

## **From Journalism to Gypsy Folk Song: The Road to Orality of an English Ballad**

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Recent years have seen the discovery of something as wonderful and unexpected as an authentic English oral tradition, persisting into the last quarter of the twentieth century: authentically English in being performed in English and in England; authentically oral in being performed by largely illiterate singers, who have received this heritage from the preceding generations of their families and communities without the intervention of writing or print. Authentic also in that although there of late was a sense that times were changing, for the generation concerned the performances remained a living and vital part of the social life and culture of their community.

This tradition comprises the “folksongs” of the English Gypsies, as represented for example by Mary Ann Haynes, “Queen” Caroline Hughes, the Smiths of Kent and the Smiths of Gloucester, and the Brazil siblings Lementina (Lemmie), Tom, Hiram, Alice, Harry, Danny, and Weenie. From one scholarly perspective it might be regretted that they were not the object of the same intense scrutiny accorded to the Scottish travelers by the School of Scottish Studies in Edinburgh a decade or two earlier (Gower 1968; Gower and Porter 1970, 1972, 1977; MacColl and Seeger 1986), not least because there is no analogous School of English Studies in London.<sup>1</sup> But by the same token their singing has been spared the disturbance and distorting effects that the associated celebrity on the “folk” scene had on the Scottish singers (Porter 1976). And quietly and steadily many performances have been collected in England, along with much information on the lives of the singers and the relationships between those lives and the songs (MacColl and Seeger 1977; Hall 1998; Richards 1987; Stradling 2000 and 2007; Yates 2003).

While the singing was manifestly part of the singers’ sense of their own cultural identity, apart from a few songs rather self-consciously deploying Romany idioms the tradition is effectively an English oikotype, most of the songs also recorded from non-Gypsy—gorgio—singers, and indeed like most English “folksongs” deriving ultimately from eighteenth- or nineteenth-century broadsides. The difference is that Gypsy sub-culture sustained into our times the English folksong tradition recorded by Cecil Sharp and others at the beginning of the twentieth century, but which in the meantime has been abandoned by the ambient culture. This is good for our knowledge of this particular sub-tradition, since with a few exceptions (Gillington 1911; cf. Yates and Roud 2006) the early

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<sup>1</sup> As it happens, one of the Brazil brothers, Weenie, together with his daughter Angela, had been recorded by Hamish Hamilton along with Scottish travelers during a period living in Scotland in the 1950s (Peter Shephard in Stradling, 2007:5).

collectors rather neglected Gypsy singers, but it is also a major opportunity for the study of English folksong tradition as a whole, which has in this way been sustained into a period when technological advances enabled the making, preservation, and dissemination of “live” recordings of performances, offering scholarship a more direct, accurate, and comprehensive access to the material than the field notebooks of the earlier collectors. With a folksong noted down by Cecil Sharp we are never certain just how much the repeated singings, necessary to get all the words, affected those same words; this is not a problem when we can ourselves transcribe the words from a tape-recording reissued as a compact disc. And the tradition thus documented in the second half of the twentieth century is paradoxically more oral than it was around 1900, since the broadsides from which many of the songs were originally learned have long ceased to be available to the singers, who have accordingly passed the songs on by word of mouth over two or more generations.

Like most discoveries, the exact dating of this one depends on who is concerned: As with the Victoria Falls, the people who lived with the songs knew they were there all the time. Of the outsiders, folksong collectors such as Peter Shephard, Mike Yates, and Gwilym Davies (to mention those to whom this study is most directly indebted) were recording Romany singers from the mid-1960s onwards. More recently, and with gathering pace, the recordings have been made available on LP’s, tapes, and latterly CD’s (notably *Gypsies* 1998; Smith 2000; *Gypsies* 2003) whose publication has technically speaking been commercial, but in reality inspired and enabled by the commitment and competences of those in the often overlapping roles of collectors, editors, and producers. These efforts have achieved a provisional culmination in the issuing of a multi-disc anthology of the songs of the Brazil family by Musical Tradition Records (*Brazils* 2007), which is responsive to the current interests of folksong studies in providing multiple performances of some songs. Texts are also being made available on the internet (e.g. Shephard 2008).

In this way the “discovery” is finally shared by the institutional, academic community that has contributed little to any of these developments, and the present study is offered from within that community by way of acknowledgment and celebration of the singers, the collectors, and the publishers who cultivated, preserved, and made available this English oral tradition.<sup>2</sup> It takes the form of a study of one song—or more specifically, to confess another dereliction, the *words* of one song—that invites attention by the way it lends itself to both of the scholarly approaches best capable of documenting and revealing the nature of oral tradition as it applies to narrative in the form of song. These are, respectively, the longitudinal, “diachronic” approach, which traces the development of a song from its origins to the form it achieves after a lengthy period of oral transmission (in this instance well over a century), and the singer-oriented, “synchronic” approach, which examines the variation the song displays as performed by one particular singer on different occasions over a relatively short time-span. More specifically, what

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<sup>2</sup> It might appropriately be dedicated to the Gypsy classmate, wherever he may be now, whose illiteracy I scorned during his brief attendance at my Essex school in the early 1950’s.

follows is a multifaceted study of “Three Brothers in Fair Warwickshire” (Roud 2008:#3207) as sung by Danny Brazil in 1966 and on several later occasions, in the context of Gypsy song tradition, and in juxtaposition with the original form of the song, “The Lamentation of W. Warner T. Ward & T. Williams,” as published a century and a half earlier. And a more informed generic appreciation of that original song will in turn be sought by comparing it with accounts in other modes of narrative discourse (judicial and journalistic prose) reporting the same events: a violent highway robbery and its judicial aftermath. The story of this song begins on the king’s highway just outside Nuneaton in 1818, and ends in our times in a Gypsy campsite beside the ring road just outside Gloucester.

In celebrating the discovery of a living English oral tradition by pursuing a better scholarly understanding of the nature, significance, and mechanisms of oral tradition, the present study should also be seen in the context of the ongoing (if sporadic) discussion on the significance of oral tradition for narrative songs, or “ballads.” Discussion in this area is confused, and controversy fueled, by the variant meanings that can be attributed to “ballad” in various contexts. In literary histories and anthologies the ballad is a sung narrative recounting physical violence or domestic conflict, strong emotions, and tragedy, often set in Scotland (thanks largely to the vigor of Scottish collection in the decades on either side of 1800), and transmitted orally. It is represented in the current edition of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* by songs such as “Lord Randall,” “Bonny Barbara Allan,” “The Wife of Usher’s Well,” “Sir Patrick Spens,” and “The Bonny Earl of Murray,” introduced as “narrative poems [sic] transmitted orally” whose distinctive quality is “spareness”:

the narrative style typically strips the story down to a few objective and dramatic scenes. Ballads are apt to deal only with the culminating incident or climax of a plot, to describe that event with intense compression, to put the burden of narration on allusive monologue or dialogue, and to avoid editorial comment. The force of the ballad often depends on what is *not* told directly, which must be inferred from dialogue and action.

Their verbal style is characterized by “heavy use of formulaic expressions,” and the narrative progresses by stanzas that are often linked by repetition (Greenblatt and Abrams 2006:2898).

The terminological problem is that songs like this were not normally called “ballads” by the people who sang them, and that from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, outside academic circles, “ballad” invariably referred to a song (often, but not necessarily, narrative) printed and sold as a broadside—a single sheet of paper printed on one side—a cheap and highly successful form of mass media of which many hundreds were published every year, each in print-runs of many thousands or even hundreds of thousands. Many of these songs narrated stories of physical violence or domestic conflict, strong emotions and tragedy, but in a style (journalistic or sub-literary) very different from the spare, formulaic, and repetitive mode of the literary history ballad, although in similar stanza forms and sharing many of the same melodies.

It is of course feasible to distinguish between “oral ballads” and “broadsides ballads,” but these terms refer only to the medium in which the songs are encountered: their generic status is compromised by the movement of actual songs between those media in both directions: “oral” ballads could be printed on broadsides, and many broadside ballads, having been sold and sung, learned from singing, and sung again, entered oral tradition. In the latter case, it is my thesis that the shift in medium could in time produce a modulation in narrative mode. Songs can acquire the features described in the *Norton Anthology*, can effectively become “ballads” in the literary history sense, in the course of—and as a result of the pressures involved in—oral tradition. The ballad (in this sense) is not defined as oral, but its characteristic, “balladesque” way of handling narrative material is determined, or rather generated, by the oral context.

Accordingly, the present study is in part a further testing of this thesis (for earlier experiments see Pettitt 2003), in that the original song, “The Lamentation of W. Warner T. Ward & T. Williams,” was a broadside ballad, indeed a classic crime-and-execution news ballad opportunistically presented as a “last goodnight,” ostensibly comprising the confession, regrets, and valediction of the condemned criminal(s) on the eve of execution. It will be shown that by the time it was recorded from the singing of Danny Brazil the song has indeed acquired some “balladesque” features (and lost many of its “broadsides journalism” features), but as always in this ongoing investigation, with some unexpected features, and in this particular case, as discussed further below, the investigation is widened to include the significance of the intertextual (inter-performance) context provided by Gypsy song tradition.

The point of departure is then a song that was composed, pen in hand, as a text, designed in the first instance (having been published and sold as a broadside ballad) for singing from the printed text. And as thus composed and printed the song narrates the sorry fates of a certain William Warner, Thomas Ward, and Thomas Williams, who were hanged on 14 July 1818 following their trial at Warwick Assizes on the charge of highway robbery. The writers of news-ballads seem generally to have culled their information from the printed press (newspapers and occasional news-sheets), and in checking, for contrastive purposes, the way such prose media handled this particular crime we are therefore dealing with the *kind* of material our balladeer had acquaintance with, and in one instance quite probably as a direct source. This initial move also has the function, of course, of introducing the narrative.

The trial was reported in a local newspaper, *The Warwick Advertiser*, in August 1818, and its reproduction (evidently almost verbatim) of the official indictment offers both a first glimpse of the protagonists and an example of a very unballad-like way of reporting the events:

William Warner, alias *Hard-hearing baby* (aged 20); Thos. Ward, alias *Jasper* (aged 18); and Thos. Williams, alias *Stodger* (aged 19); were indicted for a violent assault upon the person of George Greenway, on the King’s highway, and taking from his person, a silver watch, value £5, a gold chain, value £8, two gold seals, value £6, a silver snuff box, value 2

Guineas, and several Country Banknotes, value £26, on the 1st of July last in the parish of Nuneaton. (Yates 1983:2).

Much of the apparently redundant detail here probably had a judicial significance, the taking of the property “from the person” of the victim defining the offense as robbery rather than mere theft or burglary, and even more seriously as “highway robbery,” a crime committed on the “King’s highway” carrying the additional opprobrium of breaching the King’s Peace. The value of the property stolen is specified to classify the offense as a capital crime: little opportunity here for a sympathetic jury to value the items as worth less than the modest amount automatically triggering the death penalty. The age of the offenders would probably determine whether they were qualified as minors to be shown lenience. The specification of their aliases is to prevent a perpetrator claiming a mistrial on the technical plea of not being accurately identified in the indictment. Not surprisingly, the song, with its non-judicial function, will feel free to omit much of this detail.

The accused all pleaded guilty, but rather than proceeding straight to sentence, the judge—apparently to be quite certain there were no mitigating circumstances—instructed their victim, Mr. Greenway, to tell his story. The latter’s highly circumstantial account was also reproduced (if doubtless reshaped in accordance with journalistic protocols) in the *Warwick Advertiser* (Yates 1983:3), but our ballad-writer probably had access to a derivative news-sheet, “An Account of the Lives and Execution of Wm. Warner, Thos. Ward, and Thos. Williams, who were Executed at Warwick, on Friday, August 14<sup>th</sup>, 1818, for Highway Robbery,” published by the printer Taylor of Birmingham. It reprints from the *Advertiser* the judge’s admonitions and Greenway’s narrative, with some few verbal omissions, together with brief notices of the culprits and a laconic account of the hanging, on a single sheet headed by a stark woodcut of three men hanging from a gallows.<sup>3</sup> Its title is close to that of the broadside, “The Lamentation of W. Warner T. Ward & T. Williams, who were executed at Warwick, August 14, 1818, for highway robbery,” and the two accounts share the error of dating the execution to August rather than July. Roy Palmer suggests (2004b:1) that the ballad printer may have postdated the events to give the ballad enhanced newsworthiness, but we should now probably give the credit, if that is the word, to the author or printer of the news-pamphlet. A connection is also suggested by the fact that both were printed in Birmingham.

Mr. Greenway’s narrative, both as a possible source and for contrastive purposes, will be referred to from time to time below but will not be elaborated on here because the comparison would be distorted: the crime and execution broadside invariably tells the *perpetrator*’s story, rather than the *victim*’s. This is partly because, unlike the fortunate Mr. Greenway, the victim is usually dead and so unable to tell his or her story. But part of the selling power of the subgenre lies precisely in its emphasis on the fate and feelings

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<sup>3</sup> The publication was discovered by Roy Palmer at the Birmingham Reference Library and kindly made available in photocopy; the Library (now the Local Studies and History Department of Birmingham Central Library), is currently unable to locate the original.

of the criminal as his misdeeds are unfolded in public view, his sentence pronounced, and the hour of reckoning approaches.

Our ballad, accordingly, will show no interest whatever in what Mr. Greenaway was doing before or after his encounter with his three attackers, and the attack itself will be seen from their perspective. The song tells us the criminals' story, and for purposes of comparison is therefore, at least with regard to the opening moves, best juxtaposed with the narrative, also reported by the *Warwick Advertiser*, which is embedded in the confession of one of the three robbers, William Warner, to a local magistrate:

“The examination and Confession of  
William Warner, of Braunston, boatman . . .”

[Confesses that:]

. . . on Thursday, the 25th of June last,  
he met with Thomas Ward,  
with whom he went to Boughton Green Fair,  
and from thence to Leicester;  
That at Boughton Fair  
they met with another person,  
whose name examinant does not know,  
but whose nickname was “Stodger,”  
and who accompanied them to Leicester,  
where they staid until Wednesday, July 1st,  
when they all three went to Hinckley,  
from whence they set off  
about 8 o'clock in the evening,  
along the road towards Nuneaton;  
when they had arrived  
within a mile of Nuneaton,  
they saw a person  
approaching them on horseback,  
whom they immediately agreed  
to stop and rob;  
that the man, called Stodger,  
caught hold of the bridle,

“The Lamentation of W. Warner T. Ward . . .”<sup>4</sup>  
T. Bloomer, Birmingham

1. It's melancholy to relate  
Of three young men who met their fate  
Cut of[f] just in the bloom of day,  
For robbing in the king's highway.

2. At Nuneaton in Warwickshire  
We lived as you soon shall hear,  
But in our station not content,  
To rob and plunder we were bent,

3. Mr. Greenway was the first we met,

And by us he was soon beset

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<sup>4</sup> The original of the broadside version quoted here is in the *Cecil Sharp Scrapbook of Songs and Ballads* (p. 193), Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, London (see Appendix 1), and is reproduced with the kind permission of the English Folk Dance and Song Society through the good offices of their Librarian, Malcolm Taylor. I have introduced the conventional stanza divisions that are not signaled in the original, but which are confirmed in the other broadside printings and by the oral version.

and with a large stick struck him  
and knocked him off his horse;

With dreadful blows upon the head,

We left him as we thought for dead.

that Thomas Ward  
then took from the person's pockets,  
some bank notes,  
of which examinant thinks  
three were of the value of one pound each,  
and two of five pounds each;  
that examinant caught hold of his watch chain,  
and drew his watch out of his pocket;  
that they then proceeded across the country  
. . . .

4. His money

and his watch also  
We took, which proved our overthrow,  
And then we ran away with speed,  
And left him on the road to bleed.  
. . . .

After this the prose confession continues with an account of further crimes committed by the group, while the ballad's remaining narrative is effectively determined in advance by a well-established paradigm for crime and execution reports in the popular media (Fulcher 1984-85): the apprehension and imprisonment of the culprits, the trial and condemnation, their remorse (here somewhat muted) and valediction (these stanzas will be quoted in full below).

Indeed, in a manner quite typical of journalistic broadsides (Pettitt forthcoming) the generic paradigm outweighs the facts of the individual case—here, for instance, the bringing of a guilty verdict by a jury (broadside st. 6) who in reality, since the prisoners pleaded guilty, were not called upon to give a verdict. And in following the established convention the ballad actually loses out on what seems to have been the real emotional drama of the trial (as reported by the *Warwick Advertiser* and the derivative Birmingham news-sheet), the prisoners' insistence on pleading guilty despite the earnest warning of the judge that it would not increase their hopes of a pardon. Stanzas 5-9 effectively have nothing specific to this case apart from the accurate identification of Warwick as the venue for the trial and the number and ages of the accused.

The broadside ballad evidently shares to a degree, however, the predilection of the journalistic accounts for circumstantial detail, supplying us with the location of the crime, the name of the victim, and at least some of the items taken from him. We also have the blow to the head and the specification of the "king's highway" supplied in other sources. But there is much detail that is omitted in the song, and furthermore the facts are selected, distorted, or augmented, either to achieve conformity with the generic paradigm, or simply to help create a more effective narrative (which is presumably how the paradigm emerged in the first place). Thus, rather than narrate the preliminary moves—how the group met up somewhat fortuitously at a country fair almost a week earlier—the broadside ballad effectively begins its narration at the encounter with Mr. Greenway, strongly implying that the robbers already knew each other and were residents of the same village (Nuneaton being in reality the home of the victim). Furthermore, rather than an unplanned response

to an opportunity that fortuitously presented itself, the robbery is now seen as the fulfillment of a deliberate plan to “rob and plunder” (st. 2.4), and not merely premeditated but, like most crimes in broadside ballads, the result of moral turpitude on the part of the villains, who are “in our station not content” (2.3). The same depravity is shown by the callous way the robbers leave their victim “as we thought for dead” (3.4), “on the road to bleed” (4.4): this is admittedly in conformity with the facts of the case (the *Advertiser* reports, rather clinically, the “very copious discharge of blood” “occasioned” by the blow to the head), but the journalistic sources chose not to focus on the image of the wounded man left on the highway.

In addition to the pressures of the generic paradigm, the broadside’s rendition of the material is also of course influenced by the circumstance that it is a song, not a prose account, and designed to be both sung and sold. The latter factor helps to explain the moral tone just discerned, since the broadsides were effectively in the business of peddling lurid accounts of sex and violence under the aegis of moral indignation and admonition. It is this that enables the about-turn at the end, when the robbers, hitherto the objects of the moralizing, become its mouthpieces, urging those who have come to witness the execution to avoid their sorry fate and not to cast aspersions on their families (referred to, in a rather antiquated usage, as their “friends”).<sup>5</sup> There is no “come all ye” stanza to attract the attention of potential customers, but the author has supplied the singer with an opening gambit that announces the subject of the song and its “melancholy” character (that is, an opportunity to indulge in sentimental empathy). The author has clearly decided that the best selling point is the relative youth of the condemned: baldly stated at the outset, enhanced with the image of “blooming,” then reiterated with the ages specified in connection with the execution.

Although printed as a column of verses with no breaks between stanzas, the text readily resolves itself into a song of nine quatrains, singable to any number of “ballad” tunes. The stanzas are in the variant of the conventional ballad stanza with four stresses in all four lines (rather than alternating four and three); the rhyme scheme is aabb rather than the abcb considered typical of traditional ballads, but it is not at all unusual in broadsides. For its genre and period the song is decidedly short, but with several near-identical printings surviving this is evidently the song as it was published on broadside. The length was determined by technical rather than aesthetic factors, the song designed for publication as a “slip” ballad, that is printed with one or more other ballads on a single sheet from which the individual items could be cut and sold separately.

The career of the song as a broadside seems to have been chronologically and geographically limited, which may explain its poor showing in oral tradition. All but one of the surviving printings (see Appendix 1 for a full list) were issued by the Birmingham printer Theophilus Bloomer, who ceased publishing in 1827 (Book Trade 2008), only nine years after the events, supporting Roy Palmer’s view (2004a:236) that the Bloomer

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<sup>5</sup> This could also be a response to the cruel remark on William Warner in the Birmingham prose pamphlet: “Thus has the culprit entailed a disgrace of the most humiliating kind upon the surviving members of a respectable family.”



version is probably the original, inspired directly by journalistic reports of the trial and execution. It was also issued by an otherwise undocumented printer, Shipway of Cirencester. On the other hand only a small minority of broadside news-ballads made it into oral tradition, and a strong narrative line with some dramatic high-points is clearly a significant qualification: a quite different song on this same case, “[The Sorrowful Lamentation] of three men. Viz. [W. Warner T. Ward] and T. Williams,” dominated by the spiritual instruction and repentance of the condemned men after the trial, made one appearance on broadside and thereafter disappeared without trace.<sup>6</sup>

Except for the correction of spelling mistakes and occasional variations in punctuation the broadside text is stable, any subsequent changes consequently attributable to the processes of oral tradition, a tradition that furthermore will have been independent of printed versions for at least a century before it was recorded. And because the broadside was published shortly after the events it reports, there is no doubt of its priority in relation to any oral versions recovered subsequently: they cannot go back to an antecedent oral tradition that the broadside (as broadsides sometimes did) transcribes.

And the song reappears, miraculously and uniquely, in the repertoire of Danny (and Lemmie) Brazil, as “Three Brothers in Fair Warwickshire”—followed in due course by the second miracle of Mike Yates spotting the connection (Yates 1983). Although originally reporting a specific, somewhat humdrum robbery, the reshaping we have seen the narrative undergo in the composition of the song was evidently enough—just—to ensure it a place in folksong tradition, and it may not be coincidental that it was retained specifically in a Gypsy song tradition that had something of a taste for tales of clashes, often fatal, between renegade figures and the authorities. The Brazil family repertoire included songs on poaching (“Limpy Jack” [Brazils 2007:#1.6]; “‘Tis My Delight” [#2.7]), piracy (“Henry Martin” [#3.23]), and an insubordinate soldier (“McCaffery” [#2.6]), as well as others on highway robbery (e.g. “Brandon on the Moor” [#2.32]). It will also have enhanced the song’s compatibility with tradition that the reality it reported matched the tendency in traditional song for such poachers, pirates, and highway robbers to operate in groups of three.

Given the circumstances, the impact of oral tradition on the song can be measured with some accuracy. To the extent it is seen as a historical document, Roy Palmer is right to characterize the changes as “errors” (2004a:236), but to the extent it is seen as an achievement of what is now called “intangible culture” they can also be appreciated as the

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<sup>6</sup> Cambridge University Library, Madden Collection Vol. 21 (Country Printers VI), No. 609 (the second of two items with this number, the first containing the “Statute Song” printed on the reverse of the sheet); my thanks to Roy Palmer for drawing this ballad to my attention. Only half the text survives: it was printed in two columns, but the sheet was divided down the middle (as if it contained two slip ballads), and only the righthand strip has survived. The full title can be readily reconstructed (as above) from the remaining words, broadside conventions, and the facts of the case. The name of the printer has been lost with the lefthand strip, but the address is “Moor Street, Birmingham,” so he was probably the “Taylor” who printed the news-sheet on the case discussed above. The song is in a strangely stumbling idiom, quite unlike the sub-literary extravagances of the professional hack-writers, and may even, for once, in truth be the “last goodnight” of the condemned criminals.

results of a re-creative process transmuted the song from a journalistic broadside to the “balladesque” narrative mode.

This modulation will largely have been achieved by the internal processes of its aural reception by a given singer, retention in the memory, and reproduction from the memory under performance conditions (by a series of singers in a line of transmission): one is tempted to term the tradition “memoral” (mem-oral / memor-al) rather than merely oral. But change will also be influenced (both induced and inhibited) by external factors such as the intertextual pressure from the song tradition, not least as represented by the other songs known to the singers in the chain of transmission that extends from the broadside to Danny Brazil’s recorded performances. Direct influence from written or printed texts on Danny himself can be ruled out, as he was illiterate throughout his life (Burgess 1999:1), and the same is likely to be true of his predecessors. Of these singers we know the exact repertoire of only Danny Brazil himself, but we can also catch glimpses (or rather echoes) of the preceding link in the chain, in that Danny Brazil learned most of his songs, including this one, from his father, who “knew hundreds of songs” (Burgess 1999:1). Danny Brazil’s own recorded repertoire comprises scores rather than hundreds of songs, but supplementary avenues to the father’s repertoire and more generally the longer-term family tradition are available in the overlapping repertoires of other singing members of this generation of Brazils (Stradling 2007:15).

Beyond these inner intertextual contexts for the latter days of the song’s transmission is the local tradition represented by singers socially close to the Brazils (e.g. Smith 2000), and beyond that the wider circle of song tradition among the English Gypsies. The further we move from the center of this synchronic set of concentric circles representing current or recent repertoires, the further back we may be penetrating diachronically into the history of the song tradition leading to Danny Brazil’s “Three Brothers in Fair Warwickshire,” but with a proportionate uncertainty as to whether a given song was ever in direct contact with ours. And at some point we cross the boundary between intertextual connections between specific songs to the sharing of free-floating formulas or narrative motifs common to the tradition as a whole.

As a basis for analysis there follow parallel full texts of the original broadside and the song as first recorded (by Peter Shephard) from the singing of Danny Brazil on 6 May 1966.<sup>7</sup>

**PRINTED ORIGINAL**

*The Lamentation of W. Warner T. Ward  
& T. Williams*

**ORAL DERIVATIVE**

“Three Brothers in Fair Warwickshire”  
Danny Brazil 1966

1. It’s melancholy to relate

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<sup>7</sup> The latter supplied by Peter Shephard and quoted here with his kind permission. See Appendix 2 for details of the oral versions invoked in what follows; here and in all my quotations from transcripts (or my own transcripts) of recordings I have removed all punctuation with the exception of very obvious stops and question marks.

Of three young men who met their fate  
 Cut off[f] just in the bloom of day,  
 For robbing in the king's highway.

2. At Nuneaton in Warwickshire  
 We lived as you soon shall hear,  
 But in our station not content,  
 To rob and plunder we were bent,
3. Mr. Greenway was the first we met,  
 And by us he was soon beset  
 With a dreadful blow upon the head,  
 We left him as we thought for dead.
4. His money and his watch also  
 We took, which proved our overthrow,  
 And then we ran away with speed,  
 And left him on the road to bleed.
5. But for the crime we soon were ta'en  
 And sent to Warwick for the same;  
 To be confined in prison strong,  
 Till the Assizes did come on.
6. When at the bar we did appear,  
 We pleaded guilty as you shall hear,  
 The jury all the same did cry,  
 And we were condemned to die.
7. As for the ages of all three,  
  
 Is eighteen, nineteen, and twenty;  
 It must be awful for to see,  
 Such young men at the fatal tree.

1. All for three brothers in fair Warwickshire  
 Three daring fellows you all shall hear  
 To rob and plunder was their intent  
 To go robbing along the highway they went
2. The first they met was Lord Granuaille  
 With his coach and four there they did rebay  
 The heavy blow struck him on the head  
 And they left him on the highway for dead
3. They took his watch and his money too  
 So soon they proved his sad overthrow  
 They run away its with all the speed  
 And they left him on the highway to bleed
4. Now as they were taken all for the same  
 They were put in prison to the trial come  
 They were put in prison bound in iron strong  
 Until the assizes it did come on.
5. Now at the Bar these three young men 'peared  
 They was pleading guilty you all shall hear  
 The judge and jurymen all did say  
 For its they are cast and condemned to die.
6. The age, the age of you young men three  
 Your age, your age you come tell to me  
 One eighteen, nineteen, and the other twenty  
 Isn't it a shock and a sight to see  
 Three clever young men on the gallows tree
- [7. The names, the names of you young men three  
 Your names, your names you come tell to me  
 My name is Will Atkin from once I came  
 Yes and many a time I've heard your name.]
8. At the Bar their poor mother 'peared  
 She was wringing her tender hands tearing  
 out her hair  
 Saying 'Judge and jurymen spare their lives  
 For they are my sons and my heart's delight'

9. It's go you home dearest woman dear  
 We have just told them of their shocking fate  
 For tomorrow morning at the hour of three  
 You can claim their bodies from the gallers tree.
10. It's go you home dearest mother dear  
 You have come too late for our time is near  
 Tomorrow morning that is the day  
 From all our friends we must die away.
8. All you that come to see us die,  
 Upon the gallows tree so high,  
 Shun every vice and take good ways,  
 Then you may all see happy days.
11. Come all you people that is standing by  
 That have come here for to see us die  
 You shun bad company take to good ways  
 That's the way to live and see happy days.
9. We hope none will reflect upon  
 Our friends when we are dead and gone  
 For if they do they're much to blame,  
 Since we have suffered for the same.

As actually sung by Danny Brazil on 6 May 1966, the song did not include what is here numbered stanza seven (duly enclosed in square brackets), but in subsequent discussion (28 December 1966), prompted by his sister Lemmie, who also had the song in her repertoire, he agreed that "Three Brothers," as he knew it, included this stanza.<sup>8</sup> It accordingly forms part of my "Danny Brazil 1966" version, but the words specified are technically as spoken by Lemmie rather than as sung by Danny, and its vulnerability is duly noted for future reference.

General features meriting immediate comment include the fairly systematic shift from the broadside's first person narrative of the condemned men to the third person of the oral version, which is in accordance with generic modulation, in that emotional engagement is an important selling-point for the broadside, while conversely "impersonality" has long been considered one of the hallmarks of the traditional ballad.

Another feature conventionally assigned to the "balladesque" narrative mode is its penchant for passages that are dramatic both in comprising direct, urgent confrontations between parties with a vital interest in what is occurring, and in constituting dialogue. And largely as a result of the additions to be discussed in a moment, the oral version, with five out of eleven stanzas involving or comprising direct speech (most of it urgent), is infinitely more dramatic than the original, which has none.

The juxtaposition also shows clearly enough that oral transmission has involved some *subtraction*: it amounts to only two stanzas, but this is relatively significant (over 20%) given that the original has only nine. It is also striking that the stanzas omitted are

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<sup>8</sup> My thanks to Peter Shephard (personal communication) for this contextual information.

the first and last, that is, involving not the narrative itself but the classic broadside packaging of opening statement about the subject (a boon to the broadside peddler but redundant for the social folk singer) and the concluding, admonitory valediction to the reader/listener, most of which is now removed. (Oral tradition has nonetheless supplied the remaining valedictory stanza with the “Come all ye” commonplace normally associated with the opening of broadside ballads.) This reduction in packaging also increases the impersonality of the narration, as well as achieving a sharper focus on the essential events.

But the most striking feature of the oral version is the extent of the *additions* to the song that have occurred in transmission, no less than four of the oral version’s eleven stanzas having no equivalent in the original. Most of the songs that have lent themselves to this sort of investigation display exclusively (at the stanzaic level) subtraction, and this is the only instance in which an oral derivative is actually *longer* than the printed original. On the other hand, addition *has* been discerned in other songs, and this one conforms to the thesis in the sense that all the material added is in itself traditional, and/or is generated by traditional processes.

It is the latter that produces the first “new” stanza of the oral version (st. 7), in which the judge inquires about the names of the accused. It is not so much added as cloned from the preceding stanza in which he asks about their ages, although in the process the source stanza has in turn modulated into conformity with its derivative, including the generation of some verbal repetition within the stanzas. The result corresponds exactly to the “incremental repetition” that is a major formal feature of the balladesque narrative mode, the judge’s question about the ages now repeated, but with the narrative “increment” that it has moved on to their names.

This request in itself has a good pedigree as a *topos* in traditional balladry (with some associated commonplace phraseology), not least in the outlaw ballads, when the King needs to know who has accosted him in the greenwood:

“What is your names?” than sayd our kynge,  
 “Anone that you tell me” (Child 1965:#116A.118)

or when Robin Hood himself needs to know the identity of a doughty opponent:

Pedlar, pedlar, what is thy name?  
 Come speedilie and tell to me (Child 1965:#132A.11; cf. 136A)

The other major addition—the mother’s plea at the trial—encompasses the insertion of new but traditional material that at the same time is partly generated by the cloning of an existing stanza, and then itself subject to a repetition-generating bifurcation. The intervention of someone close to the condemned criminal pleading for his life occurs elsewhere in traditional song, the closest analogue to the present case probably being “Geordie” (Child 1965:#209), although the plea is from the sweetheart rather than a

parent. One version, from oral tradition in Somerset in 1904, also parallels/anticipates the specific detail of the intervention coming “too late” to help the condemned person:

Then George looked round the court  
 And saw his dearest Polly  
 He said My dear you've come too late  
 For I'm condemned already. (Sharp 1974:#36A.3)

Not documented in the repertoires of Danny Brazil or his immediate family, the song was nonetheless known in English Gypsy tradition; witness the versions (rather cut down, largely comprising the words of the sweetheart's plea) collected by Mike Yates from the singing of Levi Smith in Surrey in 1974 (Yates 1975:73-74; MacColl and Seeger 1977:94) and from his brother Jasper (Yates 2003:#2). Rather more of the court scene (but still not this stanza) is preserved in a Gypsy version collected by Alice Gillington almost a century earlier (1911:6-7, “The Warminster Song”).

On the other hand, the incident may not have been imported as a verbal whole, but pieced together (around the traditional theme) from individual stanzas, lines, or phrases, from tradition in general or specific songs known to the singers in this train of transmission. The mother's hand-wringing (cf. Child 1965:#61, #87C, #181B, #218A, #239, #259, #266) and hair-tearing (cf. Child 1965:#41A, #90B, #191, #196, #203, #210 #238) are familiar *topoi* of emotional stress, and sometimes occur together, as indeed in Danny Brazil's own “My Love Willie” (Brazils 2007:#2.12): “She wrung her hands and she tore her hair / Just like a woman all in despair.” Parental hair-tearing also occurs in some versions of “The Folkestone Murder,” reputed to be popular with Gypsies in southern England, when mother and father learn of the fate of their daughters (Kennedy 1975:#320, and p. 727): This song too is in Danny Brazil's repertoire, but as recorded in 1977 (Brazils 2007:#2.19) he cuts to another stanza immediately before this line.

But there is a further (traditional) process at work, for, just like the second of the judge's questions discussed above, the stanza narrating the appearance of the mother before the court is in several respects cloned on the stanza already in the ballad narrating the trial itself:

6. When at the bar we did appear,  
 We pleaded guilty as you shall hear,  
 The jury all the same did cry,  
 And we were condemned to die.

5. Now at the Bar these three young men ‘peared  
They was pleading guilty you all shall hear  
 The judge and jurymen all did say  
 For its they are cast and condemned to die.

. . .

8. At the Bar their poor mother ‘peared  
She was wringing her tender hands tearing  
 out her hair  
Saying Judge and jurymen spare their lives  
 For they are my sons and my heart's delight

The plea *topos* continues with the negative response, many of whose constituent phrases have a traditional or intertextual status too. The announcement that the young men will die “tomorrow morning” has connections with the moments when a ballad protagonist anticipates (even without the certainty of a judicial execution) his or her own demise:

For tomorrow morning before it is day

My body shall lie by him (Child 1965:#85, “Lady Alice,” C.6)

and dismissing someone with a “go home” phrase is equally traditional, if perhaps more often applied to a deceitful lover, as in two Gypsy songs: “O, go home, go home, you false damnceitful” (MacColl and Seeger 1977:228); “O go home, go home, you artful, seekful” (229). In Harry Brazil’s version of another ballad (sung by most of the Brazil family), “The Old Riverside,” this expression is combined, if in a different grammatical construction, with a reference to a mother: “You go home to your own dear mother’s house” (Brazils 2007:#1.1; Danny Brazil himself [#1.3] sings “father” at this point). In the holy legend ballad “Hugh of Lincoln,” as recorded from oral tradition in late nineteenth-century Lincolnshire, the martyr combines both of the conventional phrases discussed above in a statement to his mother that could qualify as a model for the replies of the brothers and the judge in our ballad:

Go home, go home, my mother dear

And prepare my winding sheet

For tomorrow morning before eight o’clock

You with my body shall meet (Bronson 1959-72:#155.24.6)

This ballad is in the Brazil family repertoire, although this stanza does not occur in the version recorded from Lemmie Brazil in 1967 (Brazils 2007:#3.16), or indeed in other Gypsy versions as yet consulted (MacColl and Seeger, 1977:88; Yates 2003:#20).

Wherever it came from, at some point—before, during, or after the insertion of the Mother’s plea into our ballad—the rejection bifurcated into two utterances, each of a stanza, expressed in the voices, respectively, of the judge and the sons. Together they constitute another case of incremental repetition, that is, verbal repetition with change constituting a narrative increment: “It’s go you home dearest woman dear” (st. 9) and “It’s go you home dearest mother dear” (st. 10), and so on. Since this incident is not in the broadside, we do not know which of the two utterances/stanzas is the original, and which the derivative clone. To the extent that this is a crime and execution ballad, the original rejection would most appropriately come from the judge, but in what we might call the *stabat mater* topos illustrated by “Hugh of Lincoln” the response properly belongs to the sons. It may be relevant that at the strikingly parallel moment in “Geordie,” the “you have come too late” formulation is sometimes (as in the version cited above) spoken by the accused, sometimes by the judge (Bronson 1959-72: #209.53.4; #209.45.5).

In terms of narrative as opposed to verbal structure, the addition of this intervention produces a more articulated narrative, more in the balladesque manner, with a balance

between two major scenes, the robbery and the mother's plea, linked by the intervening condemnation. The broadside original reaches an early climax with the robbery, and then tapers off with a brief evocation of the trial and its aftermath, shifting its energies from narrative construction to emotional inflation. And the insertion of this plea by "their poor mother" cannot of course have taken place independently of the song's other decisive shift towards the traditional, which transformed the historical and unrelated W. Warner, T. Ward, and T. Williams of the broadside into "three brothers" (1.1), making their common fate an even starker tragedy.

Groups of "three brothers" figure frequently in folksong tradition as a whole (e.g., Child 1965:#14, #49, #188), often as "three bold brothers" (Child 1965:#62, #71, #96, #101) if not actually "daring," not least in the songs of the travelers, whose large families depended for their well-being on a good deal of solidarity and cooperation among adult brothers. The ethos is reflected in the song, "The Oakham Poachers," recorded from Traveler Wiggy Smith (neighbor and friend of Danny Brazil) in 1974, in which "Three brothers being wet and weary, / Off a-poaching they did go" (1.3-4). Ambushed by the gamekeepers, "These three brothers being brave hearted, / They boldly kept on firing" (3.1-2) until arrested and sent for trial. As these quotations indicate (and cf. 5.2, "we three brothers"), there is a similar emphasis on their number and relationship (Yates 2006:95). It may also be relevant that the Brazil family repertoire included two songs in which the disruption of fraternal relationships is seen as unwise or tragic: the sentimental "Shake Hands and be Brothers Again" (Brazils 2007:#2.8), in which two brothers who have fallen out are reconciled as one lies dying, and the classic ballad (Child 1965:#13, "Edward") "Son Come Tell it Unto Me" (Brazils 2007:#1.14-16), in which one brother, in response to his mother's anxious queries, eventually confesses he has killed the other. Sung by seven members from two generations, it was a song manifestly well known to the Brazil family.

More specifically, it may be significant that Danny and Lemmie Brazil both sang a version of the pirate ballad "Henry Martin" (Child 1965:#250). As recorded, their versions comprise exclusively the climactic battle (Bronson 1959-72: #250.9; Brazils 2007:#3.23), but since the ballad is essentially about three brothers who draw lots to decide which of them should support the others by turning pirate, at some time in the Brazil family tradition it very likely started, as do most other recorded versions, with a line about three brothers, which sometimes comes close—"There were three brothers in merry Scotland" (Bronson 1959-72:#250.1, #250.5); "There were three brothers in fair London town" (Bronson 1959-72:#250.3)—to the opening line of our song in Danny's Brazil's rendition, "All for three brothers in fair Warwickshire." Many versions of "Henry Martin" also contain a line specifying that the one chosen "should go robbing all on the salt sea" (Bronson 1959-72:#250.2, #250.3, #250.8), similar to the expression Danny uses in the opening stanza, "To go robbing along the highway."

The discussion of the additional stanzas in the oral version above encompassed in passing several instances of the verbal repetitions (including "incremental repetition"), and the commonplaces or formulas characterizing the balladesque narrative style, but they



may be supplemented with others that are generated—evidently in the course of oral transmission—in the stanzas deriving from the original broadside.

Quite a number of the phrases new to the oral version have parallels in folksong, suggesting a traditional, if not formulaic, status. Of the more substantial, “To rob and plunder was their intent” (1.3) is matched in content and structure by “To kill or be killed was their intent” (Child 1965:#207.3) and “To bring her home was his intent” (Child 1965:#5D.11) from ballads elsewhere, or indeed by “To join the force was my intent” from Danny’s own “McCaffery” (Brazils 2007:#2.6), “All for to get married was her intent” from his “The Golden Glove” (Brazils 2007:#1.26), or “. . . to wed with her was his intent” from his “The Brake of Briars” (Shepherd 2008). But also possible is influence from a particular song, the poaching ballad “Limpy Jack,” also recorded by Peter Shepherd from Danny Brazil in 1966 (Brazils 2007:#1.6). Allowing for reversal in order, the setting off of the poacher and his dogs—

To catch a fat buck away we went  
To catch a fat buck was our intent

—is identical in rhyme and close in formulation to our oral version’s account of the three brothers at the same point of their story (st. 1.3-4):

To rob and plunder was their intent  
To go robbing along the highway they went.

And the two songs may have tangled at another point as well. The fate of the poachers:

Now we were put in prison strong,  
Until assizes did come on

is very close to that of our three brothers (st. 4.3-4):

They were put in prison bound in iron strong  
Until the assizes it did come on

or perhaps rather to something between this and the broadside original (st. 5.3-4):

To be confined in prison strong  
Till the Assizes did come on

—suggesting that at this point the influence may have been in the opposite direction. In balladry at large, the 1818 broadside’s “in prison strong” is as well qualified as a commonplace as Danny’s “bound in iron strong,” but the latter is closely matched by a Gypsy version of another crime and execution ballad, Mary Ann Haynes’ “Waxford Town” (Yates 2003:#11): “And he’s bound down in irons strong.”

The transformation of the broadside's "Mr. Greenway was the first we met" (3.1) to "The first they met was Lord Granuaille" (2.1), even leaving aside the remarkable change of identity (discussed below), probably occurred under the pressure of traditional song idiom (cf. Child 1965:#17H.12 and #130A.2). External influence is also discernible in the ostensibly minimal change in the narration of the taking of the victim's possessions:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 4. His money and his watch also<br>We took, which proved our overthrow, | 3. They took his watch and his money too<br>So soon <u>they</u> proved <u>his sad</u> overthrow |
|---|---|

The second lines actually have quite different meanings.<sup>9</sup> The broadside author, perhaps with a sense of the whole narrative typical of a textual mode of composition, can look forward, and understand that the robbery *will prove* the overthrow of the perpetrators. Oral performance, which is more conscious of the immediate task, leaving overall strategy to more automatic processes, sees the event as the overthrow, here and now, of the victim. And the addition of the words "So soon" and "sad" indicates very strongly that the reformulation of the line occurred under intertextual pressure from Danny Brazil's "Poison in a Glass of Wine" (Brazils 2007:#3.20), where a jealous lover resolves to destroy his sweetheart: "So soon that he proved her sad overthrow."

The oral version follows the broadside in twice stating that the robbers "left" their victim in a helpless condition, but the formulations in the two instances are now both closer to each other (qualifying the lines for discussion under repetitions, below), and closer to traditional folksong idiom:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 3.4 <u>We left him</u> as we thought for dead. | 2.4 <u>And they left him on the highway</u> for dead |
| 4.4 <u>And left him on the</u> road to bleed.  | 3.4 <u>And they left him on the highway</u> to bleed |

A similar opening phrase participates in an analogous repetition in Danny's 1977 performance of "Betsy the Milkmaid" (Brazils 2007:#1.11), first in the narrative of her fighting off a would-be rapist:

And she left him lay bleeding / Near the blackberry fold

and then in her report of it:

And I've left him laid bleeding / Near the blackberry fold.

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<sup>9</sup> These lines may also be taken to illustrate the changes in tradition that make the words fit more comfortably into the four-line framework constituted by the melodic structure. The oral derivative, reflecting the practicalities of performance, operates much more emphatically with one-line units, and almost systematically demolishes the enjambement that occurs in the original, whose composition was more under the constraint of the rhyme scheme, which facilitated two-line sense-units. (It is also likely that the meter of the oral version's "They took his watch and his money too" is more singable than the broadside's "His money and his watch also.")

The second half of the repeated phrase in our song “on the highway” (or, as in the broadside, “on the king’s highway”) is very common in song tradition, including a Brazil family favorite “The Gown so green,” at least as sung by Harry Brazil (Brazils 2007:#2.26; Danny himself [#2.26] sings “along the highway”), Hiram Brazil’s “Game of All Fours” (#1.7), and Danny’s “Jack and the Robber” (#1.24).

The concatenation of a blow to the head and abandonment on the highway, meanwhile, occurs in the ballad “The Famous Flower of Serving-Men” (Child 1965:#106) as sung by Gypsy Caroline Hughes (MacColl and Seeger 1977:84),

But every blow struck him all on the crown,  
Left him on the highway, there to die.

This song does not seem to figure in the repertoires of the Brazil family, but the formulation is altogether close to that in Danny’s “Three Brothers” (st. 2.3-4)

The heavy blow struck him on the head  
And they left him on the highway for dead.

Brazil’s opening phrase in the first line of the song, “All for . . . ,” is clearly something of a Brazil family convention, which they also use to begin four other songs: “All for a pretty ploughing boy” (“The Pretty Ploughing Boy”; Brazils 2007:#2.10), “All for a true born Irish man” (“Brandon on the Moor”; #2.32), “All for a fair damsel” (“The Banks of the Sweet Dundee” #3.8), and “All for a farmer . . . ” (“The Brake of Briars,” Shepherd 2008); it is rarely found in this function elsewhere in folksong tradition.

Another favorite commonplace of both traditional ballads and news broadsides, “upon the gallows tree,” occurs in our original (8.2) but is lost at this point in the folksong. But by way of compensation, however, it occurs twice elsewhere: once as a substitute for a less formulaic expression:

7.4 Such young men at the fatal tree

6.4 Three clever young men on the gallows tree

and once in the folksong’s new material (st. 9.4): “You can claim their bodies from the gallers tree.”

Several of these instances of formulaic phrases or commonplaces, in occurring more than once in the song, have added to the roster of verbal repetitions. Of what remains perhaps the smallest, but still, I think significant, is the way two quite similar phrases in the original achieve identity in the oral version:

2.2 We lived as you soon shall hear,

1.2 Three daring fellows you all shall hear

6.2 We pleaded guilty as you shall hear,

5.2 They was pleading guilty you all shall hear

The reference to “the [king’s] highway” which was lost with the subtraction of st. 1, reappears three times in the derivative, providing repetition between what are now sts. 1,

2, and 3, in the case of the last two also providing a further classic example of the way two lines of similar import in the original achieve much closer verbal repetition in the derivative:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. To rob and plunder we were bent,          | To go robbing along <u>the highway</u> they went |
| 2. We left him as we thought for dead.       | <u>And they left him on the highway</u> for dead |
| 3. <u>And left him on the road</u> to bleed. | <u>And they left him on the highway</u> to bleed |

Beyond these verbal details there are additions, subtractions, and substitutions that in a more general sense transmute this journalistic account of a specific event into a more “traditional” narrative of a personal tragedy. This includes the drift from the specific to the conventional in empirical information. Thus, while we lose Nuneaton we retain Warwickshire, only it is now the more poetical “fair Warwickshire,” and “in fair Warwickshire” may qualify as another formula introduced in the song’s oral transmission: the ubiquitous “fair” applied to places in traditional balladry may more often than not relate (at least in Child’s corpus) to Scotland, but is sometimes used more specifically of counties and towns, even English (e.g. Child 1965:#139, #169, #289). Weenie Brazil is close to matching this phrasing when he sets the action of “The Cruel Ship Carpenter” in “. . . fair London city, twas near Worcestershire” (Brazils 2007:#2).<sup>10</sup>

We also lose the individual names of the criminals as part of the process by which they become three brothers.<sup>11</sup> That the tragedy is reinforced by their youth (underlined by the appearance of their mother to plead for their lives) probably explains why their specific ages, in contrast, are retained, and the age of young protagonists is often specified in tragic folksongs: “I was scarcely years eighteen of age”; “I was young and in my prime and my age was twenty-one” (MacColl and Seeger 1977:274 and 251—both songs from Gypsy tradition). The sequence of ages in our song, “One eighteen, nineteen and the other twenty” may have enhanced the song’s welcome in a Gypsy song tradition that appreciated the poignancy of the last stanza of the well-known “Long a-growing,” here as sung by Harry Brazil:

Now the age of sixteen, he was a married man  
 The age of seventeen he was the father of a son  
 The age of eighteen all on his grave the grass grewed green  
 And it soon put an end to his growing.  
 (Brazils 2007:#2.25; see also Caroline Hughes, in MacColl and Seeger 1977:17)

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<sup>10</sup> The text in the booklet accompanying the CD, (Stradling 2007:#2) reads “. . . in fair Worcestershire,” which is even closer, and may indeed be what the singer intended.

<sup>11</sup> In the process they also acquire a new (common) surname, as one identifies himself as “Will Atkin” (st. 7). This becomes “Will Atkins” in Danny’s later versions, and may have had some currency in popular eighteenth-century tradition on robbers and renegades, being the name of the most bloodthirsty of the mutineers who at the end of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) are abandoned on the desert island (Defoe 1976:264).

But while still young they are more heroic than in the broadside: not merely three brothers but three “daring fellows” (st.1.2) for whom to rob and plunder was a deliberate commitment rather than a symptom (as in the original) of social discontent (broadside st. 2.3). There is a corresponding shift towards the heroic in the identity and character of their victim: the real and rather prosaic “Mr. Greenway,” who in the broadside (st. 3.1) is not even dignified by the horse he was riding in the newspaper accounts, becomes a figure better qualified as the antagonist of “daring” highway robbers: “Lord Granuaille” (st. 2.1), with a dashing “coach and four” (st. 2.2).

The latter feature—the exact number of horses varying for the sake of rhyme—almost certainly derives from song tradition (e.g., Child 1965:#12H, #53, #204, #232), where an impressive equipage is a symbol of wealth (like the “coach and three” in Danny’s own version of “Lord Bateman,” Child 1965:#53 [Brazils 2007:#3.25]) and can indeed identify the owner as a suitable victim of highway robbery. But in the latter function there could be a more direct intertextual influence from one particular song or another. As we have seen in other connections, Danny’s own repertoire included a ballad on the career of a highwayman, “Brandon on the Moor” (Brazils 2007:#2.32), which by the time it was recorded in 1977 (and in other oral versions consulted) lacks the relevant episodes, but a fuller, broadside version has him rob two victims qualified precisely by their ostentatious vehicles: “A coach and six horses . . .” / “A coach and four horses, Brannan chanced to spy.”<sup>12</sup> Some kind of interaction between the two songs is suggested by the other parallels between Danny’s versions of each already touched on. To these it can be added that as in our original broadside Brandon encounters some of his victims on “the king’s highway,” but another victim, as in “Three Brothers,” “along the highway,” and in both songs the person concerned is relieved of his watch; Brandon’s name is also a matter of interest to the authorities. A comic highway robbery song, “Three jolly sneaksmen,” recorded in 1907 from a singer in Portsmouth (and apparently nowhere else), also involves a coach-driving victim in a stanza otherwise reminiscent of the oral version of “Three Brothers”:

Three jolly sneaksmen they all set out  
 To rob and plunder without a doubt  
 When a coach and six came rattling by  
 Stop stop coachman they all did cry.

And the fate of the robbers is very similar:

Our sizes and sessions is drawing near  
 And at the bar they did appear  
 When the judge cast round his rolling eye  
 Saying My jolly little sneaksmen, you’re bound for to die. (Purslow 1968:111)

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<sup>12</sup> “Bold Brannan on the Moor.” National Library of Scotland 2008, “The Word on the Street,” <http://www.nls.uk/broadsides/broadside.cfm/id/16810/transcript/1>.

“Lord Granuaille” himself, or his name at least, has an uncommonly precise origin in the Brazil family repertoire, which includes a favorite of Irish folksong tradition, “Poor old Granuaille” or “Dear Old Erin’s Shore” (Brazils 2007:#1.28, sung by Harry Brazil), presumably encountered during the Brazils’ lengthy sojourn in Ireland. It is a nationalist lament for lost freedom, symbolized in a mythical female figure whose original was a rumbustious lady pirate from Elizabethan times, Grace O’Malley, of whose Gaelic form “Granuaille” (in various spellings) is a corruption (Chambers 2003).<sup>13</sup>

Not surprisingly, the changes undergone by the song between the first and last recorded performances by Danny Brazil are distinctly limited compared to the impact of oral tradition over the century and one-half following the song’s publication in 1818, and have no generic implications: the song is no more and no less balladic in 1995 than it was in 1966. This verbal stability indicates very clearly that at least during this phase of oral tradition (even in a predominantly illiterate subculture) performance entailed retrieving verbal material from the memory, rather than improvising a reconstruction on the basis of a remembered storyline, deploying traditional devices like formulas and repetitions. The oft-noted instability of Gypsy songs, notably the tendency to conglomerate stanza sequences from different songs (MacColl and Seeger 1977:12-13; 24; Stradling 2000:9), has prompted discussion that Gypsy singers may to this degree improvise in the course of performance (Yates 2003:5; Yates 2006:23-24), but while at some point in the past our song experienced a substantial injection of material from specific songs or the general tradition, all Danny Brazil’s versions, with one proviso already noted and one to come, comprise the same eleven stanzas, and the same goes for Lemmie Brazil’s version. This includes the appearance in all versions of the same, unorthodox, five-line stanza.

It is equally clear, however, that certain parts of the song are more stable than others, and perhaps not surprisingly the instability is particularly characteristic of those stanzas that have been added to the broadside, or have been most radically altered before we get to the first recorded performances: these are also, as it happens, the stanzas encompassing the song’s major instances of verbal—incremental—repetition.

This less stable material is to be found exclusively in the trial scene, and the opening five stanzas, taking us from the robbery through the escape, apprehension, and imprisonment to the beginning of the trial, are reproduced more or less verbatim on each occasion. Such variation as does occur is worth noting only to the extent it involves the generation of (very small) patterns of verbal repetition, and is restricted to two—as it happens related—lines. The second line of the song as first recorded from Danny Brazil, begins:

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<sup>13</sup> As previously noted, the present study does not extend to musical aspects of the song, but the latter can of course have implications for the words sung, and I am grateful to Peter Shephard (personal communication) for the observation that Danny Brazil sings this song to a melody in 3/2 time, which allows the option of five stresses per line, a factor that has contributed to the lengthening of some lines (in relation to the broadside) with additional syllables. There is a transcript of the tune in Shephard 2008. Peter Shephard also reports that while he has encountered this tune in Gypsy tradition it is not used by the Brazil family for any of their other songs (which might have had implications for verbal interference).

1966:                Three daring fellows

(followed by Lemmie Brazil in the same year), but is subsequently rendered variously as:

1977:                Three daring young fellows

1978:                Three daring brothers

1995:                Three daring young fellows.

The line has effectively made two attempts—only one in the upshot sustained—to establish or enhance verbal links with other lines in the song. The “young” of 1977/95 would add this line to the already impressive list referring to the youth of the robbers (st. 5, “three young men,” st. 7, “young men three,” st. 6, “you young men three”; “Three clever young men”), while the “brothers” of 1978 produces a closer parallel to the preceding line:

1978:                All for three brothers in fair Warwickshire  
                          Three daring brothers you all shall hear.

This may suggest that even after 1966 “Henry Martin,” in some version other than Danny’s, continued to exert an influence, as it can open with a similar construction (Bronson 1959-72:#250.8; cf. #250.5, 7, 10):

Three loving brothers from Old Scotland,  
 Three loving brothers were they . . .

or simply that the two songs responded similarly to the pressure to generate internal repetitions.

And it is the designation of the robbers that constitutes the other, minor, instability in these opening phases. Danny Brazil’s sixth stanza (st. 6.5) is consistent through all his performances in its anticipation that spectators will be shocked to see:

1966:                Three clever young men on the gallows tree.

This line thus participates in the incantatory repetitions of “young men” just noted, but Lemmie Brazil has instead:

Three daring young fellers on the gallows tree

which makes the line a closer verbal parallel to the second line of the first stanza (as they both sang it):

1966:                Three daring fellows you all shall hear.

The impression of a song seeking (but not always sustaining) verbal repetitions, or achieving repetitions that are unstable within themselves, is confirmed by the larger-scale instability represented by the new, or significantly altered, material. In tradition the song developed an incremental set of two questions from the judge (about ages and names, respectively) out of the one question (about ages) in the original, but it will be recalled that while he later acknowledged he did know it, when Danny Brazil performed the “Three Brothers” in 1966 he did not sing the additional stanza. Sister Lemmie, who jogged his memory, has both stanzas in her version. Danny dutifully retains both stanzas in all his subsequent performances, but instability persists, in that the order of the questions varies.

Most unstable of all, however, is the totally new episode, the plea of their mother that the three brothers be spared (sts. 8-10). Its initial stanza (st. 8) containing the mother’s plea, “At the bar their poor mother ‘peared . . .” is effectively reproduced verbatim in all performances, but the next two stanzas (sts. 9-10), with the incremental responses of the judge and the brothers, are extremely fluid (although the order of speakers remains constant), and the instability also encompasses the degree of verbal repetition involved. Most drastic, but in some ways least significant, is the swapping of the second line-couple between the stanzas. Both replies inform the mother that the decisive event will occur “tomorrow morning,” but sometimes it is the Judge who says:

For tomorrow morning at the hour of three  
 You can claim their bodies from the gallers tree  
 (Danny 1966, 1978, 1995)

sometimes (with appropriate adjustment of pronoun) the brothers themselves:

Tomorrow morning at the hour of three  
 You may claim our bodies from the gallow’s tree  
 (Lemmie 1966; Danny 1977)

When this happens, accordingly, the other response shifts from the brothers:

Tomorrow morning that is the day  
 From all our friends we must die away  
 (Danny 1966, 1978, 1995)

to the Judge:

For tomorrow morning at the dawn of day,  
 From all their friends they must die away.  
 (Lemmie 1966; Danny 1977).

It will be noticed that there is a variation within this variation in the way the first line oscillates between “that is the day” (Danny 1966, 1978 and 1995) and “at the dawn of day” (Lemmie 1966 and Danny 1977). The latter phrase has the air of an alliterating



formula, but in may derive from another song in family tradition, the line “Early one morning by the dawn of the day” occurring in versions of “The Cruel Ship Carpenter” recorded from both Weenie and Danny (Brazils 2007:#2.1&2).

The first two lines of these two stanzas (9 & 10) offer a kaleidoscope of variations involving several words or phrases. Of the two 1966 versions, that of Lemmie Brazil is technically more “correct” in sustaining the rhyme-scheme:

9. Oh no dear woman you have come too late,  
We have just told them of their shocking fate;
10. It's go you home dearest mother dear,  
You have come too late for out time is near.

As sung by Danny Brazil the same year, the two linked stanzas achieve more verbal repetition (by internal contamination), but at the expense of the rhyme:

9. It's go you home dearest woman dear  
We have just told them of their shocking fate
10. It's go you home dearest mother dear  
You have come too late for our time is near.

While the second lines are quite different, the first now differ only in their addressee: “woman” when the Judge is speaking, while the brothers say “mother.” This arrangement fails to maintain itself however, and as in other respects Danny’s handling of these lines in 1977 falls into line with that of Lemmie Brazil in 1966. In 1978, however, by a massive internal contamination that maintains the rhyme scheme intact while substituting a whole line he achieves two highly repetitive lines, in which only one word varies to suit the identity of the speaker:

9. It's go you home dearest woman dear  
You have come too late for the time is near
10. It's go you home dearest women dear  
You have come too late for our time is near.

This is effectively an example of the internal contamination process in oral tradition taking verbal parallelism too far. There is virtually no increment in the repetition, and in 1995 Danny makes a tactical withdrawal to increase the incremental element to a slightly more adequate level:

9. It's go you home dearest woman dear  
You have come too late for their time it's near

10. It's go you home dearest mother dear  
 You have come too late for our time it's near.

These changes are occurring simultaneously with the similar variations in the second two lines of these stanzas glanced at a moment ago, giving a range of permutations defying clear presentation, but it will have been seen that the number of units involved is limited, as is the variation within a given line. The sequence of four stanzas just examined, one deriving from the broadside, one generated out of it by reproduction-with-variation, and the two new stanzas (the one probably bifurcating from the other), form a kind of playground for this song's verbal instability, perhaps appropriate for its one really dramatic scene, while the remaining—more narrative—part of the song progresses, as we have seen, on its relatively steady way.

Amidst all the detail, discernible trends seem to emerge that may provide valuable insights into the way oral tradition impacts on verbal performance culture, at least in the field of narrative song. Over the long term, the trend clearly is towards the “balladesque”—a more impersonal, dramatic, and stark narrative, deploying more formulas and displaying more repetition patterns, and it is hard not to suspect that similar processes operated at other times, on original narrative songs other than broadsides, to produce late medieval or early modern ballads of the likes of “St. Stephen and Herod,” “Robin and Gandelyn,” or “The Battle of Otterburn.” In studies of broadsides in tradition, with only the beginning and the latter end of the sequence available, we normally cannot see the myriad of tactical variations by which this strategic result was achieved in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But in this instance the additional material from Gypsy tradition, both of Danny Brazil's later performances of this song and the intertextual environment of other songs (in their many variants) in which it had to survive by evolving, seems indeed to reveal a distinctly Darwinian world in which various options are tried out, but of which only the “fittest” survive—in the true Darwinian sense of best fitted to the given circumstances.

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## Appendix 1

### Surviving Copies of “The Lamentation of W. Warner T. Ward & T. Williams”<sup>14</sup>

*THE Lamentation OF W. Warner T. Ward & T Williams, who were executed at Warwick, August 14, 1818, for highway robbery.*

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<sup>14</sup> For help in identifying, locating and acquiring broadsides versions I am grateful to Roy Palmer, Assistant Librarian Peta Webb of the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, London, and Special Collections Librarian Craig Simpson of Kent State University Libraries and Media Services.

## THEOPHILUS BLOOMER, BIRMINGHAM

Bloomer evidently printed the ballad several times, as the accompanying “slip” ballads on the sheet (when it has not been divided) vary. The copies consulted form two groups, distinguished by the spelling of a word (“of” vs. “off”) in the third line of the first stanza:

A. (st. 1.3: “Cut of just in the bloom of day”)

# Kent, Ohio. Kent State University Library, Special Collections, Borowitz Crime Ephemera: Criminal Broad­sides of 19<sup>th</sup>-Century England, Inventory No. 67C (oversize box 2).

# Cambridge. Cambridge University Library, Madden Collection, 21 (Country Printers 6) item no. 22

# London. Vaughan Williams Memorial Library. *Cecil Sharp Scrapbook of Songs and Ballads*, p. 193.

# London. Vaughan Williams Memorial Library. *Cecil Sharp Scrapbook of Songs and Ballads*, p. 261.

# Cambridge. Cambridge University Library, Madden Collection, 21 (Country Printers 6) item no. 15

B. (st. 1.3: “Cut off just in the bloom of day”)

# London. Vaughan Williams Memorial Library. *Cecil Sharp Scrapbook of Songs and Ballads*, p. 194.

## SHIPWAY, CIRENCESTER

# Cambridge. Cambridge University Library. Madden Collection, 23 (Country Printers 8), item no. 647

## Appendix 2

### Brazil Family Versions of “Three Brothers in Fair Warwickshire”<sup>15</sup>

#### # Danny Brazil, 1966

Recorded by Peter Shephard, Gloucester, 6 May 1966

Springthyme Archive 66.5.1

-- cited here on the basis of transcript (and notes) supplied by Peter Shephard.

-- also accessible in Shephard 2008

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<sup>15</sup> My thanks to Rod Stradling and Peter Shephard for help in identifying and distinguishing the oral versions. Shephard 1967 has a conglomerate text based on Danny Brazil 1966 and Lemmie Brazil 1966; also accessible in Shephard 2008.

**# Danny Brazil, 1977**

Recorded by Gwilym Davies, Staverton, December 1977

-- cited here on the basis of Stradling 2007:#2.18

**# Danny Brazil, 1978**

Recorded by Mike Yates, Gloucester, 78.2.19.

-- cited here on the basis of Yates 1983:4

-- also printed in Yates 2006:111-13 [ten stanzas only: lacks stanza 10 of Yates 1983 text]

**# Danny Brazil, 1995**

Recorded by Gwilym Davies, Staverton, 95.4.13

-- cited here from Brazils 2007:#2.18 [transcribed TP]

**# Lementina (“Lemmie”) Brazil 1966**

Recorded (in part; recited) and discussed with Peter Shephard, Walham Tump, Gloucester, 28 December 1966

Springthyme Archive 66.9.2

-- cited here on the basis of transcript and notes supplied by Peter Shephard

-- also accessible in Shephard 2008

**# Danny and Lemmie Brazil 1966**

-- also accessible in Shephard 2008

## Discography

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| Brazils 2007 | <i>The Brazil Family: Down by the Riverside</i> . MTCD 345-7. Stroud: Musical Traditions Records.  |
| Gypsies 1998 | <i>My Father's the King of the Gypsies—Music of English and Welsh Travellers and Gypsies</i> , The Voice of the People, vol. 11. Topic TSCD 661. |
| Gypsies 2003 | <i>Here's Luck to a Man . . . : An Anthology of Gypsy Songs and Music from South-East England</i> . Musical Traditions MTCD320.                  |
| Smith 2000   | <i>Wiggy Smith: Band of Gold</i> . Musical Traditions MT CD 307.   |
| Yates 2006   | Mike Yates. <i>Traveller's Joy: Songs of English and Scottish Travellers</i> . London: English Folk Dance and Song Society. Accompanying CD.     |

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