that sex was then a tabooed subject.”<sup>191</sup> Other scholars, such as Charles Rosenberg, agree that “a tone of increasing repressiveness...marks much of the medical material written in the two generations after the 1830s; by the 1870s this emphasis had moved from the level of individual exhortation to that of organized efforts to enforce chastity.”<sup>192</sup> Thus, the repression of women’s sexualities not only hallmarks the time period, but also illustrates the complexities inherent in studying a facet of female identity that was successfully denied.

To understand how Victorian culture conceived of female sexuality, it must be understood that a direct shift occurred in the behaviors deemed acceptable for women to display and practice. As Degler notes, the “frank recognition of women’s sexual needs and desires persisted in the marriage manuals in the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century.”<sup>193</sup> However, shortly after this seeming acceptance, a cultural and social shift toward Victorianism took hold, effectively ending the open nature of sexuality in the mid 1800s. Primary source material from the period comes from the writings of Dr. William Acton—one of the most widely quoted and read physicians of the time—who stated, “The best mothers, wives and managers of households...know little or nothing of sexual indulgence. Love of home, children, and domestic duties are the only passions that they feel.”<sup>194</sup> Thus, the dismissal of women’s sexuality and freedoms was made popular even while women lived very

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<sup>191</sup> Carl N. Degler, *At Odds: Women and the Family in American from the Revolution to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 249.

<sup>192</sup> Charles E. Rosenberg, "Sexuality, Class and Role in 19th-Century America," *American Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (1973): 134.

<sup>193</sup> Degler, *At Odds*, 251.

<sup>194</sup> William Acton, *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs in Youth, in Adult Age, and in Advanced Life: Considered in Their Physiological, Social, and Psychological Relations* (Philadelphia, 1865), 133.

different realities. As Chapter Four demonstrates, murder ballads such as *Omie Wise*, *Pearl Bryan*, and *Lula Viers* illustrate the sexual realities of 19<sup>th</sup>-century women through their allusions to out-of-wedlock pregnancies and their depictions of the types of sexual independence that Appalachian society rejected.

Marriage was the only acceptable context within which white women could engage in sexual activity, and even then, only permissible at the invitation or demand of a husband. As demonstrated in the text of *The Murder of Laura Foster*, death, horror and tragedy could befall women who did not abide by Victorian ideals of sexual behavior. In this way, the murder ballads demonstrate both a fiction and a reflection of real life. Though women like Laura Foster focused upon the natural acceptance and practice of their sexuality, Victorian culture maintained that purity must remain of utmost importance to young women. Only “unnatural and unfeminine” women sacrificed their innocence, as Welter explains: “Without it she was, in fact, no woman at all, but a member of some lower order.”<sup>195</sup> As the murder ballads repeatedly depict, the female victims serve a significant cultural purpose, namely to illustrate the “fallen women,” in essence—“‘fallen angels,’ unworthy of the celestial company of her sex.”<sup>196</sup>

Perhaps the reality of sexually expressive women explains why, according to Daniel Cohen, we see a change in the patterns of male violence against young women during the span of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This theory of male violence posits that “the murder of young unmarried women by young unmarried men was largely a new phenomenon in British North America at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, resulting from tensions associated

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<sup>195</sup> Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” 154.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

with widespread changes in popular sexual behavior.”<sup>197</sup> As I deal with explicitly in Chapter Four and within the contexts of the murder ballads, Cohen’s statements provide a very real sense of the consequences for sexually free or expressive women.

Marriage, then, was supremely important for all women but especially for white, poor, rural-living women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century who were already negotiating a complicated cultural identity. As Dunaway asserts, “poor white women were believed to be racially inferior to more affluent females, so their sexual libidos were supposed to be closer to those of nonwhite women, who were always driven to ‘the satisfaction of their lascivious and lustful desires.’”<sup>198</sup> Victoria Bynum expounds further upon this idea of poor white women, whose low social standing forced them to live on the fringes of southern society. As she states, “their race and gender dictated that poor white women conform to the wholly domestic image of the true woman, but their class left them without the means to do so.”<sup>199</sup> In this way, the inordinately lustful anti-examples of the women contained in the murder ballads would have served a particularly useful purpose for 19<sup>th</sup>-century rural society by instructing other Appalachian women how *not* to behave. Thus, the murder ballads helped to maintain a patriarchal social order.

Marriage also allowed for a legal and effective differentiation in roles between men and women. As one of the most important developments of the modern family in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the sharp dichotomy between women’s activities taking place in the home and men’s activities taking place in the outside world produced what Degler refers to as

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<sup>197</sup> Cohen, “Beautiful Female Murder Victim,” 284.

<sup>198</sup> Dunaway, *Women, Work, and Family*, 208.

<sup>199</sup> Victoria E. Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 6-7.

“the doctrine of two spheres,”<sup>200</sup> what we commonly identify as the “public” or “private” spheres of productivity and reproductivity. This binary of the public/private worlds of men and women kept men successfully in the productive, working sector of the public economy, and women within the confines of strictly domestic pursuits. To further emphasize domesticity, women underwent heavy scrutiny for their ability to successfully demonstrate qualities idealized by the “true woman.” As Welter affirms, the ideal woman was “judged by her husband, neighbors and community on the basis of four cardinal virtues—piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife—woman.”<sup>201</sup> Thus, the fates of the socially “anti-ideal” women in the American murder ballads successfully reinforced the gender boundaries of 19<sup>th</sup>-century culture.

As a result of the “separate spheres” ideology in Victorian America, marriage became best defined as a relationship of unequal power. As Degler asserts, “certainly in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, when a husband was acknowledged by all to be the head of the family, there can be no doubt that power or the making of decisions was unequally distributed.”<sup>202</sup> The power assumed by male heads-of-household encroached upon many women’s freedoms. As Anglin notes of 19<sup>th</sup>-century laws, “upon marriage, a woman surrendered ownership of real and intangible property to her husband, was judged not capable of entering into contracts, and was not accountable for her actions.”<sup>203</sup> To further illustrate the severity of marriage laws, source material from the 1864 courts of North Carolina state that a woman could be disciplined by her husband with “such a degree of

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<sup>200</sup> Degler, *At Odds*, 26.

<sup>201</sup> Welter, “Cult of True Womanhood,” 152.

<sup>202</sup> Degler, *At Odds*, 29.

<sup>203</sup> Anglin, “Lives on the Margin,” 189.

force as is necessary to control an unruly temper and make her behave herself.”<sup>204</sup> As the victims of the murder ballads discussed in Chapter Four repeatedly depict, violence was indeed the fate suffered by transgressive women.

Entrenched within this idealized code were the ideas that women remained only as members of the household and were *never* to serve as its head—this was an honor reserved solely for men. As Dunaway says, “family was truly a privilege of race, class, gender and marital status, certainly a legal freedom ensured only to those formally married Caucasian males who possessed ‘superiority’ of race, gender and class.”<sup>205</sup>

Bynum agrees with the social emphasis placed upon males’ total authority, stating:

They lived in a patriarchal society that merged the legal identities of wife and husband into one: the husband’s. The legal submersion of a woman’s identity upon marriage affected more than just her right to own and control property. The laws granted husbands control over the family purse strings, full custody of children, and the right and responsibility of governing wives’ behavior, by physical force if necessary.<sup>206</sup>

As mothers, women devoted the majority of their time and energies to reproductive pursuits within the context of marriage. Any woman who hoped to someday obtain respectability as a mother was, as Dunaway says, subject to “constraint on her sexuality...the decent woman carefully behaved so as not to bring disgrace upon her family for inappropriate actions.”<sup>207</sup> Most importantly, the ideal women, wives, and mothers of Victorian America successfully remained chaste before their marriages *and* continued to display such exemplary behavior afterward, in order to signify and mark their purity to fellow community members. Yet, the experiences of real Appalachian

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<sup>204</sup> Cited in Albert Coates, *By Her Own Bootstraps: A Saga of Women in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, NC: s.n., 1975), 29.

<sup>205</sup> Dunaway, *Women, Work, and Family*, 196.

<sup>206</sup> Bynum, *Unruly Women*, 60.

<sup>207</sup> Dunaway, *Women, Work, and Family*, 263.

women reveal the impossibilities inherent in Victorian standards of purity—a phenomenon well represented by the murder ballad victims who *all* live outside the confines of chastity.

Motherhood was thus a highly prized and expected role of 19<sup>th</sup>-century women, particularly for those living in the South. However, statistical data illustrating the social reification of motherhood in the South particularly emphasizes that, although idealized, the reproductive contributions of women to society oftentimes came at deadly and high costs.<sup>208</sup> Southern white women married younger and bore more children than northern whites. Throughout the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, and through much of the 19<sup>th</sup>, two of every five southern white women bore eight or more children while the majority of northern females had fewer than six offspring. Two-fifths of southern white females wed as teenage girls. One of every fifty deaths in the United States was a mother's demise during or soon after childbirth. However, the maternal mortality rate for a southern female was 1.3 times greater than this national trend.<sup>209</sup>

Where did such stipulations on marriage and motherhood leave the white, poor, rural woman in her negotiation of selfhood as an ideal Victorian? As a result of class discrimination that equated her social status to that of nonwhite women, the poor white women of Appalachia were already perceived as inherently incapable of purity and chastity. While even the elite, urban, middle- or upper-class white woman would have found it virtually impossible to live up to the code engendered by “The Cult of the True Woman,” the rural white woman faced even greater difficulties in embodying institutionalized ideas of virtue and purity. Moreover, though Victorianism deemed it

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<sup>208</sup> This paragraph relies on Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 229.

inappropriate for women to be the heads of homes, Dunaway illustrates that, in reality, “more than 15% of white Appalachian households were headed by females, and poor households were four times more likely to be headed by a woman than were affluent families.”<sup>210</sup>

In essence, the sexual autonomy of women posed a direct threat to the legal sanctions and social ideas that placed marriages (and families) fully under the authority of males. Indeed, the ballad called *The Murder of Laura Foster* positions the victim’s death as a direct result of the kind of sexuality that threatens to compromise that of her male lover. Dunaway asserts that, “southern elite and middle-class males employed cultural and religious standards about marriage and family to justify the public sanctions they legislated...to shield themselves from legal responsibility for sexual liaisons outside formalized marriages, and to institutionalize patriarchal family structure.”<sup>211</sup> A further discussion of the poor white woman’s oppression and subjugation in her day-to-day activities reveals the difficulties she faced in establishing and maintaining a reputable identity and place within the Victorian community.

#### **Daily Life and Work in a Gender-Restricted Economy**

Many women in southern Appalachia worked outside the “reproductive sphere” of the home. Yet their economic contributions to society only found recognition where they held gender-appropriate occupations: as teachers, seamstresses, or occasionally as domestics providing services to others from the comfort of their homes. Thus, the majority of southern Appalachian women, and their work, remained invisible. Anglin provides census information from 19<sup>th</sup>-century North Carolina, illustrating that, in 1880,

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 130.

women were listed simply “as ‘keeping house’ if they were wives and ‘at home’ if they were daughters, while the 1860 census did not provide even this cursory reference to women’s productive activities.”<sup>212</sup> In this way, “census takers could thus be construed as operating upon assumptions that had been codified as law, namely that married women were dependents without legal rights or economic means.”<sup>213</sup> Such assumptions reflect back upon the words of 19<sup>th</sup>-century southern writer George Fitzhugh’s declaration that,

Woman naturally shrinks from public gaze, and from the struggle and competition of life...in truth, woman, like children, has but one right and that is the right to protection. The right to protection involves the obligation to obey. A husband, lord and master, whom she should love, honor and obey, nature designed for every woman...if she be obedient she stands little danger of maltreatment.<sup>214</sup>

The “cult of domesticity”<sup>215</sup> assigned income-producing activities to the realm of masculinity and household activities with no acknowledged economic value to the private sphere of women. Yet Dunaway makes the statement that, in reality, “the everyday lives of a majority of Appalachian women were a stark contrast to this mythology.”<sup>216</sup> Bynum agrees, stating that the vast majority of women “did not lead the life of the delicate, pampered lady popularized in twentieth-century southern lore. Most were of the white nonslaveholding yeomanry.”<sup>217</sup>

Thus, only women of wealthy households could successfully achieve the romanticized Victorian ideals governing southern women’s work—a phenomenon that illustrates the sharp dichotomy between social classes. For the many women counted among the impoverished majority of Appalachia, working outside of the home was

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<sup>212</sup> Anglin, “Lives on the Margin,” 189.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>214</sup> Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South*, 215.

<sup>215</sup> Dunaway, *Women, Work, and Family*, 159.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Bynum, *Unruly Women*, 47.

necessary for survival. Yet, the biases of the “elite” against working women—seen through the Victorian ideals of the rich—created a complexity for women earning income by working in the fields or, as Dunaway notes, at “an array of publicly visible nonagricultural activities.”<sup>218</sup> To be a respectable woman, one could not engage in the types of manual labor assigned to working-class males and nonwhites. Thus, as Dunaway concludes, “Because of their lack of education and their demeaned public work, more than half of white Appalachian women lacked the material and cultural symbols of status that elites associated with respectability.”<sup>219</sup>

### **Appalachia, Religion, and Women’s Oppression in the Church**

Historical accounts of religion in Appalachia are a relatively new addition to the literature of Appalachian Studies; as Patrick Mullen asserts, the attitudes of early Appalachian scholars were part of a “larger positivist dismissal of both religion and superstition as unscientific [and] common among many intellectuals at the time.”<sup>220</sup> Even later accounts often center on the numerous independent churches tucked away in the mountains, characterized by unusual practices like foot washings, homecomings, and revivals. Writers such as Raymond Bial further the depiction of these largely unique practices, stating that religion is “vitally important to mountain people. Revivals are common in the mountains, as are full-immersion baptisms in local creeks.” Moreover, “religion, along with an Old World heritage, has deeply influenced Appalachian music.”<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>220</sup> Patrick B. Mullen, “Belief and the American Folk,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 113, no. 448 (2000): 120.

<sup>221</sup> Bial, *Mist over the Mountains*, 28.

For a relatively recent writer on Appalachian America, Bial overwhelmingly perpetuates ideas surrounding the “mythical Appalachia.” However, his statements concerning the Old Worldliness of Appalachia and its ties to religion remain useful for their depiction of how popular consciousness conceives of religion in Appalachia as a series of practices dominated by church revivals and creek-side rituals. Moreover, stereotypes about the pervasiveness of religion continue to draw upon the many physical signifiers of the South’s religiosity. As Frances Mayes recollects, “In my South, there were signs on trees that said ‘Repent.’ Halfway up a skinny pipe, up beyond the tin trough that caught the resin, hung a warning, ‘Jesus is coming.’ In a nearby town, one church has as its relic a phial of Holy Milk.”<sup>222</sup>

As Charles H. Lippy points out, there is a “tendency to castigate Appalachian popular religiosity as fatalistic and as compensating for a lack of empirical power.”<sup>223</sup> Such an approach to studying Appalachian religion is rooted in the false ideology that Appalachia’s poverty “must mean that people turn to religion as a solace.”<sup>224</sup>

Where does truth intersect with these myths surrounding religion in Appalachia? Where do women fit into such a discussion? The quest remains to examine how women have seen themselves fitting into local religious cultures and to locate their spirituality in the mountain regions of the “Bible Belt.” As Wendy Reed and Jennifer Horne state, “the world’s major religions have historically oppressed women by suggesting that they have

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<sup>222</sup> Frances Mayes, “Relics of Summer,” in *All out of Faith: Southern Women on Spirituality*, ed. Wendy Reed and Jennifer Horne (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2006), 70.

<sup>223</sup> Charles H. Lippy, “Popular Religiosity in Central Appalachia,” in *Christianity in Appalachia: Profiles in Regional Pluralism*, ed. Bill J. Leonard (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 46.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

a special role to play, one that does not involve leadership.”<sup>225</sup> This section provides a brief overview of religion in historical Appalachia before turning to examine how religion impacted and subjugated the daily lives of 19<sup>th</sup>-century rural Appalachian women.

Though a variety of religions permeate the Appalachian region, various sects of Christianity dominate the southern mountains. This religious tradition has been central to the area since its English, Scotch-Irish, and German settlement in the 1600s. For this reason, and as Catherine Albanese contends, southern Appalachia:

Offers a chance to study religion with a strong traditional orientation in which both ordinary and extraordinary values are blended. It provides an explicit instance of how regionalism supplies an overarching frame within which religion and culture come together.<sup>226</sup>

Christianity’s importance to 19<sup>th</sup>-century Appalachians rested upon the idea that religious life was a crucial source of identity, offering a certain sense of security and fellowship in the face of many uncertain realities.

The branches of Christianity practiced in historical Appalachia are the same ones still found there today—mostly all members of the greater Protestant family. As Melinda Bollar Wagner asserts, “Statistically, people in the region...are affiliated more often than not with conservative Christian churches and carry a type of religion that is not easily compartmentalized into Sunday mornings.”<sup>227</sup> In order to acknowledge the religious pluralism of Appalachia, I provide a brief, descriptive list of the major denominations of

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<sup>225</sup> Wendy Reed and Jennifer Horne, eds., *All out of Faith: Southern Women on Spirituality* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2006), xii.

<sup>226</sup> Albanese, *America: Religion and Religions*, 223.

<sup>227</sup> Melinda Bollar Wagner, "Religion in Appalachia," in *A Handbook to Appalachia: An Introduction to the Region*, ed. Grace Toney Edwards, JoAnn Aust Asbury, and Ricky L. Cox (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 182.

the region. I acknowledge, as Bill J. Leonard does, that “any discussion of specific churches or denominations must not imply that these are definitive, normative, or even primary representatives of the religious ethos of the Appalachian region.”<sup>228</sup> Drawing from Leonard’s work on the religiosity of Appalachia, the following table presents an overview of the most common denominations found in historical Appalachia and some of their defining features:

**Table 1.2 Christian Denominations in Historical Appalachia<sup>229</sup>**

| <b>Church Type</b> | <b>Denominations Included</b>                                                                                        | <b>Characteristics</b>                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mainline           | Episcopal; United Methodist; Presbyterian; American Baptist, USA; Lutheran; Roman Catholic                           | Seminary-trained ministers; elaborate liturgy; sacramentalism                                                                                                                                                  |
| Evangelical        | Baptists; Nazarenes; Churches of Christ; Bible Churches, and independent, non-denominational, non-Pentecostal groups | Many preachers are bi-vocational; worship is informal and reflects the revivalistic tradition with gospel hymns, Bible preaching, altar calls                                                                  |
| Pentecostal        | Church of God (Cleveland, TN), Assemblies of God, Fire-Baptized Holiness                                             | Clergy unlikely to be college/seminary-trained; strong emphasis on the baptism of the Holy Spirit; speaking in tongues, healing; spontaneous worship/outbursts made “in Spirit.”                               |
| Mountain Churches  | Numerous independent Holiness congregations and various Baptists (United, Old Regular, Primitive, Free Will)         | These churches are most emphasized by writers of Appalachia, given their uniqueness to the region; ritualistic traditions such as creek-side baptisms, homecomings, speaking in tongues, Spirit-led preaching. |

In examining the importance of Christianity to Appalachian women’s lives, we are essentially looking at how “ordinary people” make sense of religious doctrine and

<sup>228</sup> Leonard, ed. *Christianity in Appalachia*, xvi.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., xiii.

practice it in the course of their daily lives. This idea is explained by Lippy as “popular religiosity—the ways in which people themselves construct and maintain an understanding of reality that allows them to explain and interpret their personal and collective experience.”<sup>230</sup> However, most of what can be said about Appalachian women’s relationships to religion stems from their reactions to how men historically wielded the strength of their own scriptural interpretations to maintain the power of a male hegemony. As Lippy summarizes, for Appalachians, “life is a highly personal and continual struggle because of the constant threat of temptation attributed to the Devil or Satan. In the daily experience of ordinary men and women there is a delicate balance of power between God and the Devil.”<sup>231</sup>

For women living in historical Appalachia, a sense of spirituality and an open relationship with God was an essential trait for maintaining a respectable public identity. As Welter affirms, “religion or piety was the core of woman’s virtue, the source of her strength. Young men looking for a mate were cautioned to search first for piety, for if that were there, all else would follow.”<sup>232</sup> Indeed, a wealth of such ideas circulated in the region. As Dunaway notes, “The 1835 *Ladies Magazine and Literary Gazette* (8:94) declared that women were ‘born to train the sons and daughters of men,’ so they must have a solid ‘Christian education.’”<sup>233</sup> General opinions on the necessity of religion for women seemed to view faith, as Welter argues, “as a kind of tranquilizer for the many

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<sup>230</sup> Lippy, “Popular Religiosity in Central Appalachia,” 41.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>232</sup> Welter, “Cult of True Womanhood,” 152.

<sup>233</sup> Dunaway, *Women, Work, and Family*, 229.

undefined longings which swept even the most pious young girl, and about which it was better to pray than to think.”<sup>234</sup>

Moreover, much of what we know about the presence of religion in women’s lives concerns the extent to which religious institutions regulated women’s sexuality and ensured the continuation of patriarchal gender hierarchies. Indeed, one of religion’s greatest values was its ability to keep woman in her proper sphere—the home.<sup>235</sup> As Sylvia Rhue contends, “Those strange and distant white men sent out written directives on correct Christian behavior: Makeup and jewelry were verboten because women were to be modest and circumspect. According to the worldview of those lofty white men, lust was lurking everywhere.”<sup>236</sup> With men typically in the seats of institutional power, churches exerted an immense amount of influence on the social and sexual behaviors of women. As Shaunna Scott affirms, Appalachian religious ideology “reinforced patriarchy by portraying women as ‘weak’ and ‘sinful’ and [placed] them at the bottom a divinely sanctioned hierarchy headed by a male God and his son.”<sup>237</sup>

As institutions responsible for the maintenance of communities’ social orders, churches were regularly involved in investigations of the alleged illicit behaviors of women. Dunaway illustrates this point, stating “while Appalachian churches routinely brought illicit sex charges against females who showed visible indicators of pregnancy,

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<sup>234</sup> Welter, “Cult of True Womanhood,” 153.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Sylvia Rhue, “Sex, Race, and the Stained-Glass Window,” in *All out of Faith: Southern Women on Spirituality*, ed. Wendy Reed and Jennifer Horne (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2006), 126.

<sup>237</sup> Shaunna L. Scott, ““They Don’t Have to Live by the Old Traditions”: Sainly Men, Sinner Women, and an Appalachian Pentecostal Revival,” *American Ethnologist* 21, no. 2 (1994): 230.

offending males almost never appeared in church records.”<sup>238</sup> Further, many denominations of Christianity oppressed women living in the rural South (and elsewhere), under what Marie Fortune and Salma Elkadi Abugideiri assert as a misinterpretation of “religious texts and traditions [that] have often had a detrimental effect on individuals and families dealing with domestic violence.”<sup>239</sup> Rationalizations such as “but the Bible says...” shed light on the prevalent and continued abuse by dominant males and the acceptance of brutality by subordinate women, readily depicted in the murder ballad *Omie Wise*.

Appalachian churches of various Baptist denominations exercise an unequal level of participation and responsibility between men and women. As Beverley Patterson asserts of the Primitive Baptists, there is a paradox inherent in their belief system, evidenced by the ways in which “members assign unequal roles to men and women in the church, and, at the same time, defend a predestinarian doctrine that is strongly egalitarian.”<sup>240</sup> As illustrated by the extent to which males dominate the authority of these religious institutions, women have negotiated a complex process of finding and cultivating their own spirituality through a literally silent presence in church. Beverley Patterson comments on this phenomenon, stating women are expected to:

Sit quietly and listen while men are called upon to lead the church in prayer and to introduce the worship services... Occasionally, preachers publicly commend women on their silence in church, reminding them that they are expected to ask

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<sup>238</sup> Dunaway, *Women, Work, and Family*, 207.

<sup>239</sup> Marie M. Fortune and Salma Elkadi Abugideiri, "A Commentary on Religion and Domestic Violence," in *Domestic Violence: Intersectionality and Culturally Competent Practice*, ed. Lettie L. Lockhart and Fran S. Danis (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 320.

<sup>240</sup> Beverley Bush Patterson, *The Sound of the Dove: Singing in Appalachian Primitive Baptist Churches* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 9.

their husbands or another spokesman to communicate their concerns to the church.<sup>241</sup>

The silencing of women in church manifests out of the strong belief in doctrinal literalness. Echoing ideas of how gender hierarchies are constructed based on the teachings of the Bible, Larry Morgan summarizes how families were founded on the Biblical model. As he states, this “arrangement was accepted by the husbands, wives, and children...husbands were the heads of the families and were never contested by the wives. Wives were submissive to their husbands, as the Bible instructs them to be.”<sup>242</sup>

### **The Fibers of Her Soul: Appalachian Women’s Self-Expression and Self-Assertion**

“What negotiations, rebellions, and reconciliations did women pursue, especially with men whose actions dominate written records and became defined as Appalachian history?”<sup>243</sup>

-Barbara Ellen Smith

Despite the fact that the history of Appalachian women overwhelmingly reveals the extent of their subjugation, their actions of self-assertion—often carried out through expressive means—attests to their resiliency. As Bynum states, “Human agency and resistance fade from view when we rivet attention solely on sexual, racial, and economic forces and exclude the people who wield and respond to those forces.”<sup>244</sup> In truth, many Appalachian women chose to experience their lives as something more than the material property of men. As Carol Lasser and Stacey Robertson agree, “Women did not passively

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>242</sup> Larry G. Morgan, *Old Time Religion in the Southern Appalachians* (Boone, N.C.: Parkway Publishers, 2005), 23-24.

<sup>243</sup> Smith, “Beyond the Mountains,” 4.

<sup>244</sup> Bynum, *Unruly Women*, 3.

watch as their public identities came into focus. They actively participated in influencing how these changes transpired.”<sup>245</sup>

Indeed, as the corpus of the American murder ballads shifts over more than a century of history, we see the glimmer of women’s agency that will soon hit the 20<sup>th</sup> century virtually at full speed. For the murder ballads, women’s self-assertion begins to reveal itself through the supporting roles of mothers and sisters who assertively make use of their voices and available technologies—taking action against the injustice that silenced their daughters and sisters. Although many women “internalized society’s judgment of them as unworthy and degraded,” as did the murdered sweethearts, other women fought back against their prescribed roles and “maintained vitality and self-respect through exhibiting unruly behavior.”<sup>246</sup> Thus, I conclude this chapter by commenting on women’s modes of self-expression and self-assertion, concerning their marriages, daily life activities, and relationships with religion.

Francis Stewart Silvers is one of the only Appalachian women to receive historical recognition. She was a North Carolina woman convicted of killing her husband and executed for her crime in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Her legacy lives on in the still-popular ballad known as “Frankie and Johnnie,” and as Anglin contends, “she was, and still is, known as someone who killed her husband through violent means and then carefully and cold-bloodedly demolished his body in an effort to ‘destroy the evidence.’”<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Carol Lasser and Stacey Robertson, *Antebellum Women: Private, Public, Partisan* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2010), xii.

<sup>246</sup> Bynum, *Unruly Women*, 3.

<sup>247</sup> Anglin, “Lives on the Margin,” 185.

Yet the part of Frankie Silver's story that oftentimes remains untold was her admission to her attorney that she had killed her husband in self-defense, while he was in the process of loading his gun in order to shoot her.<sup>248</sup> As Anglin asserts, "If the infamous Frankie Silvers proved memorable for her transgressions against gendered codes of the nineteenth-century, her saga likewise offers a caution about the continued authority of such codes to present women's lives as, for the most part, unremarkable and irrelevant to historical accounts of the region."<sup>249</sup> Moreover, Frankie's actions provide a powerful argument against the accepted idea that, as Anne Firor Scott describes, "unhappiness centered on women's lack of control over many aspects of their own sexual lives and the sexual lives of their husbands...over the inferior status which kept them so powerless."<sup>250</sup>

Though Frankie Silvers did not have the social power necessary to win a murder trial on the basis of self-defense, her actions clearly attest to an Appalachian reality in which women actively battled physical abuse, infidelity, or like Francis Silvers, both. Many people did not condone domestic, sexual, or any other kind of violence that threatened to disrupt the strength of the community. Despite the fact that domestic violence was a reality of relationships, perhaps more so in the south than in other areas of the country, Bynum affirms that some citizens "deplored the abuse of the powerless by the powerful, arguing that tolerance of wanton abuse undermined the paternalistic basis of social relationships in the South."

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<sup>248</sup> Jody Higgins, ed. *Common Times: Written and Pictorial History of Yancey County* (Burnsville, NC: Yancey Graphics, 1981), 18.

<sup>249</sup> Anglin, "Lives on the Margin," 187.

<sup>250</sup> Anne Firor Scott, "Women's Perspective on the Patriarchy in the 1850s," in *Half Sisters of History: Southern Women and the American Past*, ed. Catherine Clinton (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 79.

Moreover, many 19<sup>th</sup>-century Appalachian women proved themselves unwilling to remain discontent in marriages that were boring, violent, or otherwise unsuitable. Though, as Bynum states, “the legal climate for divorce was least favorable in southern seaboard states, where powerful interrelated families formed the core of a landed slaveholding elite that controlled much of the South’s wealth and power,”<sup>251</sup> unhappy women often took matters into their own hands. Though women did not find it easy to legally complain about violence, alcohol abuse, or their husband’s squandering of family property, due to what Lasser and Robertson describe as “the complications of legal action,”<sup>252</sup> some women turned to “self-divorce,” and asserted their autonomy by simply walking away from dissatisfactory unions.

Concerning women’s daily work and rituals, a wealth of history depicts many modes of feminine expression. Unfortunately, as Lasser and Robertson assert, “the growing sentimentalization of the home in conjunction with the gendered division of labor veiled the actual work involved in the cooking, cleaning, nursing, childrearing, lighting, heating, and washing that occupied women for whom these tasks were supposed to be ‘labors of love.’”<sup>253</sup> As Smith-Rosenberg describes,

Certainly, nineteenth century women lived in a world rich with distinctive female rituals...many of these rituals spanned class lines, unifying women’s experiences across religious, ethnic, and economic distinctions, sharply distinguishing women’s lives from those of same-class men.<sup>254</sup>

In the expanding American market economy, Appalachian women participated in manufacturing activities that were essentially part of a larger regional exchange. Almost

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<sup>251</sup> Bynum, *Unruly Women*, 64.

<sup>252</sup> Lasser and Robertson, *Antebellum Women*, 5.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>254</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 42.

all rural-living women made their own soap, candles, and sewed simple clothing for their families at home. Indeed, the ritual of fabric and cloth making was not only an expressive outlet for women, but a necessary activity that society deemed one of their most significant tasks. As Jillian Luttrell states, “there was a widespread belief that manual training and handwork had the power to reform mind, body, and spirit. This belief is exemplified in attitudes surrounding the process of weaving.”<sup>255</sup> In this way, the qualities of patience and perseverance—admittedly attached to the Victorian gender code—manifest into qualities cherished by women. As Frances Goodrich reports, the kinds of character traits so essential to weaving effectively strengthened “the fibers of the soul.”<sup>256</sup> As Lasser and Robertson affirm, “in an unstable compromise, certain activities were defined as domestically linked. Thus, poor women used various economic strategies on behalf of household survival.”<sup>257</sup>

Indeed, a definite relationship existed between the production of household goods and the developing market, including the “market for ‘free labor’—that is, compensation for particular tasks accomplished or time committed.”<sup>258</sup> As Stephanie McCurry affirms, yeoman farmers

knew that they managed to achieve an impressive degree of self-sufficiency because, in addition to the corn staple, virtually everything their families ate women grew or raised, preserved and cooked, and virtually everything they wore women spun and wove, dyed and sewed...by their industry wives and daughters

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<sup>255</sup> Jillian Luttrell, “The Work of Her Hands: Women, Craft, and Revival in Southern Appalachia” (Master’s Thesis, Ball State University, 2005), 5.

<sup>256</sup> Frances Louisa Goodrich, *Mountain Homespun* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1931), 25.

<sup>257</sup> Lasser and Robertson, *Antebellum Women*, xviii.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

ensured that nothing was purchased that could be produced at home, whatever the cost in labor and sweat.<sup>259</sup>

In this way, we begin to see past the privatization of the home so carefully constructed by patriarchal society, to see beyond what Jeanne Boydston describes as “the pastoralization of housework, with its emphasis on the sanctified home as an emanation of woman’s nature,” and reveal a new way of seeing women “as actors, capable of physical exertion.”<sup>260</sup>

Moreover, women’s work during the Civil War period attests to their agency and self-expression. Women’s supportive efforts to feed and clothe civilians and the army, nurse the sick, run the plantations, and pray for victory may be interpreted, as Scott contends, as an “indirect protest against the limitations of women’s role in the patriarchy. Suddenly women were able to do business in their own right, make decisions, write letters to newspaper editors, and in many other ways asserts themselves as individual human beings.”<sup>261</sup>

As a lyrical means of making a personal statement many women turned to songwriting and singing. John Anthony Scott confirms that, “many of the songs in the folk song heritage are women’s songs that give unique expression to the historical role and experience of women. This material needs to be recognized as a source for the writing of women’s history.”<sup>262</sup> Indeed, for women living in coal camps and mining

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<sup>259</sup> Stephanie McCurry, “The Politics of Yeoman Households in South Carolina,” in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, ed. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 29.

<sup>260</sup> Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 149.

<sup>261</sup> Scott, “Women’s Perspective,” 78.

<sup>262</sup> John Anthony Scott, “Folk Songs as Historical Literature for Young People,” *The Lion and the Unicorn* 6 (1982): 61.

towns, music became an essential way for them to cope with the world around them. As Yurchenco describes, the songs iterate the “endless burdens of a miner’s wife—carrying buckets of water from a well, washing clothes at a creek, and fighting endlessly against the coal dust that filtered through every crack and door.”<sup>263</sup>

Singing became a completely autonomous mode of expression, part of an ideology for women that, according to Frances Cogan, “advocated intelligence...self-sufficiency, economic self-reliance, and careful marriage: it was, in other words, a survival ethic.”<sup>264</sup> Yurchenco affirms the importance that singing carried for women’s cultural identities. As she notes, “through the oral transmission of songs and stories, women have left an indelible mark on their culture, giving pleasure, spiritual sustenance, and emotional satisfaction to family and community.”<sup>265</sup>

Moreover, singing was an activity particularly pertinent to the domestic sphere and served women well in their child-rearing duties. To teach their children right from wrong, women often utilized song to convey moral lessons. As John Anthony Scott affirms, “the young learned the melodies and lyrics at their mother’s knee, and in work and play around the home.”<sup>266</sup> In this way, women were authoritative figures largely responsible for passing the kinds of songs onto their offspring that were a part of the greater social fabric of Appalachia.

Singing became a highly effective tool for women when used as part of a mother’s instructive power over her sons and daughters. As Scott continues to state,

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<sup>263</sup> Yurchenco, "Trouble in the Mines," 216.

<sup>264</sup> Frances B. Cogan, *All-American Girl: The Ideal of Real Womanhood in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1989), 4.

<sup>265</sup> Yurchenco, "Trouble in the Mines," 209.

<sup>266</sup> Scott, "Folk Songs as Historical Literature," 54.

learning folksongs was of supreme importance to the perpetuation of social ideals, for the songs themselves are “great cultural weapons in the educational effort to bring young people a true sense of their past and of their national heritage.”<sup>267</sup> Aiding women in this most important aspect of familial responsibility, songbooks specifically marketed to the female population began to infiltrate the region. As Benjamin Filene asserts, “their publishers intended them not to be used by scholars but by families eager to make music at home.”<sup>268</sup> Thus the design of the books themselves feature floral patterns and images of the home, including one in which “a barefoot dulcimer-playing mother and five happy barefoot children [are] sitting on a back porch overlooking verdant hills.”<sup>269</sup>

Though we have established the multiple ways in which the institution of the Church and male misinterpretations of Biblical texts have oppressed women, some aspects of religion proved positive and affirming of women’s identity and authority in their faith-based communities. As G.J. Barker-Benfield notes, “In spite of their severe circumscription, women were delegated a moral responsibility by American men. Women were the ‘protectors of morals’ since religion often was unable to restrain man from the numberless temptations of chance.”<sup>270</sup>

The Second Great Awakening of the 1830s and 1840s projected the message of personal salvation. As Lasser and Robertson confirm, this process emphasized that “individuals could and should, through their own effort, establish a relationship directly

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>268</sup> Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, 18.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>270</sup> G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Horrors of the Half-Known Life: Male Attitudes toward Women and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1976), 45.

with God, through which they could secure their grace.”<sup>271</sup> Thus, this revival of Christianity placed women at the center of their own religious experiences. Indeed, because women were perceived as inherently religious creatures, “mothers were particularly suited to teach children the ways of righteousness.”<sup>272</sup> In this way, women’s education, at least where religion was concerned, was of great importance to the patriarchal order of society.

Moreover, some Protestant denominations allowed women extended responsibilities and duties within the church. As Welter states, aside from their prominence during worship services as singers, women increasingly handled the voluntary services controlled by social offices of churches, such as “teaching Sunday school, distributing tracts, and working for missions.”<sup>273</sup> Thus, the increasing significance of women’s places within the daily functions of religious establishments attests to a growing flexibility and toleration of women in both rural and urban churches.

Additional roles for church-going women were awarded based upon their successful embodiment of Christian ideals—something many women strived to display in their daily lives. As Deborah McCauley describes, the designated roles of leadership for women in Baptist church life were carried out by their statuses as “eldresses” and “deaconesses.” McCauley states, “Although this status was achieved by marriage to a ‘ruling elder’ or a deacon, it lasted for life, even if the woman was widowed.”<sup>274</sup>

Moreover, in various Baptist mountain churches, some women achieved an extremely

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<sup>271</sup> Lasser and Robertson, *Antebellum Women*, 3.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

<sup>273</sup> Barbara Welter, *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1976), 86.

<sup>274</sup> Deborah Vansau McCauley, *Appalachian Mountain Religion: A History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 221.

high status of bias immunity as a reward for their piety. As McCauley affirms, “a woman may achieve the nearly unchallengeable authority of a church ‘matriarch’ (a term not used by mountain people)—a position associated with age, wisdom, and outstanding spiritual maturity.”<sup>275</sup>

Finally, women’s religious singing in the church illustrates the reality that women were regarded as important members of Christian society, largely responsible for unifying the community’s religiosity through their expressions of faith. As Patterson asserts, “Singing appears to be linked in some important way to gender because it is the one place in which women consistently have a voice in the worship service...Furthermore, women themselves attach significance to their participation in the singing in church meetings.”<sup>276</sup> In fact, calling out requests for hymns is one part of the worship service that was historically open to both men and women. Though Patterson notes that women usually “sing more softly than men,” their voices nevertheless embody a distinctive style of singing that deliberately separates them “from the secular world and assert[s] their equality as children of God.”<sup>277</sup>

## Conclusions

To come full circle, the assumption that subordinate family members never challenged the authority of men glosses over the reality that, in fact, many women did contest male hegemony. To proclaim otherwise is to dismiss the legacy of Frankie Silvers who, although executed for a crime that ultimately illustrates a gender transgression,

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<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> Patterson, *Sound of the Dove*, 30.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 84.

represents a population of women who broke the proprieties of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century's gender code.

The American murder ballads represent a sample of factual evidence illustrating the historical realities that were experienced by women living not only in Appalachia, but in the rest of the country as well. This revelation reaffirms Appalachia's connection to the world around it; as Anglin states, "Such a reading argues that constructions of gender, like class and ethnicity, were articulated through the web of economic and social relations that connected Appalachia to the rest of nineteenth-century America."<sup>278</sup> Their daily struggles with sexual, social, and religious identity echo in the texts of the ballads that served to warn other women of the dangers inherent in breaking with tradition. As Dunaway asserts, "women are not just acted upon by male-dominated history; they also make history by resisting inequality and oppression."

As a class of poor, white, rural-living women, the victims of the murder ballads were culturally stigmatized as a group of socially "despicable" women for whom murder seemed the only viable solution. Yet, resistance to the established hegemony of patriarchal society was on the horizon, subtly contested in the everyday realities of historical rural living women. This resistance is acknowledged in the murder ballads that preserve the actions of the victims' mothers and sisters. These women begin to carve out a place for their gender, and a voice of their own, in the industrializing and modernizing South.

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<sup>278</sup> Anglin, "Lives on the Margin," 188.

## CHAPTER IV

Yet, sister woman, though I cannot consent to find a Mozart or a Michael Angelo in your sex, cheerfully, and with the love that burns in depths of admiration, I acknowledge that you can do one thing as well as the best of men...you can die grandly, and as goddesses would die, were goddesses mortal.

-Thomas de Quincey<sup>279</sup>

### Introduction

As Geoffrey Ward suggests, to contemplate death is to introduce into thought the epitome of doubt, ultimately because there are just “two certainties in life. One is that death will come. The other is that no one can be sure of this.”<sup>280</sup> Femininity and death intersect in myriad ways in our world: in literature and in song; figuratively and imagined; welcomed and feared. While Edgar Allen Poe asserts, “The death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world,”<sup>281</sup> others are concerned with the deaths of “beautiful women” from a historical-sociological approach. Such investigations tie into my own musicological research. This chapter examines the texts of American murder ballads that are based on historical events and factual evidence. Here, I seek an understanding of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Appalachian culture—specifically, the region’s gendered code and its ties to modernity—through an examination of the murder ballads that tell of real cases of femicide.

I have multiple interests in the murdered sweethearts. In part, my curiosity stems from the ways in which the female victims embody a type of “anti-ideal” woman. As powerful cautionary tales, their stories warn others about the dangers of love, sexuality, and untrustworthy men. Additionally, I have developed a fascination with how the dead

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<sup>279</sup> Cited in Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body* (New York: Routledge, 1992), ii.

<sup>280</sup> Geoffrey Ward, “Dying to Write: Maurice Blanchot and Tennyson’s ‘Tithonus,’” *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1986): 673.

<sup>281</sup> Edgar Allen Poe, “The Philosophy of Composition,” *Graham’s Magazine* 1846, 165.

bodies of the murdered sweethearts, in their corporeally deanimated states, finally achieve the Victorian ideals that they were unable to demonstrate in life. In death, the beautiful female murder victim champions ideas of stillness, wholeness, silence, and perfection. Finally, my interests include a discovery of how the ballad texts portray the victim herself, her lover-murderer, her family, and her culture. Specifically, my research reveals how the songs position and make use of the factual events surrounding these women's murders, as I read the ballads as preservative vessels that speak to the cultural idioms of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Appalachia.

While my investigation of the texts follows their chronological order across the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, my analysis discusses each ballad in terms of the emerging modernism or feminist thought dismissed or depicted in the songs. I begin with an investigation of *The Jealous Lover* and *The Banks of the Ohio* as prototypal murder ballads, and then move to an analysis of *Omie Wise* (1808), *The Murder of Laura Foster* (1866), *Pearl Bryan* (1897), *Nell Cropsey* (1901), and *Lula Viers* (1917).<sup>282</sup> Each murder ballad signifies, in part, a response to the crime that inspired it. Read as a whole, this set of ballads depicts a cultural shift away from the rigid gender roles of Victorian America toward new responses connected with the rapidly changing world around, and within, Appalachian culture.

A close reading of the lyrics provides me the opportunity to comment on the intricacy of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Appalachian community. In this way, I effectively dismantle ideas that still tie Appalachia to myths of the region as culturally isolated, backward, and ignorant. Rather, the murder ballads illustrate the emergence of new ideologies as the

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<sup>282</sup> The lyrics of my song set may be found in the appendices of this thesis.

twentieth century approaches, with specific regard to the multiple appearances of new technologies and the rising agency of female characters within the ballad texts. Because this phenomenon increases over the time span of the ballads, I read this song corpus as indicative of Appalachia's advancing connection to the industrializing and urbanizing world around it. Though some parts of the region remained geographically rural and thus isolated in some ways, its traditional and rigid cultural ideologies were nonetheless contested by new ideas spreading throughout the United States at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

My discussion of the ballads refutes the idea of Appalachian people as a passive, helpless "folk." The murdered victims embody passivity, weakness, and helplessness as they accept death as punishment for their culturally subversive sexuality. Yet these women are violently silenced in death by femicide. Such an effective silencing of sexual and personal freedom provides a unique entryway for discussing historical Appalachia's social construction and cultural praxis.

***The Jealous Lover* (Laws F1, Appendix V) and *The Banks of the Ohio* (Laws F5, Appendix VI)**

Any consideration of the American murder ballads requires an examination of *The Jealous Lover* and *The Banks of the Ohio*. Here, I treat the two songs as possible progenitors of the American murder ballads based on fact. Moreover, the stock scenes and characters depicted in these archetypal ballads effectively divide the historical murder ballad corpus into those that resemble *The Jealous Lover*, and those similar to *The Banks of the Ohio*, respectively.

*The Jealous Lover* is an archetypal ballad interchangeably referred to as *Fair Florella*, or *Florella*, in many of the anthologies by scholars such as G. Malclom

Laws',<sup>283</sup> Henry Belden,<sup>284</sup> Frank C. Brown,<sup>285</sup> and Arthur Palmer Hudson.<sup>286</sup> Laws, for instance, notes of *The Jealous Lover* that "nothing certain is known about the origin of this piece, which is one of the most popular of all white ballads apparently native to this country."<sup>287</sup> Indeed, following the paper trail of *The Jealous Lover* yields little in the way of concrete fact. While Laws classifies this ballad as a "native" American song, other scholars, such as Phillips Barry, assert its provenance more ambiguously:

"The Jealous Lover" is traditionally current from Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island...though long supposed to have originated in America, "Fair Florella" is based on an old-country original, a sordid tale of seduction, murder and punishment.<sup>288</sup>

What *can* be understood of *The Jealous Lover* is that this particular ballad has a complex relationship with numerous songs, and features plot and thematic elements utilized by many of the historical murder ballads. Here, I do not seek what Barry refers to as "a laboratory study of ballad origin and growth." Instead, I consider *The Jealous Lover* as a possible progenitor of the American murder ballads.

I similarly consider the ballad known as *The Banks of the Ohio*, for I find that many of its thematic elements are also utilized by the historical murder ballads. Namely, its plot parallels those of other murder ballads in the corpus where a young man lures his female sweetheart to a violent death by drowning. *The Banks of the Ohio* is classified under various names in the anthologies of the early ballad scholars. Louise Pound lists

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<sup>283</sup> Laws, *Native American Balladry*, 191.

<sup>284</sup> Belden, *Ballads and Songs*, 325.

<sup>285</sup> Brown, *Frank C. Brown Collection*, 578.

<sup>286</sup> Arthur Palmer Hudson, *Folkongs of Mississippi* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1936), 185-86.

<sup>287</sup> Laws, *Native American Balladry*, 191.

<sup>288</sup> Phillips Barry, "Fair Florella," *American Speech* 3, no. 6 (1928): 441.

the ballad as *The Old Shawnee* and *On the Banks of the Old Pedee*,<sup>289</sup> while Emelyn Gardner lists the song in her compendium as *The Banks of the River Dee*.<sup>290</sup> Similar to his contention that nothing certain is known about *The Jealous Lover*, Laws asserts, “the history of [*The Banks of the Ohio*] has not been traced, but its similarity to certain English broadsides has been pointed out.”<sup>291</sup> Together, *The Jealous Lover* and *The Banks of the Ohio* become archetypal murder ballads whose generic storylines permeate the texts of the historical ballads.

To begin, several thematic elements central to the murder ballad formula are illustrated by our prototypal ballads, *The Jealous Lover* and *The Banks of the Ohio*. These include:

- A. An unscrupulous lover seduces an innocent young woman.
- B. When she becomes pregnant, he arranges a tryst on the pretext of discussing plans for their marriage.
- C. Although she protests, he succeeds in luring her to her death in a remote area.
- D. She begs for mercy, but he carries out his intention to kill her in a particularly violent way, and disposes of her body.
- E. He is publicly accused of having murdered his sweetheart.<sup>292</sup>

A last element central to the stock murder ballad formula is that the murderer is arrested, imprisoned, and brought to justice.<sup>293</sup>

The archetypal murder ballads also contain several of the stock character types who appear in my corpus of the historical murder ballads. As Anne Cohen suggests, “Basically, there are three roles: the Murdered Girl, the Lover-Murderer, and the Grief-

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<sup>289</sup> Pound, *American Ballads and Songs*, 108-09.

<sup>290</sup> Emelyn Elizabeth Gardner and Geraldine Jencks Chickering, *Ballads and Songs of Southern Michigan* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1939), 80-81.

<sup>291</sup> Laws, *Native American Balladry*, 188.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Cohen, *Poor Pearl, Poor Girl!*, 39.

Stricken Families.”<sup>294</sup> Repeatedly illustrated and hardly ever varied, the “Murdered Girl” is always young, trusting, easily led, and innocent. Indeed, she is consistently portrayed as helpless against the murderous plot of her male lover. Moreover, Cohen notes that often, she is “greatly attached to her home and family, where she is cherished.”<sup>295</sup>

Contrasting in both gender and personality, the “Lover-Murderer” is cold, calculating, and violent. His relationship to his family is equally as important as the victim’s connection to her own kin. As Cohen states, “his relations with his family [are] seen as close, and his mother’s efforts to save him [arouse] considerable sympathy.”<sup>296</sup> Finally, the “Grief-Stricken Families” are depicted in numerous ways, and encompass the kin of both the victim and her lover/foe. In earlier ballads, these grief-ridden families are either non-existent or tend to project a sense of helplessness. However, the later murder ballads employ family members that have the strength of character for action and intervention. Particularly, the mothers and sisters in *Pearl Bryan* and *Lula Viers* illustrate a phenomenon of emerging feminine agency. Thus, the murder ballads employ several character types that effectively depict cultural attitudes prevalent in the genre’s corpus.

Both archetypal ballads depict a young woman who is lured away from her home on the pretext of discussing marriage or elopement. As the male character in *The Jealous Lover* coaxes in stanza 4:

“Come, love, and let us wander  
Here in these woods; alone  
And free from all disturbance,  
We’ll name our wedding day.”

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<sup>294</sup> Cohen, *Poor Pearl, Poor Girl!*, 80-81.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

Similarly, the victim of *The Banks of the Ohio* follows her deceitful lover, beguiled by his charm and sentimental language in stanza 1:

I asked my love to take a walk,  
Just to be alone with me,  
And as we walked we'd have a talk  
About our wedding day to be.

The male sweethearts then murder the female victims of *The Jealous Lover* and *The Banks of the Ohio*, yet here the story lines begin to differ between the ballads. In *The Jealous Lover*, the murdered girl professes her love or loyalty until her very last moments: "I always have been faithful, and would have been your wife" (stanza 10). In *The Banks of the Ohio*, on the other hand, she begs her lover not to murder her: "'Oh, please don't murder me, for I'm unprepared to die'" (stanza 4). In their divergence, the plots of these generic murdered-girl ballads provide formulaic scenarios, scenes, and characters from which subsequent historical murder ballads draw.

In addition to the differences in the way the songs depict the victim's final moments, the ballads depart from each other in whether or not the murderous lover pays for his violent crime. As in the majority of the murder ballads (*Omie Wise*,<sup>297</sup> *The Murder of Laura Foster*, *Pearl Bryan*, and *Nell Cropsey*), the murderer in *The Jealous Lover* receives a legal comeuppance in stanza 8:

Now Edward lies in prison  
The remainder of his life,  
For in an angry passion  
He killed his promised wife.

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<sup>297</sup> However, the historical facts of the crime tell us that the murderer escapes justice. See my discussion of *Omie Wise* below.

Alternatively, *The Banks of the Ohio* illustrates a different fate for the murderer, and corresponds more closely with *Lula Viers* (discussed below) in that the murderer presumably gets away with femicide. As *The Banks of the Ohio* concludes in stanza 6:

Going home between twelve and one,  
Thinking of the deed I'd done,  
I murdered the only girl I loved  
Because she would not marry me.

The described reason for killing the female sweetheart is given in both ballads as resulting from some kind of male frustration, discontentment, or anger. *The Jealous Lover* kills his beloved “in an angry passion,” (stanza 11) while the murderer in *The Banks of the Ohio* states that his reason was “because she would not marry me” (stanza 6). While the impetus for murder is never explicitly stated in the historical murder ballads, I describe the numerous likely reasons behind each factual woman's fate.

The archetypal ballads diverge too in the location of the death scenes. Specifically, the crime locations of *The Jealous Lover* and *The Banks of the Ohio* correspond to the historical women's murders in wooded settings (Laura Foster, Pearl Bryan), and at riversides (Naomi Wise, Nell Cropsey, Lula Viers). In the case of the latter, the murder ballad victims who meet a watery fate do so in ways that resemble the drowning of the *The Banks of the Ohio* victim, as depicted in stanza 5:

I took her by her pale white hand,  
Led her to the river bank;  
There I threw her in to drown,  
Stood and watched her float on down.

Alternatively, the victim of *The Jealous Lover*—Florella—is murdered in the remote setting of a forest in stanza 8, much like Laura Foster and Pearl Bryan:

“Here in these woods I have you,  
From me you cannot fly;

No human arms can take you—  
Florella, you must die.”

Finally, there is one other difference between the archetypal murder ballads that merits some discussion. Significantly, *The Banks of the Ohio* is told solely from the view of the lover-murderer, while *The Jealous Lover* variously encompasses the perspective of the murderer, the female victim, and an omniscient third party narrator. In *The Banks of the Ohio*, we hear the entire tragedy from the murderer’s perspective, and are left with little knowledge about the woman who is murdered. The victim is a silent and invisible woman, and her mindset remains unexpressed. The negation of the woman’s voice in this archetypal ballad speaks to an ideology that, as Kathleen Stewart asserts, “constructs itself by banishing the woman, the primitive, and the body to the margins.”<sup>298</sup> Thus, the disembodied female voice in *The Banks of the Ohio* is left to hover on the periphery—what Stewart acknowledges as “a silent but knowing ‘exile.’”<sup>299</sup>

In contrast, *The Jealous Lover* and other ballads of the historical female murder victims are told from the perspective of a third-person narrator, or a combination of the narrator, murderer, and victim. Most common in the historical ballads, the omniscient third party calls the audience to listen, employing such phrases as, “Oh listen to my story, I’ll tell you no lies” (*Omie Wise*), “a tragedy I now relate” (*The Murder of Laura Foster*), “If you will only listen” (*Pearl Bryan*), and “Come all you good people, from all over the world” (*Lula Viers*). This omniscient third-party viewpoint significantly enlists the

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<sup>298</sup> Kathleen Claire Stewart, “Backtalking the Wilderness: ‘Appalachian’ En-Genderings,” in *Uncertain Terms: Negotiating Gender in American Culture*, ed. Faye Ginsburg and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), 43.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

undivided attention of the audience, implying the songs' relevance to a larger Appalachian community, and to those who hear their stories and the warnings within.

### **The Historical American Murder Ballads**

The popularity of historical American murder ballads rests in their effective canonization into the oral tradition and cultural memory of Appalachian people. Commenting on their relevance across the ages, Harold Schechter summarizes, "as far back as the Middle Ages, the sung or recited murder ballad served to disseminate news about sensational crimes to a largely illiterate populace."<sup>300</sup> As Laws states, murder ballads have such a wide currency because they "can be appreciated by people of all kinds in all regions because they are based on elemental human passions and situations. They are truly tragic, and they excite both the interest and the pity of those who hear them."<sup>301</sup> Other scholars comment upon an apparent southern penchant for violence, reflected in the region's music. C. Kirk Hutson asserts, "In fact, homicide was one of the region's most popular song themes. Love melodies that described fatal bloodshed, for example, outnumbered nonviolent love songs about ten to one."<sup>302</sup> Additionally, their use as moral tales reflects a cultural fear of women's sexual freedom. The victims are positioned in the lyric texts as though they are sexual innocents who "fell" into illicit behavior, regardless of the historical facts that might suggest otherwise. Thus, subsequent murders of these female victims in the songs speak to a cultural idiom interested in limiting women's freedoms. Though part of a genre marked by shared thematic elements,

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<sup>300</sup> Harold Schechter, *True Crime: An American Anthology* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 2008), 196.

<sup>301</sup> Laws, *Native American Balladry*, 24.

<sup>302</sup> C. Kirk Hutson, "'Whackety Whack, Don't Talk Back': The Glorification of Violence against Females and the Subjugation of Women in Nineteenth-Century Southern Folk Music," *Journal of Women's History* 8, no. 3 (1996): 114.

each ballad's poetry is unique; my analysis seeks to capture their similarities as much as the many particularities that make each one exceptional.

Though not specifically analyzed here, the tunes of the murder ballads have existed in powerful conjunction with the texts as musical entities that effectively convey meaning to listeners. Though a scholar of 12<sup>th</sup>- and 13<sup>th</sup>- century troubadour song, Rachel Golden's arguments about the relationships of musical and textual elements are useful for discussing the importance of the ballads' melodies. As she writes, the textual-musical interrogations found in songs "suggests that poetic and musical language were shaped not independently but rather in conjunction, inspired by the same rhetorical principles and expressive desires."<sup>303</sup> Similarly, the seriousness of the moral messages at work behind the lyrics of the murder ballads is enhanced by the characteristics of each song's melody.

What may be said for the 19<sup>th</sup>-century tunes of the murder ballads is generally that their individual elements must be understood, according to Golden, as attractive ornaments that help "the less informed relate to the impact of the words," where, "in partnership with the text, musical cues participate in a unified rhetorical construct, ripe with striking imagery and adornment."<sup>304</sup> Indeed, some early ballad scholars commented on certain melodic characteristics that enhanced the meaning of the lyrics. As Maud Karpeles states in her field notes, the tunes "rarely, if ever, modulate in the sense of a change in tonal centre, but the inflection of certain notes in a tune may be regarded as a change of mode."<sup>305</sup> The use of inflection upon certain notes, coupled with instances of

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<sup>303</sup> Rachel Golden Carlson, "Two Paths to Daniel's Mountain: Poetic-Musical Unity in Aquitanian *Versus*," *The Journal of Musicology* 23, no. 4 (2006): 621.

<sup>304</sup> Carlson, "Striking Ornaments: Complexities of Sense and Song in Aquitanian *Versus*," *Music & Letters* 84, no. 4 (2003): 539.

<sup>305</sup> Karpeles, *Introduction to English Folk Song*, 37.

ornamentation and embellishment, may be read as musical nuances that effectively captivate the audience's attention. As Golden would agree, music serves to reinforce ballad characters such as the "Murdered Girl" and the "Lover-Murderer," who act "rhetorically as instances of ornamentation, decorative hooks that entice the reader's [or listener's] attention, thus leading to contemplation of the subject."<sup>306</sup>

***Omie Wise (Laws F31, Appendix VII)***

I first heard the murder ballad called *Omie Wise* while listening to an album by the legendary Doc Watson.<sup>307</sup> According to Eleanor Long-Wilgus, the Naomi Wise ballad corpus is "comprised of 147 texts and fragments, of which 133 are reported directly from oral tradition, ten from commercial sound recordings, and four from commercial song folios."<sup>308</sup> The actual woman whose name was Naomi Wise is culturally significant, as her story lives on in the words of her murder ballad and in the memories of people who are drawn to her fate, as I am.

History tells us this: Jonathan Lewis murdered nineteen-year old Naomi Wise in 1807, in Randolph County, North Carolina. According to Richard Underwood and Carol Parris,

Naomi, or "Omie," was an indentured servant. Lewis clerked in a store in Ashboro, the county seat, and was employed by a wealthy merchant...He was on his way up, but he had to get rid of some extra baggage—the pregnant girlfriend, Omie Wise. He tricked Omie into eloping.<sup>309</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> Carlson, "Striking Ornaments," 536.

<sup>307</sup> Doc Watson, "Omie Wise," *The Best of Doc Watson*, Vanguard Records, 1999.

<sup>308</sup> Eleanor R. Long-Wilgus, *Naomi Wise: Creation, Re-Creation, and Continuity in an American Ballad Tradition* (Chapel Hill, NC: The Chapel Hill Press, 2003), 21.

<sup>309</sup> Richard H. Underwood and Carol J. Parris, "Crimesong: Some Murder Ballad Ballads and Poems Revisited," *Journal of Social Legal History* 12 (2004): 9.

Naomi's death resulted from violent force and drowning and her washed-up corpse revealed she was pregnant at the time of her demise.<sup>310</sup> After her body was found near Adams Springs, North Carolina, in Deep River, her boyfriend, Jonathan Lewis, was arrested according to court documents; yet he spent only a small amount of time in jail. He broke free before his trial and was not recaptured until 1811.<sup>311</sup> After his second arrest, he was fined only for escaping from prison, and served time until 1813. Lewis was never formally tried for the murder of Naomi Wise.

While we cannot be sure of Lewis' motivation in murdering Naomi, it is likely that her unintended pregnancy posed a problem to her lover's social standing. As Manly Wellman notes of these events, Lewis' calculating mother knew that Benjamin Elliot, for whom her son worked, was "high in reputation and bank balance."<sup>312</sup> Lewis' mother frowned upon his relationship with Naomi, given that she was of a lower socioeconomic class. Underwood and Parris assert, "Lewis was from a poor, wild clan,"<sup>313</sup> but had his eye (and social prospects) upon the daughter of the merchant for whom he worked. Naomi would have seriously threatened his attempt to climb the social ladder, and all the more so given the illegitimacy of their child-to-be. As Victoria Bynum asserts of 19<sup>th</sup>-century southern culture, "motherhood, the noblest calling of southern white women, became the most appalling symbol of degradation when it occurred outside marriage."<sup>314</sup> For Lewis, killing Naomi Wise may have seemed the only option to save his growing

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<sup>310</sup> Edward Baptist, "My Mind Is to Drown You and Leave You Behind: 'Omie Wise,' Intimate Violence, and Masculinity," in *Over the Threshold: Intimate Violence in Early America*, ed. Christina Daniels and Michael V. Kennedy (New York: Rutledge 1999), 96.

<sup>311</sup> Underwood and Parris, "Crimesong," 9.

<sup>312</sup> Manly Wade Wellman, *Dead and Gone: Classic Crimes of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1954), 108.

<sup>313</sup> Underwood and Parris, "Crimesong," 9.

<sup>314</sup> Bynum, *Unruly Women*, 2.

reputation. As Kenneth Tunnell contends, Lewis “deceives her into believing that he will marry and care for her, when his real intention is murder to harbor the secret of their illegitimate child.”<sup>315</sup>

The historical documents for the case, already rare and full of ellipses, abruptly end here. However, subsequent accounts of the story recorded by local residents and published by scholars such as Olive Woolley Burt, continue the story with various assertions that Lewis confessed his crime as he lay on his deathbed.<sup>316</sup> The year 2008 marked the second centennial of the murder of Naomi Wise by her lover, who, as Gail de Vos summarizes, “ultimately was acquitted of the deed by the law but remains forever guilty through the mechanisms of the ballad.”<sup>317</sup>

The ballad *Omie Wise* lyrically depicts early 19<sup>th</sup>-century Appalachia as a culture deeply influenced by conservatism, romanticism, and religion—what would soon be called Victorianism. I find convincing Daniel Cohen’s belief that *Omie Wise* is probably the first murdered-girl ballad based on fact in the American tradition. As he states,

I have found no hard evidence of the existence of an *indigenous* tradition of American courtship-murder ballads before the beginning of the nineteenth century. To my knowledge, the earliest American “courtship murder” to generate a ballad popular enough to become incorporated in the oral tradition was that of Naomi Wise in North Carolina in 1808.<sup>318</sup>

As an early 19<sup>th</sup>-century murdered-girl ballad, *Omie Wise* depicts a young unmarried man killing his young pregnant lover. As Eleanor Wilgus asserts, “the story of the murder of Naomi Wise by Jonathan Lewis, nurtured by the pre-existence of textual models from

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<sup>315</sup> Kenneth D. Tunnell, “99 Years Is Almost for Life: Punishment for Violent Crime in Bluegrass Music,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 26, no. 3 (1992): 170.

<sup>316</sup> Olive Woolley Burt, *American Murder Ballads and Their Stories* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 28.

<sup>317</sup> de Vos, *Stories from Songs*, 105.

<sup>318</sup> Cohen, “Beautiful Female Murder Victim,” 280.

which to borrow relevant features and the fundamental idea of what a ‘Murdered Girl’ tale *should* consist of, was ready to be shaped into a traditional ballad.”<sup>319</sup> Thus, *Omie Wise* makes use of several of the stock thematic elements circumscribed by the prototypical ballads discussed above.

However, the one stock thematic element missing from Naomi Wise’s actual story is her murderer’s legal comeuppance. Interestingly, however, *Omie Wise* does include it, ending with, “He made no confession, but they carried him to jail. No friends nor relations would go on his bail” in stanza 15. Yet the historical facts of the case tell us that Naomi Wise’s story does not end with Lewis’ demise in a jail cell, as the murder ballad text would have us believe. John Lewis successfully eluded a murder trial, and remained a free man for the rest of his life. Thus, in its dismissal of John Lewis’ escape from justice, the ballad text reflects a cultural desire to ensure that the world will always be righted once more and that all criminals are brought to justice.

The ballad’s use of rigid gender roles, male dominance, and power solidify *Omie Wise*’s place in pre-Victorian culture. The ballad illustrates this placement to the extent that Naomi Wise is repeatedly referred to as “poor,” or “little,” no less than six times throughout the text. Whether the identification of Omie as “poor” alludes to her low social status or generally describes her tragic situation, the designation implies that she is small and frail in physical stature, an embodiment of an antebellum feminine ideal even as she meets her death. Additionally, in the second and third stanzas, the ballad text asserts that John Lewis falsely promised Naomi financial security and care in stanzas 2 and 3:

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<sup>319</sup> Wilgus, *Naomi Wise*, 17.

He told her to meet him at Adams's Springs,  
He promised her money and other fine things.

So fool-like she met him at Adams's Springs,  
No money he brought her nor other fine things.

Thus the ballad positions John Lewis of higher socioeconomic standing, even though historical truth tells us that he was only a merchant's clerk only on his way up the social ladder. In this way, the ballad reinforced patriarchal gender roles; its illustration of male dominance and authority coincided with the era's belief that men wield the romantic and economic power in relationships, households, and families.

Moreover, the display of a watery grave and flowing river suggests a shadow of Christian morality. Water's connection to feminine sexuality, and to the popular literary depiction of feminine death by drowning, is of particular interest in this ballad. Its occurrence crucially contributes to the ballad's depiction of fateful women who defy socially accepted behavior. Indeed, water appears in many of the murder ballads, both American and European in origin; Naomi Wise is not the only victim to be thrown into a river by her murderous lover. However, I find her ballad most useful for a discussion of water, and the aspects of feminine death and sexuality associated with it.

Prevalent throughout the song, water appears from the very beginning, and establishes the setting of the ballad in stanzas 1 and 2:

Oh listen to my story, I'll tell you no lies,  
How John Lewis did murder poor little Omie Wise.

He told her to meet him at Adams' Springs  
He promised her money and other fine things.

In stanza 4, Lewis tricks Naomi into eloping with him, "Go with me, little Omie, and away we will go. We'll go and get married and no one will know." We then learn

that Naomi is carried on horseback to her fate, as line 5.2 forebodingly sings, “But off to the river where deep waters flow.” When she begs for Lewis’ mercy for her unborn child’s life, we learn something of her lover-murderer’s true nature in stanza 9:

He kissed her and hugged her and turned her around,  
Then pushed her in deep waters where he knew that she would drown.

Several elements concerning water, death, and femininity are at work throughout these lines of the ballad. Perhaps most obviously, death by drowning within the murder ballads references a gendered reality. As J. Roberta Coffelt notes, “prior to about 1920, women often did not know how to swim—while boys might have been welcome to splash and swim in lakes and ponds, girls typically were not.”<sup>320</sup> Because their clothing tended to be restrictive and heavy, in keeping with the era’s fashions, when women met water they may have found it difficult to save themselves.

More significantly, John Lewis embodies a sense of Christian or moral authority by pushing Naomi in the river. This phenomenon remains a powerful element of the murder ballads, particularly for drowned victims. The act of throwing the female body in a river reflects religious ideas about purity and a symbolic cleansing process of washing away the sin of extramarital sex. Indeed, in the context of the murder ballads, water represents holiness, cleanliness, and the passage of time—making it a useful and moral vehicle for saving the victim’s sinful and lustful soul. Further, water is important for its symbolic connection to women’s sexuality. As Coffelt asserts,

Drowning is associated with women because of the link between female sexuality and liquid via the egress of menstrual blood and breast milk and the intake of semen. Further, water and that ubiquitous symbol of femininity, the moon, are linked via tides.<sup>321</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Coffelt, “She ‘Too Much of Water Hast,’” 2.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

In this way, Naomi's death by drowning may be read as a highly allegorical or figurative representation of chaotic femininity. Thus, water is useful as a literary punishment for sexually transgressive women.

Uniquely within my ballad set, two boys discover Omie's body when they happen across her buoyant corpse in stanza 12:

Two boys went a-fishin' one fine summer day,  
And saw little Omie's body go floating away.

The two incidental boys—symbolically innocent in their youthful fishing activities—become, in a way, proverbial Christian fishermen. Elevating her body out of the water, they expose the truth of her death and the violence bestowed upon her. In the absence of any overt feminist mechanisms in this ballad text, Naomi's buoyancy in the river exposes her murderer's crime. Although passive in life, in death Naomi Wise's final act incriminates John Lewis through her refusal to enable male violence by remaining hidden in her watery grave.

As a final note on *Omie Wise*'s significance to the corpus of American murdered-girl ballads, I quote Robert Wells:

Omie (Naomi) Wise, whose fatal mistake was trusting John Lewis's lies in 1808, not far from where Tom [Dula] killed Laura [Foster], may have been one of the first American victims to be used to warn young women via song to be careful, but she was not the last.<sup>322</sup>

While I read the murder ballad *Omie Wise* as the most conservative text in my corpus, the genre soon begins to subtly shift in its depiction of cultural modernity. The next ballad I discuss carefully employs historical fact to respond to the sexual complexities experienced by the Appalachian murder victim known as Laura Foster.

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<sup>322</sup> Wells, *Life Flows on in Endless Song*, 2.

***The Murder of Laura Foster (Laws F36, Appendix VIII)***

In 1866, Laura Foster was found murdered in North Carolina, two months after her mysterious disappearance. Her body was discovered with the stab wounds still visible in her left breast, between the third and fourth ribs,<sup>323</sup> an astonishing discovery given that the body was “badly decomposed, and forensic evidence was slim by today’s standards.”<sup>324</sup> Her lover, Tom Dula, was hanged for the crime. However, as Wells asserts, “no hard evidence ever connected Dula to the murder, though he suspiciously crossed the border into Tennessee in 1866, shortly after Laura Foster disappeared.”<sup>325</sup> Dula was arrested in Tennessee, while working on the farm of James Grayson. He was tried and convicted on circumstantial evidence that stated Laura had last been seen in his company, and he was executed in 1868 in what E. Martin Pedersen calls, “one of the most sensational murder cases of the mid-nineteenth century.”<sup>326</sup>

Laura Foster’s demise made her story a prime candidate for the composition of a classic murder ballad that warns of ill-fated courtships that result in tragic death. However, her case notably includes unique elements too, specifically the murderer’s other female lover and the presence of a venereal disease.

According to historical accounts, when Dula came home to North Carolina following the Civil War, he began intimate relationships with three women, all cousins: Laura Foster, who was ultimately murdered; Pauline Foster; and, according to Wells, “the

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<sup>323</sup> Underwood and Parris, “Crimesong,” 11.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid.: 13.

<sup>325</sup> Robert V. Wells, *Life Flows on in Endless Song: Folk Songs and American History* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 2009), 2.

<sup>326</sup> E. Martin Pedersen, “Factlore, Fakelore, or Folklore: Sorting through Folk Song Origins,” *The Social Studies* July/August, vol. 88, no.4 (1997): 184.

beautiful and dissolute Ann Foster Melton,” who was married to another man.<sup>327</sup> As Underwood and Parris relate, “at some point, Tom contracted syphilis, and he suspected that it was Laura who passed it to him.”<sup>328</sup> Wells also considers the character of Ann Foster Melton, stating “Ann Melton discovered she had acquired a venereal disease from Dula, and she was not happy about having to explain this to Mr. Melton.”<sup>329</sup> Many suspect that Ann Melton either instigated the murder, or was otherwise partially involved in the crime.

The absolute truths of Laura Foster’s story are lost in history, passed down and varied by the many people interested in the tale or fond of the ballad. Perhaps most strikingly, it is not *her* demise that is so widely known but Dula’s. The ballad called *Tom Dooley* (Appendix VIII-A), made famous by a version recorded by the Kingston Trio in 1958,<sup>330</sup> recounts his tragic fate, mentioning Laura Foster only incidentally in stanza 1:

Hang down your head Tom Dooley,  
Hang down your head and cry.  
You killed poor Laura Foster,  
And now you’re bound to die.

Tom Dula’s side of the story remains significant as a commentary on the period’s history, namely the end of the Civil War. *Tom Dooley*, however, is not a murder ballad and thus does not fall into my research set. I offer instead an analysis of the ballad known as *The Murder of Laura Foster*. I find this text culturally insightful in its depiction of a complex intimate and sexual relationship involving several people. Moreover, I consider the

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<sup>327</sup> Wells, *Life Flows on in Endless Song*, 1.

<sup>328</sup> Underwood and Parris, "Crimesong," 11.

<sup>329</sup> Wells, *Life Flows on in Endless Song*, 1.

<sup>330</sup> The Kingston Trio, *Greenback Dollar*, Synergie OMP, 2009.

venereal disease as the probable impetus for Foster's murder. Finally I analyze the ballad's response to, and dismissal of, this historical fact.

The historical Laura Foster was remarkably sexually independent given the time in which she lived; her behaviors were also unusual in her level of intimacy with a man who was simultaneously courting two of her cousins. While Victorian ideals demanded purity from women, Charles Rosenberg affirms, obviously "premarital chastity and marital fidelity hardly serve as an inclusive description of mid-19<sup>th</sup> century behavior."<sup>331</sup> Laura Foster's ballad ultimately offers merely a shadowed representation of the real woman who was so brutally murdered. Though her behaviors in her actual life may have been regarded as promiscuous or lewd, her murder ballad transforms her into a kind of Christian martyr, thereby blurring the lines of reality with fiction.

As we have established, motives for killing the female sweethearts included unintended pregnancies and jealousy. *The Murder of Laura Foster* does not address the fact that syphilis was spread between the lovers, clearly dismissing a disease that did not fit within the prescribed murdered-girl ballad compositional formula. In this way, the song reflects a cultural fear of sexual infestation. In truth, venereal diseases were significant in the lives of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Americans, including those in Appalachia.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, diseases of all kinds plagued Appalachia just as they pervaded urban America. Charles Rosenberg asserts, "the prostitution, the venereal disease rate, the double standard itself all document the gap between admonition and reality."<sup>332</sup> That Laura Foster, Tom Dula, and Ann Melton all contracted syphilis speaks to the sexual complexity and reality of Appalachian culture. Thus the ballad text's dismissal of the

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<sup>331</sup> Rosenberg, "Sexuality, Class and Role," 140.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid.

venereal disease confirms Appalachia's ties to a cultural obsession with purity. As Carroll Smith-Rosenberg cites, "Victorian purity was the creation of a self-defined group of male sexual reformers who advocated a variety of reforms, all involving a fusion of bodily and social control."<sup>333</sup> Well aware of the true story, the fact that ballad singers never inserted Foster's, Dula's, and Melton's contraction of syphilis as the impetus for Laura's murder speaks to a Victorian desire for bodily control and, as Rosenberg confirms, "suggests a fear of its loss."<sup>334</sup>

Moreover, the ballad barely alludes to the presence of an accomplice in stanza 4. It certainly fails to recognize that the accomplice was a female, related to Laura Foster, married to another man, or also intimately involved with Dula:

As eve declined toward the West,  
She met her groom and his vile guest.  
In forest wild the three retreat;  
She looked for person there to meet.

Easy to miss, the song hints at the presence of another person in lines two and three of the stanza quoted above. Furthermore, the reference to the third party as both "vile" and a "guest" speaks to an opinion about the role of an accomplice in the murder of "poor Laura Foster" (stanza 1).

The use of the term "vile guest" to refer to Ann Melton might indicate that the ballad's composer and singers were aware of a woman's involvement in the murder of Laura Foster. However, owing to a cultural code that would have upheld a married woman's dignity, the text subtly addresses Melton as a "guest," (albeit a "vile" one).

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<sup>333</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Sex as Symbol in Victorian Purity: An Ethnohistorical Analysis of Jacksonian America," *The American Journal of Sociology* 84, no. Supplement: Turning Points: Historical and Sociological Essays on the Family (1978): S213.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

Alternatively, the term “vile guest” may suggest the appearance of a promiscuous woman, thereby illustrating another kind of cultural opinion about the lewdness of women, particularly considering ideas about prostitution. As Bynum states, “Few citizens seem not to have thought much about the prostitute herself except to label her “vile,” “dissolute,” and the like.”<sup>335</sup> Thus, the impersonal reference to Dula’s accomplice (Ann Melton) as a “vile” kind of guest illustrates ideas about the infidelity of women as highly promiscuous, and engaged in behavior linked to prostitution. In turn, the imagery of a married woman’s lechery stands in stark contrast to the purity of “poor” Laura Foster.

Laura Foster’s ballad dismisses any account of her reputation and addresses her as a “poor” sexual innocent, thereby pointing to a cultural desire to position beautiful female murder victims as pure beings firmly in the character mold of Naomi Wise. According to John F. West, the real Laura Foster (in juxtaposition to the sanitized victim presented in the ballad) had a poor reputation for chastity and was known for having “round heels.”<sup>336</sup> If Laura Foster truly did have a penchant for promiscuity, she could not be considered “poor” in the sense that she was innocent, given that her sexual purity would have been governed by Victorian attitudes. Indeed, the ballad text portrays Laura in youthful innocence, depicted in stanza 3:

Her youthful heart no sorrow knew;  
She fancied all mankind was true,  
And thus she gaily passed along  
Humming at time a favorite song.

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<sup>335</sup> Bynum, *Unruly Women*, 93-94.

<sup>336</sup> John F. West, *The Ballad of Tom Dula: The Documented Story Behind the Murder of Laura Foster and the Trials and Execution of Tom Dula* (Durham, NC: Moore Publishing Company, 1970), vii.

In the act of singing gaily to herself, the ballad depicts Laura not only as childlike, but forewarns of coming violence where the text illustrates the idyllic realm of innocence soon to be lost. Such imagery is certainly not unique to this ballad: historical and modern audiences alike are accustomed to the naïveté displayed by unaware young women with a penchant for humming, such as Snow White and Goldilocks.

Interestingly, the religious imagery employed by the ballad invokes a sense of Christ-like resurrection. The song's lyrics depict Laura as missing for a period of three days, entombed in the woods under cover of leaves and clay. As the text states in stanza 11:

Since Laura left at break of day,  
Two nights and days have passed away,  
The parents now in sorrow wild  
Set out to search for their lost child.

The repeated inclusion of the number three in *The Murder of Laura Foster* is interesting for the spiritual and Christian symbology associated with it. Though not explicitly stated, Laura's three-day disappearance in the ballad text and the inclusion of three persons involved in the crime alludes to biblical ideas of approval or completion where the number three represents the Holy Trinity and divine perfection. More specifically, in the New Testament, Christ rises after three days of entombment. Further, the number three is spiritually associated with ideas of the life cycle in that some Celtic and neopaganist beliefs associate the trinity (known as the Triquetra) as representative of the various stages of a woman's life: Maiden, Mother, and Crone.

After her body is discovered in stanza 17 ("they took away the leaves and clay, which on her lifeless body lay"), the ballad concludes with an impression of Laura's Christian martyrdom in stanza 20:

Then in the church yard her they lay,  
 No more to rise 'til Judgment Day;  
 Then robed in white we trust she'll rise  
 To meet her savior in the skies.

Though the events of the real Laura Foster's life could scarcely position her as a Christian martyr, the ballad text nevertheless chooses to sanitize Laura Foster's character to embody pure Christian ideals where her death becomes a kind of "baptism in blood," in which she is cleansed of her sins.

While the ballad text denies the actual events of its case, *The Murder of Laura Foster* overwhelmingly illustrates a negative cultural response to the sexual realities of women like Laura Foster and her cousins Pauline and Ann Melton. The historical events of Laura Foster's murder speak to an Appalachian reality rife with behavior that deviates from Victorian ideals. Even though the presence of multiple lovers and a venereal disease clearly indicates a disjuncture between Victorian idealism and the realities of how people actually lived, the text of *The Murder of Laura Foster* effectively silences this aspect of the story and resists the modern influences that led to the depicted events. Similarly, the next ballad I discuss also chooses to repress a crucial event in the female victim's lived experience—an abortion—that Appalachian culture found too transgressive and fearsome to name in its ballad tradition.

***Pearl Bryan* (Laws F1B, F2, F3, Appendix IX)**

In early February of 1896, a woman's headless body was found in a farming field just outside of Fort Thomas, Kentucky.<sup>337</sup> The next day, a coroner's report stated that the victim was in the second trimester of pregnancy at the time of her demise. Shortly

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<sup>337</sup> Cohen, *Poor Pearl, Poor Girl!*, 3.

thereafter, the body was identified as that of twenty-three-year-old Pearl Bryan, the daughter of a farmer in Greencastle, Indiana.<sup>338</sup> Here, the facts of the story turn cloudy. Underwood and Parris write, “It turned out that she had been impregnated by a young wealthy farmer named William Wood, the son of a minister. He had sent her off on a train for an illegal abortion, to be performed by two dental students, Scott Jackson and Alonzo Walling.”<sup>339</sup> In his commentary on the ballad, scholar Paul Brewster relates that Pearl was impregnated by William Wood. As he reports:

She went to Cincinnati, where she appealed to an acquaintance, Scott Jackson, at the time a student in the Ohio College of Dental Surgery, to give her medical attention. She was never seen alive again. On February 1, 1896, her body, minus the head, was found near Fort Thomas, Kentucky. Her death was the result of a criminal operation. Identification was made through her shoes, purchased in Greencastle, and by her feet, Miss Bryan being web-footed.<sup>340</sup>

However, conflicting accounts of the ballad’s history come from Laws and Jean Thomas. Laws states, “Pearl Bryan, of Greencastle, Indiana, was murdered by Scott Jackson, the father of her unborn child, and his accomplice, Alonzo Walling.”<sup>341</sup> Cohen agrees with this version of the story, stating, “One of her beaux, Scott Jackson, then a dental student in Cincinnati, was arrested and charged with her murder.”<sup>342</sup> While the historical evidence remains unsure, the ballad text of *Pearl Bryan* preserves Scott Jackson as Pearl’s lover in stanza 2:

Pearl went to Cincinnati  
 She’d never been there before  
 She said to Sweetheart Jackson  
 I’ll never see Mama no more  
 She said to Sweetheart Jackson

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> Underwood and Parris, “Crimesong,” 20.

<sup>340</sup> Brewster, *Ballads and Songs of Indiana*, 283.

<sup>341</sup> Laws, *Native American Balladry*, 192.

<sup>342</sup> Cohen, *Poor Pearl, Poor Girl!*, 3.

Why do you want to take my life?  
 You know I've always loved you  
 And would have been your wife.

The events of Pearl's tragedy witness the many modernisms emerging in America in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The ballad text introduces the listener to the use of cabs—whether they belonged to horse-drawn buggies or trains is uncertain—in the second half of stanza 1:

Oh, soon the cab was ordered,  
 To go out for a stroll  
 And if you will only listen  
 The half has never been told.

Additionally, the song's audience learns of some advances in law enforcement's use of investigative technologies in stanza 4, lines 1 and 2: "Oh, then some bloodhounds were ordered, they found no trail they said." Subsequently, the listener learns of the availability of telephones in stanza 4, line 3: "they telephoned for miles around, at last an answer came; it was from Pearl Bryan's sister, it must be Pearl that's slain." Moreover, *Pearl Bryan* connects with newspaper stories published over the course of the murder case's duration, and with other media coverage of the trial of Scott Jackson and Alonzo Walling. As Anne Cohen states, "internal evidence suggests that Pearl Bryan was composed by someone familiar with newspaper stories of the case," as early texts of this ballad seem to:

Describe in detail the excitement in Cincinnati when the body was found, the attempts to identify it, the use of bloodhounds to find the head, and the plea Pearl's sister made to Jackson to reveal where he had put the head.<sup>343</sup>

Thus, *Pearl Bryan* overwhelmingly ties to the prevalence and use of modern technologies beginning to enjoy wide distribution in urban *and* rural areas of the United States. By

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<sup>343</sup> Cohen, *Poor Pearl, Poor Girl!*, 62-63.

mentioning that Pearl was beheaded (rather than “traditionally” drowned or stabbed like the other female victims of American and British songs), stanza 4 of the ballad demonstrates the willingness of composers and singers to depart—in some ways—from the murdered-girl plot formula. The mechanism of murder has here shifted to death-by-decapitation, formerly not an acceptable form of demise in the traditional murder ballad scenario:

Oh, then some bloodhounds were ordered  
 They found no trail, they said  
 Here lies a woman's body  
 But we can't find no head.

However, in other important ways, *Pearl Bryan* remains seated in Victorian ideals and patriarchy. The ballad does not mention Pearl's pregnancy, or the fact that her reasons for going to Cincinnati were for an abortion. Indeed, the ballad dismisses the fact that Pearl's death may actually have resulted from complications of the abortion procedure. Underwood and Parris, on the other hand, support this possibility, stating, “The dental students gave Pearl cocaine as an anesthetic. However, she overdosed on the drug and died. In a panic, the dental students removed Pearl's head to frustrate identification and ditched the body along Alexandria Pike outside of Fort Thomas.”<sup>344</sup>

It seems that the ballad composers and singers of *Pearl Bryan* were unwilling to depict Pearl's pregnancy, abortion and possible use of narcotics, even though we have established that the author of the *Pearl Bryan* text seems to have been familiar with the media coverage of the story. The dismissal of her pregnancy is further puzzling when one considers that Naomi Wise's ballad writers and singers were not shy in preserving *her* pregnancy in the text of *Omie Wise*. As an explanation, I suggest that an influence of

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<sup>344</sup> Underwood and Parris, “Crimesong,” 20.

Victorianism, again, is to blame for the absence of reality in the ballad text. I believe that the stigma and public opinion concerning the “depravity” of abortion may have caused the total erasure of Pearl’s pregnancy from the ballad text.

Abortion has long carried many complex reactions, regarding ethical, moral, and safety concerns. Even today, abortion is a hotbed of debate, often serving as the microcosm for disagreements between liberal and conservative politics. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, abortion suffered from a complex social and cultural stigma, in addition to carrying a high factor of physical danger. Opponents of abortion often labeled such practices as “feticide,” “criminal abortion,” or “aborticide.”<sup>345</sup> As Janet Brodie comments, “Many couples were desperate to learn effective and safe ways to prevent contraception and to induce abortion. Yet the subject was clothed in secrecy, for reproductive control was just beginning to emerge into the public domain.”<sup>346</sup> In a time of women’s sexual repression, access to information about contraception and abortion procedures was limited by social reformers such as Anthony Comstock, who ensured the passage of the “Comstock laws” in the 1870s—legislation that prohibited the distribution of such information.<sup>347</sup>

Because of public restriction, information about abortion and pregnancy prevention circulated by word-of-mouth through social networks of friends and family. Indeed, abortion was not a rare occurrence in America, just as the facts of Laura Foster’s death have established that pre- and extra-marital sexual activities were widely practiced under the façade of Victorian ethics. As Carroll Smith-Rosenberg affirms, “widespread

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<sup>345</sup> Janet Farrell Brodie, *Contraception and Abortion in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 5.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid.*

abortion points to a society actively engaged in the pursuit of real and of fantasied sexual pleasures, both within and without conjugal confines.”<sup>348</sup> Additionally, history asserts that issues surrounding contraception and birth control affected not only a small percentage of urban and middle- to upper-class women, but cut across racial, ethnic, and class lines as well. Moreover, the means by which birth control literature was passed and obtained was limited to men. As Brodie explains,

It is true that women had far less access than men to books and products pertaining to reproductive control. Many women therefore had to rely on their husbands for information, as culture tended to set constraints on reading materials and information for women. Women’s economic ability to buy the information was also restricted.<sup>349</sup>

This elucidation is useful in contextualizing the realities of Pearl’s tragic fate, for it confirms that she would not necessarily have had knowledge (or access to knowledge) about abortion, and would have relied on the information supplied to her by her lover (whether it was Wood or Jackson). Thus, Pearl Bryan’s historical story points to the victimization often experienced by women who are oppressed by societal codes that control and limit women’s knowledge. As the Rosenbergs relate, death from abortion-inducing procedures parallel those that resulted from childbirth, “in a period when gynecological practice was still relatively primitive...young women were simply terrified of having children.”<sup>350</sup> If Pearl had been aware of the dangers of abortion, perhaps she never would have gone to Cincinnati to meet her doom. However, to Cincinnati she went, on the faith of her lover and his word. In this way, the woman in the ballad depicts the

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<sup>348</sup> Smith-Rosenberg, "Sex as Symbol in Victorian Purity," S212.

<sup>349</sup> Brodie, *Contraception and Abortion*, 159.

<sup>350</sup> Smith-Rosenberg and Rosenberg, "The Female Animal," 345-46.

helplessness and naïveté glorified by 19<sup>th</sup>-century conservatism. The second half of stanza 3 depicts this well:

There's room for your name in my album  
 There's room for your love in my heart  
 There's room for us both in Heaven,  
 Where true lovers never part.

Yet *Pearl Bryan* intersects with the story of the real Pearl Bryan in the dramatic scene of Pearl's sister pleading with Scott Jackson for Pearl's head in stanza 5:

In came Pearl Bryan's sister  
 Falling on her knees  
 A-pleading to Scott Jackson  
 For sister's head—oh, please!  
 But Jackson was so stubborn,  
 A naughty word he said;  
 When you meet Pearl in Heaven  
 You'll find her missing head.

Though reduced to a state of mercy and begging, depicted by her kneeling posture on the ground below the murderous Jackson, the emergence of Pearl's sister provides the listener with a glimpse of the important familial connections between women. Though the ballad version of Scott Jackson scoffs at the sister's plea, her appearance in the courtroom, on her sister's behalf, depicts a supporting female character strong in her convictions and determination to see justice done.

Perhaps the richest ballad text of the corpus, I find several aspects of *Pearl Bryan* unique and fascinating. Namely, I find the inclusion (and juxtaposition) of both rural and urban settings significant. Where Pearl leaves her rural home to travel to urban Cincinnati, she enters a presumed realm of technology, control, and logic. Within the confines of a city that, much like the medieval castle, symbolically offers protection and civility, Pearl meets the men who take her away for her abortion. Leaving that urban

environment, she once more enters the rural, untamed natural world characterized by violence, irrationality, and danger. Gale Sigal has outlined the implications that isolation carries for women in general, noting that “encountering a woman beyond the surveillance of castle walls, the nobleman is no longer constrained to offer her the kind treatment de rigueur within its walls...beyond the boundaries of the court, her sexuality is what counts.”<sup>351</sup> Alone with strangers and physically unprotected, Pearl succumbs to the kind of violent death that cannot take place within the confines of urban civility.

Pearl’s death-by-dismemberment is also unique in the murder ballad canon. As Regina Janes asserts, “beheading is among the most ancient, widespread, and enduring of human cultural practices.”<sup>352</sup> Indeed, professional “headsman” are historically famous for beheadings throughout Western Europe, a practice that took place until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the guillotine revolutionized the practice.<sup>353</sup> As Janes affirms, “removing a head asserts a desire to possess the good represented by the head. The head, seat of breath, and (later) soul, remains a site of power and a locus of desire.”<sup>354</sup>

Beheadings of women carry particularly powerful cultural implications. The desire to dominate, or own, a female body is carried out most successfully by decapitation, as it effectively removes one’s social identity. As Howard Eilberg-Schwartz and Wendy Doniger contend, “the female head is a particularly rich and important site in the symbolization of gender and in the linking of gender to the transcendent values of

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<sup>351</sup> Sigal, “Pit or Pedestal,” 3.

<sup>352</sup> Regina Janes, *Losing Our Heads: Beheadings in Literature and Culture* (New York, NY: University of New York Press, 2005), 10.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid., x.

specific cultural or religious systems.”<sup>355</sup> The head is that anatomical part of the female body that gives all women a voice and an identity which, as Eilberg-Schwartz and Doniger state, “threatens to unmake and disrupt the classic gender distinctions that have linked men to speech, power, identity, and the mind.”<sup>356</sup> In this way, Pearl Bryan’s murderers decapitate her as a way of addressing such a threat. Moreover, by confusing (and removing) her identity, the murderers effectively reduce her to a purely sexual, or anatomical, body.

Given the emergence of modern technologies, and the development of a positive supporting female role, *Pearl Bryan* illustrates a definite shift away from the rigid ideologies illustrated in ballads like *Omie Wise*. However, Pearl Bryan’s murder ballad clearly serves its purpose of illustrating the fates of transgressive women well, where the text warns other young men and women to avoid such behavior. Indeed, the closing stanza of *Pearl Bryan* effectively pleads:

Oh, boys and girls, take warning,  
Before it is too late;  
The worst crime ever committed  
In old Kentucky State.

***Nell Cropsey (Laws F1C, Appendix X and Appendix X-A)***

The murder of nineteen-year-old Ella Maud (Nell) Cropsey took place in late November of 1901. The crime, owing to a number of mysterious facets, caused a great deal of controversy, news coverage, and sensationalism between the time of her disappearance in November and the discovery of her body a month later. According to

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<sup>355</sup> Howard Eilberg-Schwartz and Wendy Doniger, eds., *Off with Her Head! The Denial of Women’s Identity in Myth, Religion, and Culture* (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 1995), 1.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid.

Bland Simpson, Nell Cropsey and her family had moved from Brooklyn, New York, to Elizabeth City, North Carolina, where they lived prosperously for three years before Nell was murdered.<sup>357</sup> Nell's boyfriend, Jim Wilcox, was the son of the city's former police sheriff, and was the last person seen with Nell. As Simpson states, "In those days Jim worked over at Hayman's Marine Railways, one of the town's shipyard and drydock outfits that were booming."<sup>358</sup> Ollie Cropsey, Nell's sister, reportedly stated that the couple had been awkward with each other since September of that year, 1901.<sup>359</sup> On the evening of her disappearance, Nell and Ollie were entertaining Jim Wilcox and one of Ollie's callers, Roy Crawford, in their parents' home. Simpson relates that when Jim Wilcox asked to speak with Nell alone, Ollie encouraged her sister to go with him, a decision that reportedly haunted Ollie for the rest of her life.<sup>360</sup>

The Nell Cropsey case turns mysterious at this point. For the rest of his life, Jim Wilcox swore that, after a short stroll with Nell in which he broke off their relationship, he left her crying on the front porch of her home.<sup>361</sup> Shortly after Christmas of 1901, two fishermen found Nell Cropsey's body floating in the Pasquotank River. According to the medical coroner, Dr. Ike Fearing, there were no external injuries to her body, no water in her stomach, no pregnancy to be found. The only damage to Nell Cropsey's body was discovered after an incision was made to her left temple, and a "bluish-tinged bruise a little larger than a silver dollar,"<sup>362</sup> was revealed. After the inquest finished and the

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<sup>357</sup> Bland Simpson, *The Mystery of Beautiful Nell Cropsey: A Nonfiction Novel* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 1-2.

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

coroner's jury deliberated, Dr. Fearing reported, "Ella M. Cropsey came to her death by being stricken a blow on the left temple and by being drowned in the Pasquotank River."<sup>363</sup> Jim Wilcox was arrested, and convicted by a jury to hang on April 25<sup>th</sup> of 1902. However, after a mistrial was declared, and a lesser sentence imposed, he was released in 1913; he later committed suicide in 1934. Some believed that his suicide clearly proved his guilt. Others believed it was the last act of an innocent man "scorned and disbelieved and hounded to the grave."<sup>364</sup>

The text of Nell's ballad, combined with the factual events of her death, make *Nell Cropsey* the most curious and mysterious song of my set. A number of facets of the ballad and historical story are responsible for its divergence from the murdered-girl ballad formula. Chiefly, Nell Cropsey was not pregnant at the time of her death, nor may we be certain that her relationship with Wilcox was sexually intimate. Moreover, the facts of her story reveal that Nell, unlike the other female murder victims, was not of a lower socioeconomic standing than her beau. As Simpson recorded, Nell and her family were "the Cropseys of Brooklyn, among the Old Dutch that built Brooklyn, and New York too." Cropsey Avenue remains a prominent street in Brooklyn, named after James Cropsey, who led the Kings County Buckskins against the British in 1812.<sup>365</sup>

Reportedly, the investigator, Hurricane Branch, wondered why a prominent family from a city like Brooklyn moved south to a little river town. In fact, William Cropsey, Nell's father, came to Elizabeth City to farm and trade, because commercial

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<sup>363</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid., 72.

circulars said the low tidewater and sound country was a garden spot.<sup>366</sup> The success of Elizabeth City and the Cropseys (and many others like them) was a direct result of the railroad's infiltration of the rural south. When the Norfolk Railroad opened in the early 1880s, "the cash rolled into Elizabeth City and the produce rolled out. The town's population tripled between the coming of the railroad and the turn of the century."<sup>367</sup>

Given that Nell Cropsey's story does not align well with the murder ballad formula already well established, how *did Nell Cropsey* become a murder ballad, much less one popular enough in the oral tradition to be published in anthologies by scholars such as Malcolm Laws? The answer lies in the ballad's connection to *The Jealous Lover*. It appears that, during the time that she was missing, a highly original ballad (Appendix X) was composed speculating about Nell's location and fate, utilizing the imagery of rivers as its central narrative device, while lacking specific facts or details of the case, as in stanza 1:

Oh, swift flowing river,  
A secret you hold,  
Way down in the depths—  
Of the water so cold.

Indeed, the lyrics of the text are so vague that one might be led to believe that the song is merely a fictional piece of prose. However, the reference to "Dismal Swamp" alludes to the historical location of Nell's disappearance, somewhere near "the Great Dismal Swamp, the mire that separated Elizabeth City from Norfolk, Virginia."<sup>368</sup> As the ballad states in stanza 3:

And you oft have whispered

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<sup>366</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>368</sup> Simpson, *Beautiful Nell Cropsey*, 3.

In your ceaseless rounds,  
 From the Dismal Swamp  
 To your home in the Sound.

Sometime after the discovery of her body, her autopsy, and the arrest of Wilcox, Nell Cropsey's name was inserted into the text of *The Jealous Lover* and renamed *Nell Cropsey* (Appendix X-A), a move that effectively replaced "Fair Florella."

However, *The Jealous Lover* proves itself unsuitable for the story of Nell's demise; its stock storyline has almost nothing to do with the event of Nell Cropsey's murder. While we know that Jim Wilcox took Nell for a stroll to break off his relationship with her, stanza 4 of this version of *Nell Cropsey* states that Nell was lured from home by her deceitful lover, supposedly to discuss their marriage:

He said, Come, love, let's wander  
 Out in the woods so gay.  
 While wandering we will ponder  
 About our wedding day.

Additionally, this later version of *Nell Cropsey* depicts Nell in stark contrast to the facts of her death, which resulted from a forceful blow to her left temple. However in stanza 9, the ballad relies on a stock plot device instead of the medical evidence found in the case of the historical Nell:

Down on her knees before him  
 She pleaded for her life,  
 But deep into her bosom  
 He plunged the fatal knife.

In further divergence from the case's factual elements, stanza 10 of this *Nell Cropsey* depicts the victim's conversation with her lover, whose name is given as the stereotypical "Willie," instead of that of Nell's real love, "Jim":

O Willie, I forgive you,  
 Her last and dying words,

I never meant to deceive you,  
And she closed her eyes in death.

Finally, two fishermen on the Pasquotank River do not make the discovery of the Nell Cropsey's body after Christmas in this version of *Nell Cropsey*. Rather, an unidentified person happens across her corpse in stanza 11:

A stranger came and found her  
Cold and lifeless on the ground.

Obviously, that Nell Cropsey's name has found its way into the text of *The Jealous Lover* speaks to the popularity of both the archetypal ballad and Nell Cropsey's mysterious death. In this way, *The Jealous Lover* remains an important text within the murder ballad canon, owing to its widespread popularity and circulation.<sup>369</sup> Its adoption of Nell's name witnesses the generic song's flexibility in speaking to different subjects and victims, based on contemporaneous affairs and tastes.

Aside from the fact that Nell Cropsey's case does not fit the murder ballad genre's thematic outline and plot formulae, a further explanation may be offered as to why her story never resulted in a distinct murder ballad. This situation may be due to the fact that Nell Cropsey and her family, as transplants from New York, were outsiders in Appalachia. Her relatively high social position would not merit a traditional portrayal of Nell as a helpless victim who suffers from financial instability and low social status. In fact, Nell's wealth could have been the impetus for her murder, which would firmly place her story outside of the context of the archetypal ballads.

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<sup>369</sup> According to Laws, *The Jealous Lover* has been collected in texts ranging from New Foundland, to Ontario, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Missouri, Arkansas, Illinois, Michigan, Nebraska, and Wyoming. See Laws, *Native American Balladry*, 191. Such widespread distribution, even outside of Appalachia, speaks to the ballad's popularity and resonance, as well as its versatility.

It is possible that Jim Wilcox took violent action against Nell—a well-to-do Brooklyn Native—out of a psychological response to the threat that her wealth posed to his masculinity. In Chapter Three, I established that mainstream American culture traditionally placed the duties of financial stability upon males, and that this social convention deliberately maintained patriarchal structures. Indeed, the male desire to hold primary monetary power in intimate relationships persists today. Thus, criminologists such as James Messerschmidt explain male violence as a phenomenon among those who, physically or financially, lack the ability to display their hegemonic authority to others.

As he states,

Masculine resources are contextually available practices that can be drawn upon so that men and boys can demonstrate to others that they are “manly.” Thus men use the resources at their disposal to communicate masculinity to others. Because of its connection to hegemonic masculinity, for many men violence serves as a suitable resource for constructing masculinity.<sup>370</sup>

This theory supports Wilcox’s possible motive for killing his wealthy sweetheart if we accept that male violence manifests as a response to masculinity challenges; Nell embodied such a challenge in her social standing.

Alternatively, perhaps Nell’s name found its way into *The Jealous Lover* and the separate river ballad called *Nell Cropsey* because the body was found on a cold, sunny morning two days after Christmas by a pair of fisherman out on the Pasquotank River, and it reminded people of poor Naomi Wise. Regardless, the inclusion of *Nell Cropsey* in the oral tradition of murder ballads speaks to a cultural desire to sanitize the stories of young women as innocent and helpless, left to the fate prescribed to them by cold and calculating men.

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<sup>370</sup> James W. Messerschmidt, *Nine Lives: Adolescent Masculinities, the Body, and Violence* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 12.

***Lula Viers (Laws F10, Appendix XI)***

Over one hundred years after the body of Naomi Wise washed up on the shores of Deep River in North Carolina, another southern young woman was brutally murdered by her lover. Lula Viers, a young woman from a “coal camp” town called Auxier in Floyd County, Kentucky, fell in love with a man named John Coyer. As the ballad relates, Coyer “ruined her reputation,” and “would later take her life” (stanza 3). Indeed, as Richard Underwood and Sharon Ray suggest, “the murder of a young woman who has become inconvenient, pregnant, or both (usually both) is an ‘All American’ theme.”<sup>371</sup> Of all its historical documentations, Laws provides the most verifiable account. After requesting information about Lula’s murder from the clerk of the Floyd County Court in Prestonburg, Kentucky in 1948, he writes:

Lula Viers was killed by John [Coyer] at Elkhorn City, Kentucky, approximately October 1917. She was thrown into Big Sandy River, near Elkhorn City, and was not found until four to six months later at Hanging Rock, Ohio, near Ironton, Ohio.<sup>372</sup>

Coyer reportedly took Lula to Elkhorn City to get married, stayed in a hotel room with her, and then took Lula out for a stroll where he threw her into the “Big Sandy” river with a piece of railroad steel tied around her waist.<sup>373</sup> John Coyer then joined the army, perhaps to escape from being implicated in the death of his pregnant girlfriend. However, after Lula’s mother identified her daughter’s body at a morgue, a reporter, whose last

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<sup>371</sup> Richard H. Underwood and Sharon Ray, “The Sad, Sad Story of Lula Viers,” *Journal of Social Legal History* 15 (2007): 259.

<sup>372</sup> Laws, *Native American Balladry*, 65.

<sup>373</sup> Underwood and Ray, “The Sad, Sad Story of Lula Viers,” 260.

name is given in the ballad text as “Arodent,” published the story in a newspaper. John Coyer was then arrested,<sup>374</sup> as stanza 16 relates:

They sent for a reporter,  
His name was Arodent.  
He printed in the paper  
And around the world it went.

However, John Coyer was never formally tried for the murder of Lula Viers. An Army officer became involved in the legal proceedings and Coyer was shipped off to France with the military.

Most indicative of a ballad inspired by a rapidly modernizing American culture, *Lula Viers* contains a number of emerging modernisms and feminist ideologies not yet seen in the canon of murdered-sweetheart ballads. Historian James Klotter would agree, given his assertion that, “family-oriented violence focused attention on the complex interplay of law and lawlessness, romance and sordidness, honor and deceit, and became eagerly read front-page copy.”<sup>375</sup> Laws, too, affirms (rather condescendingly) that, “no one hearing or reading this unlyrical and pedestrian chronicle would suppose that the story was fictional.”<sup>376</sup> Like in *Pearl Bryan*, we witness a strong relationship of ballads to the media and printed word—a connection that testifies to Appalachia’s ties to modernity. As *Lula Viers* is arguably the most detailed murder ballad in the corpus, its words overwhelmingly illustrate that by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Appalachia was no longer wholly isolated—culturally, geographically, or otherwise. In fact, the lyrics demonstrate a keen sense of familiarity with technology and new ideologies.

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<sup>374</sup> Ibid.: 261.

<sup>375</sup> James C. Klotter, “The Black South and White Appalachia,” *The Journal of American History* 66, no. 4 (1980): 832.

<sup>376</sup> Laws, *Native American Balladry*, 64.

In stanza 4, we learn that Lula was taken to Elkhorn City on a train, sixty miles from her home in Auxier, Kentucky:

They went to Elkhorn City,  
Sixty miles away;  
And put up at a hotel,  
Until the close of day.

The coming of the railroad into the mountains of Kentucky added a new thematic element, and reflects that the ballad maker was accepting enough of new technology to include it within the song text. Just as the ballad called *John Henry* made legendary the image of the “steel-drivin’ man,”<sup>377</sup> the lyrics of *Lula Viers* point to South’s relationship with the railroad industry. As Jon Finson notes of technology’s appearance in ballads, songs with transportation present in their texts represent an “appreciation of the inherent properties of machines,” and “the benefits accruing to society from the workings of technology.”<sup>378</sup> Indeed, Lula’s mother makes use of new transportation modes to identify her daughter’s body in stanza 18:

She boarded a train for Ironton,  
And arrived right at the place.  
It was in a morgue so drear,  
She looked on her child’s face.

Moreover, the ballad depicts John Coyer’s use of industry and technology to seal Lula’s fate in stanza 8:

She threw her arms around him,  
Before him she did kneel.  
Around her waist he tied  
A piece of railroad steel.

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<sup>377</sup> Thomas, *Ballad Makin'*, 120.

<sup>378</sup> Finson, *Voices That Are Gone*, 133.

By using a piece of railroad steel to kill his pregnant lover, Coyer symbolically represents a Victorian-patriarchal illustration of power and dominance; he uses technology to respond to Lula's embodiment of modern sexual ideologies, effectively impaling her upon her own sword. In a depiction of the ultimate double standard, Coyer then escapes via the same technology he used to silence Lula in stanza 10:

He hastened to the depot,  
And boarded a train for home,  
Thinking that his cruel crime  
Never would be known.

*Lula Viers* also includes the use of telegrams or telephones. The growing appearance of such technology in the later murder ballads attests to Appalachia's welcoming response to technology. The song texts depict Lula's mother clearly using a form of the telegraph to confirm her daughter's death, as in stanza 18:

Saying, "I will send a message,  
Or, I will go and see,  
If it is my daughter, oh!  
It surely cannot be."

As Tom Standage affirms, "during Queen Victoria's reign, a new communication technology was developed that allowed people to communicate almost instantly across great distances, in effect shrinking the world faster and further than ever before."<sup>379</sup> Like all new technologies, reception was divided among those who favor change and those who do not. In this way, the later murder ballads confirm that Appalachia was, at least partially, open to the advent of modernization in the mountains.

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<sup>379</sup> Tom Standage, *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century's On-Line Pioneers* (New York: Walker Publishing Company, 1998), xiii.

Notably, while the women in supporting or secondary roles are users of new technology (Pearl's sister and Lula's mother, respectively), the female murder victims themselves are never so sophisticatedly portrayed; the mechanisms of the classic murder ballad and the stock character stereotype of the "Murdered Girl" make it impossible for the sweethearts to save or aid themselves via technology. I read this phenomenon as illustrative of women's progressive use of modern devices. Such use demonstrates a shift from their passivity and place solely within the "private sphere" to assertive members of society, intent on bringing justice to women who have been silenced by men.

Finally, I find the striking appearance of the military and masculine hegemony interesting in *Lula Viers*. As established from the historical facts of the case, John Coyer reportedly joined the army in order to escape the repercussions of murdering his pregnant lover. However, we know that he was arrested in his escape attempts and sent to prison, until an army officer mysteriously came to his aid. While I cannot conjecture as to the means by which the officer was able to free John Coyer, I find this development useful for a final comment about the male lover-murderers. As the last stanza of *Lula Viers* reads:

Soon an army officer came,  
And took him off to France.  
John Coyer never went to trial,  
Nor sought to clear his name.

Though the criminals of the murder ballads, *The Murder of Laura Foster* and *Pearl Bryan*, are rightfully brought to justice (Tom Dula was hanged, as were Scott Jackson and his accomplice, Alonzo Walling), the murderer of Lula Viers—John Coyer—escapes his legal comeuppance, much like John Lewis does in killing Naomi Wise. However, as we have seen, the murder ballads still wish to see justice done to criminals. In *Omie Wise*,

the text depicts John Lewis as left to dwell in jail while we know that he did not. Within the text of *Lula Viers*, John Coyer is not brought to justice, and the ballad tells us that he is carried off to France. According to Underwood and Ray, “John Coyer was indeed removed from the Pike County jail and taken off to fight in France. Supposedly no one in Coyer’s family knew where he went after the war.”<sup>380</sup>

However, one must consider that John Coyer’s enlistment in the Army, and subsequent deployment to France, would position him as a participant in World War I. In this way, it may be read that John Coyer, unlike John Lewis, truly did suffer a death equally as brutal as the one he inflicted upon Lula Viers. However, I believe we must take this part of the story one step further.

Though John Coyer may have been killed in World War I, I argue that he ultimately dies on masculine terms—a patriotic hero’s death instead of a criminal’s execution—thus, a true depiction of masculinity. Additionally, John Coyer’s escape from formal prosecution speaks to the cultural legitimization of violence against women. As Diana Russell and Jane Caputi assert, in a sexist society, “psychotics as well as so-called normals frequently act out the ubiquitous misogynist attitudes they repeatedly see legitimized.”<sup>381</sup> In turn, *Lula Viers* clearly illustrates that while a shift away from Victorian beliefs and ideologies was taking hold in Appalachia, women were still expected to be pure and chaste while men were free to assert their autonomy and masculinity.

## Conclusions

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<sup>380</sup> Underwood and Ray, “The Sad, Sad Story of Lula Viers,” 267.

<sup>381</sup> Russell and Caputi, “Femicide,” 35.

The fatal stories of Naomi, Laura, Pearl, Nell and Lula together represent an entire century's shifting ideologies in historical southern Appalachia. Each of their deaths speaks to some facet of a historical cultural code that represses women's freedoms and sexualities. Naomi, Pearl, and Lula were pregnant young women murdered for the sake of their male lover's reputations, laid at the mercy of his social agenda. Laura must die for the disease she may or may not have spread; regardless of who actually carried and passed syphilis; Laura Foster becomes the easy scapegoat, the sexually promiscuous girl that her lover thought no one would miss. The ballads' conscious choice to depict only certain historical truths of the murders points to Jenkins' assertion that the emphasis on meaning over fact and the subjection of the murdered sweetheart to "an overarching cultural perspective is what gives traditional music a special, regenerative quality in shaping community identities and values."<sup>382</sup> Nell mysteriously disappears, presumably murdered by her lover whose existence is defined by his place below hers on the socioeconomic ladder. Thus, the unwavering lyrical depiction of the sweethearts' helpless deaths couches the murder ballad genre firmly in patriarchal ideals.

In essence, the faithful depiction of passive, submissive women brutalized by men as punishment for what society interprets as unruly behavior speaks to the overt misogyny of historical southern culture. While this aspect remains in the preservation and popularity of these songs that depict such hostility toward women, the ballads also demonstrate significant change. The mechanisms of the murder ballads depict the transformation of Appalachian culture. As Jenkins states, the songs illustrate "how historical facts fade, shift, and adapt to different local experiences, and yet still serve the

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<sup>382</sup> David Jenkins, "Common Law, Mountain Music, and the Construction of Community Identity," *Social & Legal Studies* 19 (2010): 359.

original purpose of transmitting common cultural values.”<sup>383</sup> Over the time span of the genre, we see Appalachia’s acceptance and utilization of various technologies and modernisms, namely in the form of trains, telephones, printed media, and innovations in the science of forensic investigation. Moreover, we begin to see a change in women’s place in society—a place that begins to move outside the confines of the private world of the home, and into the public sphere. The initiative taken by the women in supporting roles illustrates the ballads’ acknowledgement of emerging feminist ideologies where these women seek justice for their sisters and daughters who have been silenced by men.

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<sup>383</sup> Ibid., 358.

## CHAPTER V

I began my graduate research with a desire to study Celtic ballads; I was drawn to the idea of connecting my Scottish heritage with the music of everyday people. While I myself am a classically trained musician, I equally love the music of traditional and popular Americana. For me, the genre will continue to bring back memories of family vacations with my mom, who always had a CD of Pete Seeger and Arlo Guthrie at the ready for our long car trips across the country. In discovering the historical Appalachian murder ballads, and the American canon of folksong in general, I discovered the flaws in my own perceptions. In my research, I have found that the musical link between English and American cultures has been fashioned more out of the national agendas of the early ballad scholars than by demonstrable fact. While the English, Scotch-Irish, and Germans certainly did bring their tradition of balladry with them in settling the Appalachian Mountains, their song lyrics clearly depict a new cultural idiom where central themes and elements inherent to British songs are eliminated in favor of distinctly American concerns.

The striking nature of the Appalachian murder ballads speaks to their continued popularity as a genre for scholarly study and debate. My own lyrical analysis of the murder ballads stemmed from a fascination with their paradoxical natures. Indeed, there is no mistaking that the haunting texts are sorrowful over the fate of fallen innocence while they simultaneously depict overt misogyny toward sexually active young women. The songs have undoubtedly served their cultural purpose as moral cautionary tales designed to warn young women of the danger inherent in losing one's virtue. Thus, the

songs witness the gendered hierarchy of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Appalachia well—a region that I have illustrated as richly nuanced and rooted in a sophisticated construction of patriarchy.

Yet there is no denying that popular consciousness still conceives of Appalachia as an isolated and ignorant culture. Films like *Deliverance* and *O, Brother Where Art Thou?* continue such depictions, building on the popularity first achieved by television programs such as *The Beverly Hillbillies* and *Green Acres*; news stories covering the occasional deaths associated with religious snake handling rituals seem to confirm the idea that Appalachia is indeed a very strange and backwards place. As Chapter Two demonstrates, sophisticates have long been interested in “helping” the mountaineers to join the pace of modern America by infiltrating the mountains with their many cultural projects. The settlement school phenomenon and the work of those such as Olive Dame Campbell, Maud Karpeles, and turn-of-the-century Berea college president William Goodell Frost attest to the desire to modernize the mountaineers.

Meanwhile, the work of Appalachian ballad scholars spans more than an entire century of efforts to collect, classify, and shelve the mountain songs in accordance with positivist ideologies. I have argued that restricting these songs to rigid categories does not serve the ballads well nor provide for any explicit understanding of folk music. In fact, the desire to connect and affirm the relatedness of all ballads, particularly as variations on a British cultural theme, has impeded an understanding of the songs where their places in numerous anthologies on dusty library shelves leave the ballad enthusiast wanting. Though I am indebted to scholars such as Malcolm Laws, Louise Pound, Arthur Hudson and Olive Woolley Burt for their efforts to collect as many texts as possible, I recognize

that the need to *contextualize* the ballads must be at the heart of contemporary research in this field.

I have shown that the ballad scholars desired to affirm that America contained as pure a peasantry in the protected realm of Appalachia as did the English of the folk cultures reified by Francis Child. In doing so, workers such as Cecil Sharp missed the true significance of the Appalachian ballads. Using the 19<sup>th</sup>-century murder ballads and their depiction of the region's gender code as my vehicle of study, I have demonstrated that a close reading of the song texts reveals Appalachia as—in ideology—just as connected to American culture as any other region of the country. As Henrietta Yurchenco affirms, “change *has* come to the mountains, as elsewhere, through advances in communication, migration, and economic and political events.”<sup>384</sup> The murder ballads exemplify this change as their texts shift over more than a century of history and depict the use of new technologies and modern ideologies, namely trains, telegraphs, forensic crime investigation, and the emergence of a feminine voice and agency demonstrated in the supporting characters of the murder victims' mothers and sisters.

The murder ballads witness, in their illustrations of violence against women and depictions of the cultural stigma surrounding 19<sup>th</sup>-century feminine sexuality, that Appalachia was just as modern as Victorian America. Where the American nation repressed women's sexuality, there also did Appalachia. Though it is perhaps easy for the modern reader to dismiss Victorianism as antiquated, misogynist, and archaic, in reality, its ideologies were the epitome of 19<sup>th</sup>-century cutting-edge culture. That Appalachians

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<sup>384</sup> Yurchenco, "Trouble in the Mines," 211.

used these ideals in the composition of their ballads speaks to the region's connection (and desire to be connected) with the industrializing nation around its borders.

A historical contextualization of the murdered-girl ballads, such as the one I have provided here, fills a gap in balladry research that has not yet attempted to interpret the texts and read Appalachian culture from a feminist approach. Though countless essays have investigated the origins and circulation patterns of the ballads, surmised an explanation for the ballads' continued popularity, or commented on the connected plot themes of the songs, my study reveals the sophisticated, patriarchal, and modernized nature of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Appalachia, effectively refuting the idea of Appalachia as culturally isolated and backward, through historical evidence and critical analysis. In doing so, my research project provides the opportunity for future studies that address the songs within performative contexts. Building upon my foundational evidence, future studies of this nature would strengthen the work of feminist scholars such as Lydia Hamessley, whose research seeks to answer why women ballad performers continue to sing the murder ballads given their misogynistic overtones.<sup>385</sup>

Though perhaps not as widely known as they were in the 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-centuries, the murder ballads continue to remain significant to American culture. Not long ago, as I was speaking with a fellow Americanist scholar, I was asked to defend my reasons for choosing the murder ballads, which seem so antiquated. My response to such a question is that violence against women continues to weigh heavily in the minds of Americans just as much as it remains the living reality of many women. Though without

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<sup>385</sup> See Lydia Hamessley, "A Resisting Performance of an Appalachian Traditional Murder Ballad: Giving Voice to 'Pretty Polly'," *Women & Music--A Journal of Gender and Culture* 9 (2005), 13-36.

a ballad to preserve her story, the 2002 murder of seven-months-pregnant Laci Peterson remains vivid in my mind, whose headless body was found in a canal near Point Isabel Regional Shoreline in Richmond, California. Moreover, modern pop music and rap culture continues to glorify violence against women, readily evident in songs such as Eminem and Rhianna's 2010 *Love the Way You Lie*, which topped the *Billboard 200* during its premiere:

I'm tired of the games, I just want her back, I know I'm a liar  
If she ever tries to [expletive] leave again, I'ma tie her to the bed  
And set this house on fire.

Just gonna stand there and watch me burn  
Well that's alright because I like the way it hurts  
Just gonna stand there and hear me cry  
Well that's alright because I love the way you lie.<sup>386</sup>

The prevalence of violence against women in song lyrics continues to increase; its popularity as a compositional theme attests to the reality that misogyny is alive and well in American culture. As Diana Russell and Jane Caputi agree, the

Escalation of violence against females [is] part of a male backlash against feminism. This doesn't mean it's the *fault* of feminism: patriarchal culture terrorizes women whether we fight back or not. Still, when male supremacy is challenged, that terror is intensified.<sup>387</sup>

If we seek to understand how misogyny circulates in our culture, we must look at the forums through which it finds preservation. Though certainly problematic, the glamorization of domestic violence is not solely a contemporary dilemma housed by the mass popularity of current musical genres. Instead, the phenomenon comes to us much earlier in time, as captured in the seemingly unlikely vessel of Appalachian murder

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<sup>386</sup> P!nk Eminem, Lil Wayne, and Rihanna, *Recovery* (Santa Monica, CA: Aftermath Records, 2010).

<sup>387</sup> Russell and Caputi, "Femicide," 36.

ballads. Thus the relevance of the murder ballads validates studying the cultural codes of those living in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Appalachian mountains—a complex culture that foregrounds the modern social issues of violence against women prevalent in 21<sup>st</sup>-century American music and society.

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Appendix I<sup>388</sup>  
**The Wexford/Oxford Girl**

The Wexford Girl

- |   |                                                                                                                                     |     |
|---|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1 | Young men and maidens all give ear,<br>Unto what I shall now relate;<br>O mark you well, and you shall hear,<br>Of my unhappy fate. | 1.4 |
| 2 | Near famous Oxford Town,<br>I first did draw my Breath,<br>Oh! That I had been cast away<br>In an untimely Birth.                   | 2.4 |
| 3 | My tender parents brought me up,<br>Provided for me well.<br>And in the town of Wittam then,<br>They plac'd me in a Mill.           | 3.4 |
| 4 | By chance upon an Oxford Lass,<br>I cast a wanton Eye,<br>And promised I would Marry her,<br>If she would with me lie.              | 4.4 |
| 5 | But to the World I do declare,<br>With sorrow, grief, and woe:<br>This folly brought us in a snare,<br>And wrought our overthrow.   | 5.4 |
| 6 | For the damsel came to me and said<br>By you I am with Child:<br>I hope dear John, you'll marry me,<br>For you have me defil'd.     | 6.4 |
| 7 | Soon after that, her mother came,<br>As you shall understand,<br>And oftentimes did me persuade<br>To wed her out of hand.          | 7.4 |
| 8 | And thus perplex'd on every side,<br>I could not comfort find:<br>So to make.....Creature,                                          |     |

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<sup>388</sup> Laws, *American Balladry from British Broadsides*, 267.

|    |                                                                                                                                      |      |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
|    |                                                                                                                                      | 177  |
|    | A thought came in.....                                                                                                               | 8.4  |
| 9  | About a month before Christmas last,<br>Oh! Cursed be the Day,<br>The Devil then did me persuade,<br>To take her Life away.          | 9.4  |
| 10 | I call'd her from her Sister's Door,<br>At eight o'Clock at Night:<br>Poor Creature she did little dream,<br>I ow'd her any spight.  | 10.4 |
| 11 | I told her, if she'd walk with me,<br>A side a little way:<br>We both together would agree,<br>About our Wedding-day.                | 11.4 |
| 12 | Thus I deluded her again,<br>Into a private Place:<br>Then took a Stick out of the Hedge,<br>And struck her in the Face.             | 12.4 |
| 13 | But she fell on her bended Knee,<br>And did for Mercy cry,<br>For Heaven's sake don't murder me,<br>I am not fit to die.             | 13.4 |
| 14 | But I on her no pity took,<br>But wounded her full sore,<br>Until her Life away I took,<br>Which I can never restore.                | 14.4 |
| 15 | With many grievous Shrieks and Cries,<br>She did resign her Breath,<br>And in inhuman and barbarous sort,<br>I put my Love to death. | 15.4 |
| 16 | And then I took her by the hair,<br>To cover this foul sin:<br>And drag'd her to the River side,<br>Then Threw her body in.          | 16.4 |
| 17 | Thus in the blood of innocence,<br>My hands were deeply dy'd,<br>And shined in her purple gore,<br>That should have been my Bride.   | 17.4 |

- 18                    Then home unto my Mill I ran,  
                          But sorely was amaz'd,  
 My man he thought I had mischief done,  
                          And strangely on me gaz'd.                    18.4
- 19                    Oh! What's the matter then said he?  
                          You look as pale as death:  
 What make you shake and tremble so,  
                          As though you had lost your Breath.                    19.4
- 20                    How came you by that Blood upon  
                          Your trembling Hand and Cloaths?  
                          I presently to him reply'd  
                          By bleeding at the Nose.                    20.4
- 21                    I wishfully upon him look'd,  
                          But little to him said,  
 But snatched the Candle from his Hand,  
                          And went unto my Bed.                    21.4
- 22                    Where I lay trembling all the Night,  
                          For I could take no rest,  
 And perfect Flame of Hell did Flash,  
                          Within my guilty Face.                    22.4
- 23                    Next day the Damsel being miss'd,  
                          And no where to be found,  
                          Then I was apprehended soon,  
                          And to the Assizes bound.                    23.4
- 24                    Her Sister did against me swear,  
                          She reason had no doubt,  
                          That I had made away with her,  
                          Because I call'd her out.                    24.4
- 25                    But Satan did me still persuade,  
                          I stifly should deny:  
 Quoth he, there is no witness can,  
                          Against thee Testify.                    25.4
- 26                    Now when her Mother did her cry,  
                          I scoffingly did say,  
                          On purpose then to frighten me,  
                          She sent her Child away.                    26.4

- 27 I publish'd in the Post-boy then,  
My Wickedness to blind,  
Five Guineas any one should have,  
That could her Body find. 27.4
- 28 But Heaven had a watchful eye,  
And brought it so about:  
That though I stifly did deny,  
This Murder would come out, 28.4
- 29 The very day before, the Assize,  
Her Body was found,  
Floating before her Father's door,  
At *Hendly* Ferry Town, 29.4
- 30 So the second Time I was seiz'd,  
To *Oxford* brought with speed,  
And there examined again,  
About the bloody deed. 30.4
- 31 Now the Coroner and Jury both  
Together did agree,  
That this Damsel was made away,  
And murdered by me. 31.4
- 32 The Justice too perceiv'd the guilt,  
Nor longer would take bail:  
But the next Morning I was sent  
Away to *Reading* Goal. 32.4
- 33 When I was brought before the Judge,  
My Man did testify,  
That Blood upon my Hands and Cloaths,  
That Night he did espy. 33.4
- 34 The Judge he told the Jury then,  
The Circumstance is plain,  
Look on the Prisoner at the Bar,  
He hath this Creature slain. 34.4
- 35 About the Murder at the first,  
The Jury did divide:  
But when they brought their Verdict in,  
All of them Guilty cry'd. 35.4
- 36 The Jailor took and bound me straight,

- As soon as I was cast:  
And then within the Prison strong  
He there did lay me fast: 36.4
- 37 With Fetter strong then I was bound,  
And shin-bolted was I,  
Yet I the Murder would not own,  
But still did it deny. 37.4
- 38 My father did on me Prevail,  
My kindred all likewise,  
To own the Murder, which I did  
To them with watery Eyes. 38.4
- 39 My Father he then did me blame,  
Saying, my Son, oh! Why  
Have you thus brought yourself to shame,  
And all you Family 39.4
- 40 Father, I own the Crime I did,  
I guilty am indeed,  
Which cruel fact I must confess,  
Doth make my heart to bleed. 40.4
- 41 The worst of Deaths I do deserve,  
My crime it is so base:  
For I no mercy shew'd to her,  
Most wretched is my case. 41.4
- 42 Lord grant me grace while I do stay:  
That I may now repent:  
Before I from this wicked world,  
Most shamefully am sent. 42.4
- 43 Young men take warning by my fall:  
All filthy lusts defy;  
By giving way to wickedness,  
Alas! This Day I die. 43.4
- 44 Lord, wash my hateful Sins away,  
Which have been manifold,  
Have mercy on me I thee pray,  
And Christ receive my Soul. 44.4

Appendix II<sup>389</sup>  
**The Knoxville Girl**

- |   |                                                                                                                                              |     |
|---|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1 | I met a little girl in Knoxville,<br>A town we all know well.<br>And every Sunday evening,<br>Out in her home I'd dwell.                     | 1.4 |
| 2 | We went to take an evening walk,<br>About a mile from town.<br>I picked a stick up off the ground,<br>And knocked that fair girl down.       | 2.4 |
| 3 | She fell down on her bended knee,<br>For mercy she did cry:<br>Saying "Willie dear, don't kill me here!<br>I'm unprepared to die!"           | 3.4 |
| 4 | She never spoke another word,<br>I only beat her more.<br>Until the ground around me,<br>Within her blood did flow.                          | 4.4 |
| 5 | I took her by her golden curls;<br>I drug her 'round and 'round,<br>Throwing her into the river<br>That flows through Knoxville town.        | 5.4 |
| 6 | "Go down, go down, you Knoxville girl,<br>With dark and roving eyes;<br>Go down, go down, you Knoxville girl,<br>You can never be my bride." | 6.4 |
| 7 | I started back for Knoxville,<br>Got there about midnight.<br>My mother, she was worried<br>And woke up in a fright,                         | 7.4 |
| 8 | Saying, "Dear son, what have you done<br>To bloody your clothes so?"                                                                         |     |

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<sup>389</sup> Laws does not provide a ballad text of *The Knoxville Girl*, instead he merely lists it as related to *The Wexford/Oxford Girl*. The lyrics for *The Knoxville Girl* provided in this thesis are transcribed from the 1956 recording of the ballad sung by The Louvin Brothers, released on their Capitol Records album entitled, *Tragic Songs of Life*.

- I told my anxious mother  
I was bleeding at my nose. 8.4
- 9 I called for me a candle  
To light my way to bed.  
I called for me a handkerchief  
To bind my aching head. 9.4
- 10 I rolled and tumbled the whole night through,  
As trouble was for me.  
Black flames of Hell around my bed  
And in my eyes could see. 10.4
- 11 They took me down to Knoxville jail  
And put me in a cell.  
My friends all tried to get me out,  
But none could go my bail. 11.4
- 12 I'm here to waste my life away,  
Down in this dirty old jail,  
Because I murdered that Knoxville girl,  
The girl I loved so well. 12.4

Appendix III<sup>390</sup>  
**The Cruel Ship's Carpenter/The Gosport Tragedy**

The Cruel Ship's Carpenter

- |   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |     |
|---|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1 | In fair Worcester town and in fair Worcestershire,<br>A beautiful damsel she once lived there.<br>A young man he courted her all for to be his dear,<br>And he by his trade was a ship's carpenter.                      | 1.4 |
| 2 | Early one morning before it was day,<br>He went to his Polly, these words he did say:<br>'O Polly, O Polly, you must go with me,<br>Before we are married my friends for to see.'                                        | 2.4 |
| 3 | He led her through woods and valleys so deep,<br>Which caused this poor maiden to sigh and to weep:<br>'O Billy, O Billy, you have led me astray<br>On purpose my innocent life to betray.                               | 3.4 |
| 4 | 'O Billy, O Billy, Oh pardon my life,<br>I never will covet for to be your wife;<br>I'll travel the whole world to set myself free,<br>If you will pardon my baby and me.'                                               | 4.4 |
| 5 | 'There's no time for pardon, there's no time to save,<br>For all night long I've been digging your grave.<br>Your grave is now open and the spade is standing by';<br>Which caused this young damsel to weep and to cry. | 5.4 |
| 6 | He covered her up so safe and secure,<br>Thinking no one could find her, he was sure.<br>Then he went on bard to sail the world round,<br>Before the murder could ever be found.                                         | 6.4 |
| 7 | Early one morning before it was day,<br>The captain he came up and these words he did say:<br>'There's a murderer on board and he must be known.<br>Our ship is in mourning, we cannot sail on.'                         | 7.4 |
| 8 | Then up steps the first man, 'I'm sure it's not me';                                                                                                                                                                     |     |

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<sup>390</sup> As Laws does not provide any full text of either song, the lyrics herein come from The Roud Folk Song Index, maintained by The English Folk Dance and Song Society. This ballad text in the database is found under Roud number 15.

Then up steps the second, 'I'm sure it's not me';  
Then up steps bold William to stamp and to swear:  
    'I'm sure it's not me sir. I vow and declare.'

8.4

9

Now as he was turning from captain with speed,  
He met with his Polly, which made his heart bleed.  
She ripped him and tore him, she tore him in three,  
    Because that he murdered her baby and she.

9.4

Appendix IV<sup>391</sup>**Pretty Polly**

- 1            Pretty Polly, pretty Polly, come go with me,  
              Before we get married, some friends to see;  
              Pretty Polly, pretty Polly, come go with me,  
              Before we get married, some friends to see.”
- 2            They rode o’er hills and valleys so deep;  
              At last pretty Polly began to weep.  
              They rode o’er hills and valleys so deep;  
              At last pretty Polly began to weep.
- 3            They rode a piece further to see what they could spy;  
              They saw a grave dug and a spade lying nigh.  
              They rode a piece further to see what they could spy;  
              They saw a grave dug and a spade lying nigh.
- 4            She threw her arms around him and suffered no fear,  
Saying “how could you kill a girl who loves you so dear?”  
              She threw her arms around him and suffered no fear,  
Saying “how could you kill a girl who loves you so dear?”
- 5            He drew a sharp knife, and the blood it did flow;  
              And down in this grave pretty Polly must go.  
              He drew a sharp knife, and the blood it did flow;  
              And down in this grave pretty Polly must go.
- 6            He threw some dirt over in time to get home,  
              And left nothing behind but the birds to mourn;  
              He threw some dirt over in time to get home,  
              And left nothing behind but the birds to mourn.
- 7            Now, ladies and gentlemen, I’ll bid you goodnight;  
              All raving distracted, he died the same night.  
              Now ladies and gentlemen, I’ll bid you goodnight;  
              All raving distracted he died the same night.

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<sup>391</sup> These lyrics, for which Laws does not provide except in fragments, are from Brewster, *Ballads and Songs of Indiana*, 298. Brewster notes that this song was “contributed by Mr. Elmo Davis. Obtained from his grandmother, Mrs. William Davis, of Oakland City, Indiana. January 8, 1935

Appendix V<sup>392</sup>  
**The Jealous Lover**

|   |                                                                                                                                |     |
|---|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1 | Deep, deep in yonder valley<br>Where the violets always bloom,<br>There sleeps my own Florella,<br>So silent in the tomb.      | 1.4 |
| 2 | She died not broken-hearted<br>While living in this dell,<br>But by an instant parting<br>From the one she loved so well.      | 2.4 |
| 3 | One night the moon shone brightly,<br>The stars were shining too.<br>Up to her cottage window<br>Her jealous lover drew.       | 3.4 |
| 4 | “Come, love, and let us wander<br>Here in these woods; alone<br>And free from all disturbance,<br>We’ll name our wedding day.” | 4.4 |
| 5 | Deep, deep into the forest<br>He led his love so dear.<br>Said he, “it’s for you only<br>That I have brought you here.”        | 5.4 |
| 6 | “The way grows dark and dreary,<br>And I’m afraid to roam,<br>Since roaming is so dreary,<br>And will retrace me home.”        | 6.4 |
| 7 | “Retrace you home! No, never!<br>Here in these woods you roam,<br>You bid farewell forever<br>To parents, friends, and home.   | 7.4 |
| 8 | “Here in these woods I have you,<br>From me you cannot fly;<br>No human arms can take you—<br>Florella, you must die.”         | 8.4 |

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<sup>392</sup> Hudson, *Folkongs of Mississippi*, 185-86.



Appendix VI<sup>393</sup>  
**On The Banks of The Ohio/ The Banks of the Old Pedee**

- |   |                                                                                                                                              |     |
|---|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1 | I asked my love to take a walk<br>Just to be alone with me,<br>And as we walked we'd have a talk<br>About our wedding day to be              | 1.4 |
| 2 | Darling, say that you'll be mine<br>In no other arms I you find<br>Down beside dark waters flow<br>On the banks of the Ohio.                 | 2.4 |
| 3 | I asked your mother for you, dear,<br>And she said you were too young;<br>Only say that you'll be mine;<br>Happiness in my home you'll find. | 3.4 |
| 4 | I drew a knife across her breast;<br>In my arms she dearly pressed,<br>Crying, "Oh, please don't murder me<br>For I'm unprepared to die."    | 4.4 |
| 5 | I took her by her pale white hand,<br>Led her to the river brink;<br>There I threw her in to drown,<br>Stood and watched her float on down.  | 5.4 |
| 6 | Going home between twelve and one,<br>Thinking of the deed I'd done,<br>I murdered the only girl I loved<br>Because she would not marry me.  |     |

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<sup>393</sup> Mellinger Edward Henry, *Folk-Songs from the Southern Highlands* (New York City: J.J. Augustin Publisher, 1938), 220. Henry states that he obtained this text "from Miss Cora Clark, Crossnore, Avery County, North Carolina, July 13, 1929.

Appendix VII<sup>394</sup>**Omie Wise**

- 1        Oh, listen to my story, I'll tell you no lies,  
How John Lewis did murder poor little Omie Wise.
- 2        He told her to meet him at Adams's Springs.  
He promised her money and other fine things.
- 3        So, fool-like she met him at Adams's Springs.  
No money he brought her nor other fine things.
- 4        "Go with me, little Omie, and away we will go.  
We'll go and get married and no one will know."
- 5        She climbed up behind him and away they did go,  
But off to the river where deep waters flow.
- 6        "John Lewis, John Lewis, will you tell me your mind?  
Do you intend to marry me or leave me behind?"
- 7        "Little Omie, little Omie, I'll tell you my mind.  
My mind is to drown you and leave you behind."
- 8        "Have mercy on my baby and spare me my life,  
I'll go home as a beggar and never be your wife."
- 9        He kissed her and hugged her and turned her around,  
Then pushed her in deep waters where he knew that she would drown.
- 10       He got on his pony and away he did ride,  
As the screams of little Omie went down by his side.
- 11       T'was on a Thursday morning, the rain was pouring down,  
When the people searched for Omie but she could not be found.
- 12       Two boys went a-fishin' one fine summer day,  
And saw little Omie's body go floating away.
- 13       They threw their net around her and drew her to the bank.  
Her clothes all wet and muddy, they laid her on a plank.

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<sup>394</sup> Laws does not provide a full text for this murder ballad. These lyrics have been transcribed from a recording performed by Doc Watson on the Vanguard Records Album, *The Best of Doc Watson 1964-1968*, released in 1999.

- 14        Then sent for John Lewis to come to that place --  
            And brought her out before him so that he might see her face.
- 15        He made no confession but they carried him to jail,  
            No friends or relations would go on his bail.

Appendix VIII<sup>395</sup>  
**The Murder of Laura Foster**

- |   |                                                                                                                                                                         |     |
|---|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1 | A tragedy I now relate<br>'Tis of poor Laura Foster's fate—<br>How by a fickle lover she<br>Was hurried to eternity.                                                    | 1.4 |
| 2 | On Thursday morn at early dawn,<br>To meet her doom she hurried on,<br>When soon she thought a bride to be,<br>Which filled her heart with ecstasy.                     | 2.4 |
| 3 | Her youthful heart no sorrow knew;<br>She fancied all mankind was true,<br>And thus she gaily passed along<br>Humming at time a favorite song.                          | 3.4 |
| 4 | As eve declined toward the West,<br>She met her groom and his vile guest.<br>In forest wild the three retreat;<br>She looked for person there to meet.                  | 4.4 |
| 5 | Soon night came on, with darkness drear,<br>But while poor Laura felt no fear,<br>She tho't her lover kind and true,<br>Believed that he'd protect her too.             | 5.4 |
| 6 | Confidingly upon his breast<br>She leaned her head to take some rest,<br>But soon poor Laura felt a smart,<br>A deadly dagger pierced her heart.                        | 6.4 |
| 7 | No shrieks were heard by neighbors 'round,<br>Who were in bed and sleeping sound.<br>None heard those shrieks so loud and shrill<br>Save those who did poor Laura kill. | 7.4 |
| 8 | This murder done, they her conceal<br>And vowed they'd never it reveal.<br>To dig the grave they now process,<br>But in the dark they made no speed.                    | 8.4 |

The dawn appeared, the grave not done,

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<sup>395</sup> Brown, *The Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore*, 707-10.



The inquest held, this lifeless maid  
Was there into her coffin laid.

18.4

19

The jury made the verdict plain:  
'Twas that poor Laura had been slain;  
Some ruthless friend had struck the blow  
That laid poor Laura Foster low.

19.4

20

Then in the church yard her they lay,  
No more to rise 'til Judgment Day;  
Then robed in white we trust she'll rise  
To meet her savior in the skies.

20.4

Appendix VIII-A<sup>396</sup>**Tom Dula**

(Also known as “Tom Dooley,” or “The Ballad of Tom Dooley”)

- |          |                                                                                                                               |     |
|----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| <b>1</b> | Hand down your head Tom Dula,<br>Hang down your head and cry;<br>You killed poor Laura Foster<br>And now you're bound to die. | 1.4 |
| <b>2</b> | You met her on the hill-top,<br>And God Almighty knows,<br>You met her on the hill-top<br>And there you hid your clothes.     | 2.4 |
| <b>3</b> | You met her on the hill-top,<br>You said she'd be your wife,<br>You met her on the hill-top<br>And there you took her life.   | 3.4 |

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<sup>396</sup> Ibid., 712. This ballad has achieved greater fame than *The Murder of Laura Foster*, and is supplied here to connect my discussion of Tom Dula and his murder of his girlfriend, Laura Foster.

Appendix IX<sup>397</sup>  
**Pearl Bryan**

- 1                   It was one winter evening  
                   The sorrowful tale was told  
                   Scott Jackson said to Walling  
                   Let's take Pearl for a stroll;  
                   Oh, soon the cab was ordered,  
                   To go out for a stroll  
                   And if you will only listen  
                   The half has never been told.
  
- 2                   Pearl went to Cincinnati  
                   She'd never been there before  
                   She said to Sweetheart Jackson  
                   I'll never see Mama no more  
                   She said to Sweetheart Jackson  
                   Why do you want to take my life?  
                   You know I've always loved you  
                   And would have been your wife.
  
- 3                   Little did Pearl think  
                   When she left her home that day  
                   That the little grip she carried  
                   Would hide her head away  
                   There's room for your name in my album  
                   There's room for your love in my heart  
                   There's room for us both in Heaven,  
                   Where true lovers never part.
  
- 4                   Oh, then some bloodhounds were ordered  
                   They found no trail, they said  
                   Here lies a woman's body  
                   But we can't find no head;  
                   They telephoned for miles around  
                   At last an answer came;  
                   It was from Pearl Bryan's sister  
                   It must be Pearl that's slain.
  
- 5                   In came Pearl Bryan's sister

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<sup>397</sup> Cohen, *Poor Pearl, Poor Girl! The Murdered-Girl Stereotype in Ballad and Newspaper*, 65-66. Cohen states that, "it is the contention of this study that there are, or were, at least six Pearl Bryan ballads in oral tradition." I have selected a text that Cohen classifies as Pearl Bryan V, and Laws as Pearl Bryan III, found in Laws, *Native American Balladry: A Descriptive Study and a Bibliographical Syllabus*, 193.

Falling on her knees  
A-leading to Scott Jackson  
For sister's head—oh, please!  
But Jackson was so stubborn,  
A naughty word he said;  
When you meet Pearl in Heaven  
You'll find her missing head.

6                    In came Walling's mother  
                      A-pleading for her son  
                      A-saying to the jury  
It's the first crime they ever done;  
                      Oh send him not to prison,  
'Twould break my poor old heart  
                      My son's my darling one,  
                      How from him can I part?

7                    The jury soon decided  
                      And from their seat they spring;  
For the crime the boys committed  
                      They both now must be hung;  
                      On January the thirty-first  
                      This awful crime was done  
Scott Jackson and Alonzo Walling  
                      Together they were hung.

8                    Oh, boys and girls, take warning,  
                      Before it is too late;  
The worst crime ever committed  
                      In old Kentucky State.

Appendix X<sup>398</sup>  
**Nell Cropsey**

|   |                                                                                                                 |     |
|---|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1 | Oh, swift flowing river,<br>A secret you hold,<br>Way down in the depths—<br>Of the water so cold.              | 1.4 |
| 2 | Won't you stop for a while,<br>As onward you flow,<br>And tell us, Oh River,<br>The secret you know?            | 2.4 |
| 3 | And you oft have whispered<br>In your ceaseless rounds,<br>From the Dismal Swamp<br>To your home in the Sound.  | 3.4 |
| 4 | Won't you stop for a while,<br>As onward you flow,<br>And tell us, Oh River,<br>The things that you know        | 4.4 |
| 5 | The fair girl whose story<br>So sad has been told,<br>Stole away in the night<br>Like a lamb from the fold.     | 5.4 |
| 6 | The treacherous hand dealt<br>The villaineous blow<br>That secret, Oh River,<br>You surely must know.           | 6.4 |
| 7 | Did you take her dear from<br>In your tender embrace?<br>Did you stoop low and kiss<br>Her beautiful face?      | 7.4 |
| 8 | Did you sing sweet lullabies<br>Down in the deep,<br>While the billowly waves<br>Rocked the loved one to sleep? | 8.4 |

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<sup>398</sup> Chappell, *Folk-Songs of Roanoke and the Albemarle*, 110. This ballad, according to Chappell, was “composed apparently during the period between the disappearance of the girl and the discovery of her body in the Pasquotank River.

**9**

Rocked softly to sleep  
To awaken no more,  
'Til dawn of the light  
On eternity's shore.

9.4

**10**

Won't you stop for a while,  
As onward you flow,  
And tell us, Oh River,  
The secret you know?

10.4

Appendix X-A<sup>399</sup>  
**Nell Cropsey II**

|   |                                                                                                                                               |     |
|---|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1 | Look down in the low green valley<br>Where the violets bloom and fade,<br>'Tis there my sweet Nellie Cropsey<br>Lies mouldering in the grave. | 1.4 |
| 2 | She did not broken hearted,<br>Nor by diease she fell,<br>But in one moment parted<br>From all she loved so well.                             | 2.4 |
| 3 | One night when the moon shone brightly<br>And the stars were shining too,<br>Then softly to her cottage<br>Her jealous lover drew.            | 3.4 |
| 4 | He said, Come, love, let's wander<br>Out in the woods so gay.<br>While wandering we will ponder<br>About our wedding day.                     | 4.4 |
| 5 | So out in the forest<br>He led his love so dear.<br>She said, 'Tis for you only<br>That I am wandering here.                                  | 5.4 |
| 6 | The way grows dark and dreary,<br>I am afraid to stay.<br>Of wandering I am weary<br>And would retrace my way.                                | 6.4 |
| 7 | Retrace your way, no never,<br>No more this world you'll roam.<br>So bid farewell forever<br>To parents, friends, and home.                   | 7.4 |
| 8 | Farewell, kind loving parents,<br>I never shall see you more,                                                                                 |     |

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<sup>399</sup> Ibid., 115-16. According to Chappell, this ballad was composed after Nell Cropsey's body had been discovered and Jim Wilcox arrested. As is observable, however, it seems largely adapted from the generic ballad called *The Jealous Lover*, and does not account for many of the historical facts of the murder case like the other murder ballads do.

|    |                                                                                                                                                 |      |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
|    | And long will be my coming<br>At the little cottage door.                                                                                       | 8.4  |
| 9  | Down on her knees before him<br>She pleaded for her life,<br>But deep into her bosom<br>He plunged the fatal knife.                             | 9.4  |
| 10 | O Willie, I forgive you, <sup>400</sup><br>Her last and dying words,<br>I never meant to deceive you,<br>And she closed her eyes in death.      | 10.4 |
| 11 | The banners float above her<br>And shrill the bugles sound.<br>A stranger came and found her<br>Cold and lifeless on the ground. <sup>401</sup> | 11.4 |
| 12 | They took her to her mother<br>So she might plainly see,<br>And sweet Nellie Cropsey's sleeping<br>Beneath the willow tree.                     |      |

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<sup>400</sup> Note the discrepancy in the murder's name, here identified as "Willie," the generic name used in *The Jealous Lover*. In truth, Nell Cropsey was murdered by her lover, John Wilcox.

<sup>401</sup> A second discrepancy here, pointing to this version of Nell Cropsey's connection *The Jealous Lover*. Nell Cropsey's body was found in the Pasquotank River, not "cold and lifeless on the ground."

Appendix XI<sup>402</sup>  
**Lula Viers**

|   |                                                                                                                               |     |
|---|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1 | Come all you good people<br>From all over the world;<br>And listen to a story<br>About a poor young girl.                     | 1.4 |
| 2 | Her name was Lula Vires,<br>In Auxier she did dwell;<br>A place in old Kentucky,<br>A town you all know well.                 | 2.4 |
| 3 | She loved young John Coyer,<br>Was engaged to be his wife;<br>He ruined her reputation,<br>And later took her life.           | 3.4 |
| 4 | They went to Elkhorn City,<br>Sixty mile away;<br>A put up at a hotel<br>Until the close of day.                              | 4.4 |
| 5 | And as dark did gather,<br>They went out for a stroll;<br>It was in bleak December,<br>The wind was blowing cold.             | 5.4 |
| 6 | They went down to the river,<br>Cold water was running deep;<br>John then said to Lula,<br>“In the bottom you must sleep.”    | 6.4 |
| 7 | “Do you really mean it, John?<br>It surely cannot be.<br>How could you stand to murder<br>A poor, helpless girl like me?”     | 7.4 |
| 8 | She threw her arms around him,<br>“Oh John, please spare my life!<br>I’ll go back to my mother,<br>If I cannot be your wife.” | 8.4 |
| 9 | She threw her arms around him,                                                                                                |     |

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<sup>402</sup> Thomas, *Ballad Makin' in the Mountains of Kentucky*, 150-52.

|    |                                                                                                                              |      |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
|    | Before him she did kneel.<br>Around her waist he tied<br>A piece of railroad steel.                                          | 9.4  |
| 10 | He threw her in the river,<br>The bubbles they did rise.<br>They burst upon the water,<br>What a sad and mournful sight.     | 10.4 |
| 11 | He hastened to the depot,<br>And boarded a train for home,<br>Thinking that his cruel crime<br>Never would be known.         | 11.4 |
| 12 | Poor Lula she was missing,<br>Nowhere could she be found.<br>They searched the country over,<br>For many miles around.       | 12.4 |
| 13 | John Coyer joined the army,<br>Four months had come and past,<br>But in the Ohio River<br>The body was found at last.        | 13.4 |
| 14 | They took her from the River,<br>And to the near-by town;<br>The steel that was around her<br>Weighed over thirty pound.     | 14.4 |
| 15 | They held an inquest over her,<br>The people were in doubt.<br>They could not recognize her,<br>They could not find her out. | 15.4 |
| 16 | They sent for a reporter,<br>His name was Arodent.<br>He printed in the paper<br>And around the world it went.               | 16.4 |
| 17 | Her mother was seated in her home<br>When she read the news.<br>She quickly left her chair,<br>To a neighbor told her views. | 17.4 |
| 18 | Saying, "I will send a message,<br>Or, I will go and see,                                                                    |      |

|    |                                                                                                                                                              |      |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
|    |                                                                                                                                                              | 203  |
|    | If it is my daughter, oh!<br>It surely can not be.”                                                                                                          | 18.4 |
| 19 | She boarded a train for Ironton <sup>403</sup> ,<br>And arrived right at the place.<br>It was in a morgue there so drear,<br>She looked on her child’s face. | 19.4 |
| 20 | She recognized the clothing,<br>The poor girl now still wore.<br>The mother looked upon the corpse,<br>Fell fainting to the floor.                           | 20.4 |
| 21 | John Coyer was arrested,<br>And placed in Floyd County’s jail;<br>But for that awful murder<br>No one could go his bail.                                     | 21.4 |
| 22 | Soon an army officer came,<br>And took him off to France.<br>John Coyer never went to trial,<br>Nor sought to clear his name.                                | 22.4 |

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<sup>403</sup> Ironton is located on the Ohio River, a few miles south of the junction of the Big Sandy River with the Ohio.

### Resource Index for the Murder Ballads<sup>404</sup>

How to use the Index:

The table below contains tune information for each murder ballad discussed in this thesis. I have provided each ballad's earliest known date of publication as well as a comprehensive list of anthologies that document one or more tunes for each song. Full citations for the Melody Sources and Recordings may be found in the bibliography of this thesis.

#### ***The Wexford/Oxford/Lexington Girl or The Knoxville Girl***

Earliest Known Date of Publication: 1796 (as a British Broadside)

Sample Recordings: The Blue Sky Boys, *Classic Country Remastered*, 2007  
The Louvin Brothers, *Knoxville Girl*, 2008.

| <b>Melody Source</b>                                                       | <b># of Melodies</b> | <b>Title of Tune</b>                                                 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Shuldham-Shaw, <i>Greig-Duncan</i> vol. 2, 1983, p. 200.                   | 3                    | <i>The Butcher's Boy</i>                                             |
| Randolph-Shoemaker, <i>Ozark FolkSongs</i> vol. 2, 1946-1950, p. 150.      | 5                    | <i>The Noel Girl</i>                                                 |
| Randolph (Ed. Norm Cohen), <i>Ozark Folksongs</i> , 1982, pp. 108-111.     | 1                    | <i>The Noel Girl</i>                                                 |
| Eddy, <i>Ballads and Songs from Ohio</i> , 1939, p. 104                    | 2                    | <i>The Murdered Girl</i>                                             |
| Scarborough, <i>Song Catcher</i> , 1937, p. 402.                           | 1                    | <i>The Wexford Girl/<br/>Hanged I Shall Be/<br/>The Prentice Boy</i> |
| Shellans, <i>Folk Songs of the Blue Ridge Mountains</i> , 1968, pp. 68-69. | 1                    | <i>The Jealous Lover</i>                                             |
| Flanders, <i>Vermont Folk-Songs</i> , 1968, pp. 88-89.                     | 1                    | <i>Hang-ed I Shall Be</i>                                            |
| Sharp, <i>English Folk Songs</i> , 1932, p. 71.                            | 5                    | <i>The Miller's<br/>Apprentice/ The Oxford<br/>Tragedy</i>           |
| Peacock, <i>Songs of the Newfoundland</i> , 1965, pp. 634-640.             | 4                    | <i>The Wexford Girl/The<br/>Worcester Tragedy</i>                    |

<sup>404</sup> This list relies heavily upon the Fresno Traditional Ballad Index. See Robert B. Waltz and David G. Engle, "The Traditional Ballad Index," Accessed at <http://www.csufresno.edu/Folklore/Balladindextoc.Html> (California State University, Fresno Folklore, 2010). Also see The English Folk Dance and Song Society, "The Roud Folk Song Index," Accessed at <http://library.efds.org/cgi-bin/query.cgi>.

| <b>Melody Source</b>                                                       | <b># of Melodies</b> | <b>Title of Tune</b>      |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Manny, <i>Songs of Miramichi</i> , 1968, p. 98.                            | 1                    | <i>The Wexford Lass</i>   |
| Doerflinger, <i>Sailor and Lumberman</i> , 1972, pp. 288-290.              | 1                    | <i>The Wexford Girl</i>   |
| Warner, <i>Traditional American Folk Songs</i> , 1984, p. 7.               | 1                    | <i>The [Waxford] Girl</i> |
| Cohen/Seeger/Wood, <i>Old Time String Band</i> , 1964, pp. 150-151.        | 1                    | <i>The Knoxville Girl</i> |
| Botkin, <i>A Treasury of Southern Folklore</i> , 1949, p. 737.             | 1                    | <i>The Knoxville Girl</i> |
| Kennedy, <i>Folksongs of Britain and Ireland</i> , 1975, p. 327.           | 1                    | <i>The Oxford Girl</i>    |
| Abrahams, <i>Anglo-American Folksong Style</i> , 1968, pp. 115-116.        | 1                    | <i>The Knoxville Girl</i> |
| MacColl, <i>Travellers' Songs from England and Scotland</i> , 1977, p. 75. | 1                    | <i>The Wexford Girl</i>   |

***The Gosport Tragedy/ The Cruel Ship's Carpenter or Pretty Polly***

Earliest Known Date of Publication: 1767

Sample Recordings: The Stanley Brothers, *Long Journey Home*, 1963.

Pete Seeger, *American Ballads*, 1957.

Mike Waterson, *English & Scottish Folk Ballads*, 1996

| <b>Melody Source</b>                                                    | <b># of Melodies</b>            | <b>Title of Tune</b>                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Shuldham-Shaw, <i>Greig-Duncan</i> vol. 2, 1983, p. 201.                | 1                               | <i>The Gosport Tragedy</i>                     |
| Cox, <i>Folk-Songs of the South</i> , 1925, pp. 73-78.                  | 2                               | <i>Pretty Polly/ Come, Polly, Pretty Polly</i> |
| Creighton, <i>Traditional Songs of Nova Scotia</i> , 1960, pp. 114-120. | 2                               | <i>The Ship's Carpenter</i>                    |
| Fowke, <i>Canadian Folk Songs</i> , 1973, p. 70.                        | 1                               | <i>The Ship's Carpenter</i>                    |
| Peacock, <i>Songs of Newfoundland</i> , 1965, pp. 404-406.              | 1                               | <i>The Ship's Carpenter</i>                    |
| Karpeles, <i>Folk Songs from New Foundland</i> , 1970, p. 27.           | 1                               | <i>The Cruel Ship's Carpenter</i>              |
| Mackenzie, <i>Ballads and Sea Songs from Nova Scotia</i> , 1963, p. 29. | 1                               | <i>The Gaspard Tragedy</i>                     |
| Scarborough, <i>Song Catcher</i> , 1937, pp. 395-398.                   | 5                               | <i>The Cruel Ship's Carpenter</i>              |
| Sharp, <i>English Folk Songs</i> , 1932, p. 36.                         | 21 (many of them are fragments) | <i>The Cruel Ship's Carpenter</i>              |
| Sharp/Karpeles, <i>Eighty Appalachian Folk Songs</i> , 1968, p. 36      | 1                               | <i>The Cruel Ship's Carpenter</i>              |
| Huntington, <i>Whalemen</i> , 1970, pp. 129-131.                        | 1                               | <i>The Ship Carpenter</i>                      |
| Leach, <i>Labrador Coast</i> , 1965, p. 20.                             | 2                               | <i>Pretty Polly</i>                            |
| Manny, <i>Songs of Miramichi</i> , 1968, p. 92.                         | 1                               | <i>The Ship's Carpenter</i>                    |

***The Jealous Lover***Earliest Known Date of Publication: 1903Sample Recordings: Kelly Harrell, *Complete Recorded Works in Chronological Order, Volume 1 (1925-1926)*, 1998.Vernon Dalhart, *The Jealous Lover of Lone Green Valley*, 1925.

| <b>Melody Source</b>                                         | <b># of Melodies</b> | <b>Title of Tune</b>                                                           |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Eddy, <i>Ballads and Songs from Ohio</i> , 1939, p. 104.     | 2                    | <i>The Jealous Lover</i>                                                       |
| Lomax, <i>American Ballads and Folk Songs</i> , 1934, p. 47. | 1                    | <i>The Lone Green Valley</i>                                                   |
| Cox, <i>Mainly from West Virginia</i> , 1977, pp. 130-132.   | 1                    | <i>The Jealous Lover/ Blue-Eyed Ellen</i>                                      |
| Spaeth, <i>Weep Some More</i> , 1927, pp. 121-122.           | 2                    | <i>Blue-Eyed Ellen/The Jealous Lover of Lone Green Valley, and Come, Emily</i> |

***The Banks of the Ohio***Earliest Known Date of Publication: 1915Sample Recordings: Doc Watson and Clarence Ashley, *The Original Folkways Recordings of Doc Watson & Clarence Ashley*, 1994.The Blue Sky Boys, *Classic Country Remastered*, 2007.The Monroe Brothers, *The Monroe Brothers Complete RCA Victor Bluebird Recordings*, 1936.Pete Seeger, *American Favorite Ballads*, vol. 4, 1992.

| <b>Melody Source</b>                                                     | <b># of Melodies</b> | <b>Title of Tune</b>                                |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Randolph-Shoemaker, <i>Ozark Folk Songs</i> , 1946-1950, p. 160.         | 2                    | <i>Down on the Banks of the Ohio</i>                |
| Eddy, <i>Ballads and Songs from Ohio</i> , 1939, p. 104.                 | 2                    | <i>The Murdered Girl/The Banks of the Old Pedee</i> |
| Gardner-Chickering, <i>Ballads from Southern Michigan</i> , 1939, p. 20. | 2                    | <i>The Banks of the River Dee</i>                   |
| Dunson-Raim, <i>Anthology of American Folk Music</i> , 1973, p. 110.     | 1                    | <i>Down on the Banks of the Ohio</i>                |
| Cohen/Seeger/Wood, <i>Old Time String Band</i> , 1964, pp. 138-139.      | 1                    | <i>Banks of the Ohio</i>                            |

| <b>Melody Source</b>                                | <b># of Melodies</b> | <b>Title of Tune</b>            |
|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| Botkin, <i>Mississippi Folklore</i> , 1955, p. 577. | 1                    | <i>On the Banks of the Ohio</i> |

***Omie Wise***

Earliest Known Date of Publication: 1874

Sample Recordings: Doc Watson, *The Essential Doc Watson*, 1986.

Roscoe Holcomb, *The High Lonesome Sound*, 1994.

| <b>Melody Source</b>                                                   | <b># of Melodies</b> | <b>Title of Tune</b>            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| Randolph-Shoemaker, <i>Ozark FolkSongs</i> , 1946-1950, p. 149.        | 2                    | <i>Poor Oma Wise</i>            |
| Randolph (Ed. Norm Cohen), <i>Ozark Folksongs</i> , 1982, pp. 163-166. | 1                    | <i>Poor Oma Wise</i>            |
| Friedman, <i>Viking Book of Ballads</i> , 1956, p. 202.                | 1                    | <i>Naomi Wise</i>               |
| Lomax, <i>Folk Songs of North America</i> , 1960, p. 138.              | 1                    | <i>Omie Wise</i>                |
| Sharp, <i>English Folk Songs</i> , 1932, p. 123.                       | 7                    | <i>Poor Omie</i>                |
| Burt, <i>American Murder Ballads</i> , 1958, pp. 25-28.                | 1                    | <i>Omie Wise</i>                |
| Dunson-Raim, <i>Anthology of American Folk Music</i> , 1973, p. 42.    | 1                    | <i>Ommie Wise</i>               |
| Warner, <i>Traditional American Folk Songs</i> , 1984, p. 116.         | 1                    | <i>The Ballad of Naomi Wise</i> |

### ***The Murder of Laura Foster***

Earliest Known Date of Publication: 1947

Sample Recordings: Sheila Clark, *The Legend of Tom Dula and Other Tragic Love Ballads*, 2000.

The Kingston Trio, *Greenback Dollar*, 2009.

Note: In my research, I have not found any anthology that documents a tune for *The Murder of Laura Foster*. However, the related popular 20<sup>th</sup>-century song known as *Tom Dooley* has been documented and the following anthologies reflect the collection of this tune:

| <b>Melody Source</b>                                           | <b># of Melodies</b> | <b>Title of Tune</b> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Warner, <i>Traditional American Folk Songs</i> , 1984, p.118.  | 1                    | <i>Tom Dooley</i>    |
| Lomax, <i>Folk Song U.S.A.</i> , 1947, p. 82.                  | 1                    | <i>Tom Dooley</i>    |
| Lomax, <i>Folk Songs of North America</i> , 1960, p. 139.      | 1                    | <i>Tom Dula</i>      |
| Cohen/Seeger/Wood, <i>Old Time String Band</i> , 1964, p. 137. | 1                    | <i>Tom Dooley</i>    |
| Arnett, <i>I Hear America Singing!</i> 1975, p. 188.           | 1                    | <i>Tom Dooley</i>    |

### ***Pearl Bryan***

Earliest Known Date of Publication: 1935

Sample Recordings: According to ballad indexes such as The Fresno Traditional Ballad Index and the Roud Folk Song Index, there are no known recordings of *Pearl Bryan*. However, the following recorded versions of *Pearl Bryan* may be accessed from Alexander Street Press<sup>405</sup>:

Bruce Buckley, *Ohio Valley Ballads*, 1965.

The Phipps Family, *Faith, Love and Tragedy*, 1965.

R.D. Burnett and Leonard Rutherford, *Old Time Mountain Ballads*, 1929.

| <b>Melody Source</b>                                        | <b># of Tunes</b> | <b>Title of Tune</b>             |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|
| Brewster, <i>Ballads and Songs of Indiana</i> , 1940, p.61. | 1                 | <i>Pearl Bryan</i>               |
| Thomas, <i>Ballad-Makin'</i> ,                              | 1                 | <i>The Murder of Pearl Bryan</i> |

<sup>405</sup> "Music Online." Alexander Street Press, LLC, 2011, accessed at <http://musco.alexanderstreet.com.proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/> May 31, 2011.

|                    |  |  |
|--------------------|--|--|
| 1939, pp. 131-136. |  |  |
|--------------------|--|--|

***Nell Cropsey***

Earliest Known Date of Publication: 1912

Sample Recordings: According to ballad indexes such as The Fresno Traditional Ballad Index and the Roud Folk Song Index, there are no known recordings of *Nell Cropsey*.

| <b>Melody Source</b>                                      | <b># of Melodies</b> | <b>Title of Tune</b>                                                                               |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Chappell, <i>Roanoke and the Abermarle</i> , 1939, p. 64. | 1                    | <i>Nell Cropsey</i> , IV. This tune is a variant of Chappell's listing of <i>The Jealous Lover</i> |

***Lula Viers***

Earliest Known Date of Publication: 1939

Sample Recordings: According to ballad indexes such as The Fresno Traditional Ballad Index and the Roud Folk Song Index, there are no known recordings of *Lula Viers*.

However, the following recorded version of *Lula Viers* may be accessed from Alexander Street Press:

Bruce Buckley, *Ohio Valley Ballads*, 1965.

| <b>Melody Source</b>                                            | <b># of Melodies</b> | <b>Title of Tune</b> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| McNeil, <i>Southern Folk Ballads</i> , vol. 2, 1988, pp. 79-81. | 1                    | <i>Lula Viers</i>    |

## VITA

Christina Hastie earned a Bachelor of Music in Flute Performance from Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan in 2009. She earned a Master of Music in Musicology at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in 2011 where her work emphasized the historical study of Appalachian murder ballads. During her studies, Christina also served as a Graduate Teaching Associate in Women's Studies, taught an undergraduate course on women in biography and autobiography, and received a Graduate Certificate in Women's Studies, which aided her readings of the ballads through a feminist lens of scholarship.

Christina's preliminary work on the Appalachian murder ballads won first place in the 2010 Distinguished Lecture Series Student Research Competition in Music at the University of Tennessee. Additionally, she presented her work on violence against women in multiple historical song traditions at the prestigious Susan B. Anthony Institute's Annual Gender Conference at The University of Rochester, New York in 2011.

In Fall 2011, Christina will begin her studies as a Ph.D. student in American History at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville where she plans to continue her work on 19<sup>th</sup>-century Appalachia, women, sexuality, and murder. She also will hold a Graduate Teaching Assistantship in Women's Studies. Her other interests include baking vegan cupcakes, antiquing with her mom, and spending as much time as possible with her family in Michigan. Christina lives in Knoxville with her boyfriend, and they hope to hike the entire Appalachian Trail before their 30<sup>th</sup> birthdays.