

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: Breathing It In: The Musical Identity of the
Scottish Travellers

Cheryl Annette Tobler, Doctor of Philosophy, 2012

Directed By: Dr. Robert C. Provine chair
Division of Musicology and Ethnomusicology
School of Music, University of Maryland

This study examines the creation and continuation of identity among Travellers with regard to their vocal music and storytelling traditions. Travellers are historically a nomadic ethnic group found mainly in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, and in smaller numbers in the United States. My study focuses specifically on the Travellers of Scotland, in particular those of Perthshire and Aberdeenshire. Known widely for their musical abilities, the historically peripatetic Travellers often introduced new tunes or new settings wherever they travelled and mingled with settled, or non-Traveller, communities. Within the past forty years the majority of Travellers have become settled, and many have managed to maintain their identity through their expressive culture, specifically music and stories.

I examine how for many Travellers a previous peripatetic lifestyle and a current settled lifestyle have both contributed to and affected their musical identity. For this study, I draw on theories of identity and ethnicity, as well as the fields of folklore, ethnomusicology, history, linguistics and cultural studies to assist in the interpretation of music and identity in a cultural context.

Fieldwork I conducted in Scotland, Ireland, and the United States informs my research into how Traveller identity and ethnicity is conveyed and sustained through their vocal music. I conducted fieldwork in Ireland in the summer of 2004; in the United States in the summer of 2003 and the fall of 2004; and in Scotland in April 2004, August 2005, from September 2006 to April 2007, and in January 2008. Information during my fieldwork was collected from personal interviews with Irish and Scottish Travellers, with folklorists, and with those who are music promoters. I also conducted extensive archival research at the School for Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh, at the Cecil Sharp House in London, at the gypsy archives of the University of Liverpool, and at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

I analyze the role performance has in portraying Traveller identity, both in public and private spheres. Both music and storytelling, intertwined within the same performative framework for Travellers, are examined together in my research. In examining the complex role of Traveller identity portrayed through performance, I also include transcriptions of selected pieces from Traveller repertoire that contribute to my analysis of how key elements of Traveller society are revealed through their music. Furthermore, I conduct a comparative musical analysis of a song performed by a particularly well-known musical Traveller family, the Robertsons, to examine the continuation of specific Traveller cultural traits through music transmission. Through a close examination of four specific Scottish Travellers (Stanley Robertson, Duncan Williamson, Sheila Stewart, and Jess Smith) I conclude that Traveller identity is strongly tied to an understanding of their ethnicity, and that a musical identity is clearly evident through their expressive culture, specifically ballads and stories.

BREATHING IT IN: THE MUSICAL IDENTITY
OF THE SCOTTISH TRAVELLERS

By

Cheryl Annette Tobler

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Advisory Committee:
Professor Robert C. Provine, Chair
Professor Stephen Brighton
Professor Barry Pearson
Professor Eugene Robinson
Professor Lawrence Witzleben

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DEDICATION

To:

My parents, for their support and encouragement

and

The Traveller communities in Scotland and Ireland, for the music

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Many people--family, friends, advisors, and scholars--were instrumental to me, in both the United States and in the United Kingdom, in helping me with the development of this work, from offering research advice, suggestions and leads, to a free bed so I could continue working at archives overseas.

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I would like to thank the staff at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress for allowing me access to their uncatalogued collections of Traveller research and to the Cecil Sharp House in London, England for their invaluable aid in Traveller audio recordings. I would also like to offer my thanks to the staff at the School for Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh for months of access and assistance in scouring their library, photo and video archives for a wealth of Traveller information. In particular, I would like to thank Dr. Katherine Campbell and especially Ian Mackenzie, who sadly passed away during my research, and his wife Talitha Mackenzie for sharing both their extensive knowledge and their home with me. I would also like to offer my gratitude to Dr. Ian Russell of the Elphinstone Institute at the University of Aberdeen and Donald Smith at the Scottish Storytelling Centre for their invaluable assistance in connecting me with Travellers. And many thanks to Ewan McVicar who opened his

home to me on more than one occasion to share personal stories about the many Travellers he had performed with over the years.

Many other people supported me in invaluable ways so that I could continue my research both in the United States and in the United Kingdom. Without them, this research would not have been completed: Ruth and Brian Lewis, Jayne Shaw, Órla O’Sullivan, Sunmin Yoon, Dr. Razia Sultanova, Andi Tobler, Shelby Tobler, Shannon Dove, David Maier, Colin Miller and most especially my parents Shirley and John Tobler.

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Mun'ia du hu.

Tapadh leibh.

Go raibh míle maith agat.

Buíochas le Dia.

Ta.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In a poem titled “Scotia’s Bairn,” Scottish Traveller Jess Smith relates to the reader some of the main disparities in the lives of those brought up in the Traveller culture as opposed to those not. “Scotia’s Bairn,” Scots dialect for ‘child of Scotland,’ expresses both Smith’s frustrations and delights in being part of the Traveller culture.

The opening lines of this poem read:

“Yes, it may be said you are better than I.
Your peers have obviously blessed you with a fine home,
fine clothes, best schooling, good food....
I, on the other hand, saw life from the mouth of a Tinker’s tent.”¹

With this poem Smith introduces the reader into a culture seen for its richness of material culture and musical skills while at the same time being a pariah culture to the settled Scottish community. It is this dichotomy that informs my research into their music, stories, and identity.

This study examines the creation and continuation of identity among Travellers with regard to their music, both instrumental and vocal, and storytelling. Travellers are historically a nomadic ethnic group found mainly in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, and in smaller numbers in the United States. My study focuses specifically on the Travellers of Scotland, in particular those of Perthshire and Aberdeenshire. Known widely for their musical abilities, the historically peripatetic Travellers often introduced new tunes or new settings wherever they travelled and whenever they mingled with settled folk. Folklorists often described Travellers in terms

¹ <http://diary.jesssmith.co.uk/>, accessed April 25, 2011.

of bees spreading pollen. Songs and tunes of one non-Traveller community would carry to another group through the musical travels of the Travellers.

In this chapter I introduce the research approach to my dissertation topic, and the four individuals whose music and identity I examine in detail, as well as literary and scholarly areas of Traveller culture that inform Traveller identity. I begin with a brief discussion of the theoretical methods I use to examine Traveller musical identity; a literature review of pertinent works concerning Travellers, ethnicity and identity; and archives useful for detailed research on gypsies and Traveller communities. To better understand how music helps to shape Traveller identity, I include in this chapter a brief history of the Travellers and a discussion of their change from a nomadic lifestyle to a settled one. This chapter briefly introduces the four Travellers I focus on in my research—Stanley Robertson, Jess Smith, Duncan Williamson, and Sheila Stewart; I examine them in depth in chapter two. The main areas covered in my literature review are: Scottish Travellers, Traveller language, folksongs, ethnicity, and identity. This chapter concludes with an outline of the organization of the remaining chapters of this work.

Within the past twenty years the majority of Travellers have become settled. They live in permanent housing and no longer travel the roads, the way they were most notably distinguished as being ‘othered’ from mainstream society. Today, Travellers have managed to maintain their identity through their expressive culture, specifically music and storytelling.

In my research into the musical identity of the Scottish Travellers, I use an interdisciplinary approach that includes theoretical methods from the fields of

ethnomusicology, folklore, sociology, anthropology, and economics. I examine the Travellers in terms of their expressive culture, specifically ballads and stories, as well as their ethnicity and identity. This chapter is an overview of the types of sources I consulted for my work, as well as my introduction to this topic and my fieldwork resources. I have organized this overview by theme: sources focusing on Travellers from Scotland or Ireland; sources from folklore and folk music studies; publications on ethnicity, especially concerning minority or marginalized groups and communities; and works on identity issues, particularly those that pertain to musical identity.

I was already interested in Celtic music and a performer of the genre on Irish flute and whistle when I first became aware of Traveller performers through an email on the IRTRAD-list, an Irish traditional music email listserve, in 2000. A member of this list had posted a question asking if anyone knew of any Irish Travellers who played flute, as so many of these great musicians seemed to be performers on pipes or singers. Never having heard of this term, “Traveller,” before, and apparently being informed that Travellers held a musical prowess in Irish music, I became intrigued and began my research into this community of performers as well as their history and contributions to the music.

As mentioned at the outset, Travellers are historically a nomadic ethnic group found mainly in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, and in smaller numbers in the United States. Scholars often mistakenly group them with the gypsies and Rom of Europe. In doing research with such communities, whether they are Travellers or Roma, researchers often find one of the greatest blocks to research is developing connections within the communities. These are somewhat closed-off ethnic groups having limited

contact with those who are non-Travellers or non-Roma. In my own research I was fortunate in this respect, in that I was working primarily with Travellers who perform and/or write publicly of their lives and cultures. The four Travellers I focus on are all now settled, as are most Scottish Travellers. Only a small number still travel the roads, mostly in the summer only.

Very few recordings exist of Traveller performances, and those that do are either held in U.K. archives or are difficult to acquire in the United States. Archives in the U.K. with significant Traveller holdings are the University of Liverpool, the University of Aberdeen and the School for Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh. Archives with significant Traveller holdings in the United States are in the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress and the library archives of the University of California, Berkeley. Both of these American archives are repositories of fieldwork among Scottish Travellers conducted by the American scholar John Niles in the 1980s. The American Folklife Center also holds many of the recordings and fieldnotes of Alan Lomax, specifically those from his time spent in Scotland where he came into contact with several important Traveller performers. At present, only the Elphinstone Institute at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland is conducting a systematic review of Traveller culture, including contemporary trends in culture and performance. Active research would seem to be essential, owing to the rapidly disappearing lifestyle of such a musically wealthy and important ethnic group and the limited availability of research material.

Travellers have historically migrated between Northern Ireland and Scotland, and familial and cultural ties exist between the two groups, though through my research I

have not found an academic study that examines the continued (or discontinued) musical ties between Traveller communities in Scotland and Northern Ireland. These ties could well inform their music culture through shared ballads, tunes, and stories. One Traveller I interviewed, Sheila Stewart, briefly mentioned this to me in an interview; I examine this cultural link in chapter five of this dissertation.

The music culture of the Travellers is an important aspect of their identity. The songs and stories of their communities are how they enculturate the younger generation, sharing their history, belief practices and group knowledge. They perform their identity through their music. My dissertation examines specifically the Scottish Traveller community, where my research explores not only the current musical undertakings of the community but also how the groups' music has evolved and changed as they have left their nomadic life and become settled within their own regions. I study how the process of enculturation has been affected by the Travellers' increasing contact with modernization and non-Travellers. I also examine how modern technology is affecting the production and performance of their music.

Fieldwork I conducted in Ireland, the United States and Scotland informs my research into how Traveller identity and ethnicity are conveyed and sustained through their vocal and instrumental music. I began fieldwork in the United States in the summer of 2003 at the Scottish pavilion of the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, which, among other performers and culture bearers, featured Stanley Robertson, a Scottish Traveller known for storytelling, ballad singing, and piping, and also featured his friend (non-Traveller) and scholar Dr. Ian Russell of the Elphinstone Institute at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland. This would be my first direct contact with the Traveller community. My next

direct contact occurred in Ireland in the summer of 2004 when I was touring with an Irish music ensemble. At this time I was able to make contact with Travellers in Limerick, Ireland, including the noted *uilleann*² piper Mickey Dunne. Most of my fieldwork, however, was conducted in Scotland over four distinct periods: April 2004, August 2005, September 2006 to April 2007, and January 2008. My fieldwork was mainly based in Edinburgh, Scotland, where I could meet with Travellers, chiefly from Aberdeenshire and Perthshire.

Traveller Resources and Literature Review

Several organizations were helpful to my research on Scottish Travellers. These include archives, social organizations, record labels, and numerous individuals. I conducted extensive archival research at the School for Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh, at the Cecil Sharp House in London, at the gypsy archives of the University of Liverpool, and at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. Most of my fieldwork, however, was collected from personal interviews with Irish and Scottish Travellers—specifically Mickey Dunne, Stanley Robertson, Sheila Stewart, and Jess Smith—as well as folklorists, music promoters, scholars, and independent researchers, including among others Ewan McVicar, Katherine Campbell, Sheila Douglas, Ian Russell, and Donald Smith. One of the informants in my research, Sheila Douglas, is a Scottish scholar who has studied various performers in the Travelling community for over thirty years. Sheila Douglas's *The Sang's the Thing: Scottish Folk, Scottish History* (1992) examines the influence of Scottish history and

² *Uilleann* is the Irish word for “elbow,” noting how the both elbows are used for sound production on *uilleann* pipes.

individuals upon the folksongs known best among Scottish singers and Travellers. Her book *Last of the Tinsmiths: The Life of Willie MacPhee* (2006) is the only study concerned with this talented Traveller, known for his singing, instrumental skills, and story-telling ability; she includes in this work a collection of songs and stories associated with MacPhee. She also has written a volume of collected Traveller short stories, *The King of the Black Arts and other Folktales*, which includes stories by Willie MacPhee, and Alec, John, and Belle Stewart, among others.

I was also able to gain additional information using resources of the Scottish Storytelling Centre in Edinburgh, Scotland, and Pavee Point in Dublin, Ireland. The Scottish Storytelling Centre was of tremendous importance to my research, as it was both a source of employment for me during the year I spent in Scotland and also a vehicle that allowed me to participate in numerous public events involving Travellers, including a workshop on ballad singing and performance with Scottish Traveller Sheila Stewart. The Centre also hosts an annual International Storytelling Festival, often including Travellers among the participants. Pavee Point in Dublin, Ireland, is an organization that supports human rights issues for Irish Travellers. Though I have not yet been able to visit this organization in person, their website³ offered me invaluable information on current political and social concerns facing the Traveller community, not just in Ireland but also Scotland and England.

The foremost archive with rich holdings of Traveller sources is the School for Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. They have extensive holdings in recordings and written records of Scottish Travellers, in addition to photographs. Their staff, specifically Dr. Margaret Mackay, Arnot McDonald, Ian MacKenzie and

³ <http://www.paveepoint.ie/>

Katherine Campbell, were immensely helpful in not only allowing me to participate in academic courses in the department but also to provide insight into their rich collection of Traveller materials. The American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., contains Traveller field recordings and transcriptions in the Alan Lomax and John Niles collections. These include both transcriptions of interviews and recordings and nine videotapes of interviews and performances by Scottish Travellers, including ones I focus on in my current research, notably Stanley Robertson, Duncan Williamson, and Willie MacPhee. The Cecil Sharp House in London, England, contains a limited collection of written works concerning the Travellers, but an extensive sound archive that includes such works as Peter Hall's field recordings of British Travellers and gypsies. The Gypsy Lore Society archive at the University of Liverpool and the main office of The Gypsy Lore Society in Cheverly, Maryland were also very informative for my research with their historical collections of early scholarly work of the gypsies and Travellers of Britain.

e. Scottish traveller literature

Most of the limited amount of scholarly research on the Travellers was carried out in the 1960s and 1970s by folklorists and song collectors, such as Hamish Henderson and Alan Lomax, who introduced the Travellers to a wider audience by bringing them to festivals and arranging appearances on radio shows. These works were often either biographical or a collection of ballads or stories. In the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s further work was carried out by sociologists, anthropologists, and cultural researchers, such as Judith Okley (1983, 1996) and James Porter and Herschel Gower, whose 1995 work,

Jeannie Robertson: Emergent Singer, Transformative Voice, concerned the vocal traditions of the Scottish Travellers, specifically the performance practice and repertoires of Jeannie Robertson and Jimmy McBeath. Other scholars who have contributed to ameliorating the research lacunae on the Travellers include Sharon Gmelch and her ethnographies of Irish Travellers (1975) and George Gmelch. George Gmelch's *Irish Tinkers: The Urbanization of an Itinerant People* (1985) examines the rapid disappearance of the Traveller's traditional way of life as it comes under pressure from hegemonic forces of the settled communities; he discusses the Travellers' adaptive survival techniques in the face of urbanization. This work connects with my own research into how Travellers have adapted to changes in society, specifically economically with the use of music as a means to acquire capital.

Hamish Henderson, the prolific Scottish folklorist and scholar, both aided specific Travellers in becoming known to a larger audience and meticulously researched their culture. Three works in particular that draw upon Henderson's life and work have been very informative to my research. *The Armstrong Nose: Selected Letters of Hamish Henderson* (Henderson 1996) includes much correspondence not only between Travellers and Henderson, but also between fellow scholars and public sector individuals, giving a useful look into his work among the Travelling community. *Alias Macalias: Writings on Songs, Folk and Literature* (Henderson 1992) includes some of Henderson's private correspondence, but also gives an insight into the ballads and culture of the Scottish Travellers. In 2007 Timothy Neat released volume one of a two-volume work of his biography of Hamish Henderson, covering 1919 to 1953. This volume begins a discussion on Henderson's role in the study of and friendship with Scottish Travellers.

All three of these works inform my research into how folklorists themselves influence Traveller culture.

Works regarding tune types and song classification aid my research and analysis of specific songs in Chapter Five. Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger's *Travellers' Songs: From England and Scotland* (1977) is an important examination of the lives of the Stewarts, a family of Travellers from northeast Scotland. This work covers rare information on the Travellers, from their language (Cant) and song classifications (riddles, improvisations, children's rhymes) to activities of their everyday lives (childhood, married life, music, etc.). Tim Coughlan's *Now Shoon the Romano Gillie* (2001) is one of the few academic works on the Travellers that discusses in depth the song repertoires of the Travellers of Britain. In addition to a valuable, yet small, collection of Romani and Cant words, the work includes texts of almost two hundred songs; unfortunately, there are no transcriptions of these songs.

More works exist in connection with Scottish Traveller storytelling research than music. Donald Braid's *Scottish Traveller Tales: Lives Shaped through Stories* (2002) is the first, in-depth account of the storytelling tradition of the Scottish Travellers. In addition to his ethnographic approach to his work, which includes descriptions of Travellers' daily activities and culture, Braid also includes numerous examples of traditional songs and prose that illustrate urban and rural Traveller lifestyles. A number of articles also have appeared in academic journals over the past thirty years that pertain to Traveller storytelling tradition, whether as their main focus or in a pertinent section of the work. Among these articles most useful for my research are Jim Carroll's "Irish Travellers Around London" (1975), Vic Legg's "Sophie Legg: A Conversation with a

West Country Traveller” (2006), Mike Yates’ “Some Gypsy Singers in South East England” (1975) and his “English Gypsy Songs” (1975), James Porter’s “Jeannie Robertson’s ‘My Son David’: A Conceptual Performance Model” (1976) and his “(Ballad-) Singing and Transformativity” (1992), and Sam Richards’ “Westcountry Gipsies: Key Songs and Community Identity” (1971).

Since 2000, however, a newly developing interest in Travellers has appeared among researchers. Scholars at the Elphinstone Institute at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland are currently conducting research on the music of the Travellers and on how their music is changing, as this ethnic group increasingly leaves their nomadic lifestyles and become settled. Mike Yates has compiled a collection (2006) of songs he gathered from both Scottish and English Travellers between 1965 and 2005. Brian Belton has written works on both Traveller identity (2005) and Traveller ethnicity (2005) issues; Belton’s *Questioning Gypsy Identity* (2005) examines gypsy identity both within their own communities and within the broader context of the society in which they live.

Travellers, since the 1980s, have begun writing their own works that are not just autobiographical, but also contain collected and new stories and ballads. These include works by such well-known Travellers as Stanley Robertson, Duncan Williamson, Betsy Whyte, Jess Smith, and Sheila Stewart. These works give a first-account insight into the lives of the Travellers and their material culture. A rich collection of Traveller short stories, cultural beliefs, and lore is found within the numerous works by the four Travellers who are the focus of my research.

Of these four, Stanley Robertson and Duncan Williamson have been the most prolific in their published works on Traveller stories and culture. Stanley Robertson’s

works often deal with the supernatural aspects of Traveller lore, as seen in his work *Reek Roon the Campfire: A Collection of Ancient Tales* (2009). Duncan Williamson's works also include elements of the supernatural in Traveller stories, especially the seal people, as in his short story collection *Broonies, Silkies, and Fairies* (1987). Autobiographical works that exemplify the Traveller lifestyle include works by Sheila Stewart (2006) on the life of her mother, Belle Stewart, Betsy Whyte's autobiographical volumes (1979, 2000), and perhaps most notably the works of Jess Smith. Smith's works are among the most recognized and critically reviewed of Traveller writings. Her three-volume autobiographical works (2002, 2003, 2005) span her life from traveling on the road with her large family to the point when she married and became settled. Notably her first autobiographical volume, *Jessie's Journey: Autobiography of a Traveller Girl* (2002), provides an excellent introduction to those unfamiliar with Traveller culture and describes numerous cultural beliefs of the Scottish Travellers.

Robert Dawson has authored or edited (solo or with the aid of specific Travellers) several self-produced short works concerning Travellers and gypsies of the United Kingdom, often in conjunction with members of the culture. He has written works on Traveller history (2001) and a collection of published sources on Traveller families (2002). His *British Gypsy Slavery: The Caribbean and Americas* (2001) reflects on the often-overlooked British enslavement of gypsies, or Travellers, from England who were transported to the Caribbean and the British colonies in America as slaves. His work traces the settlements of these gypsies in the New World and lends to my research the early possible influences of Travellers on ballads in the United States, specifically the

Appalachian region of the United States. This influence on the ballads of Appalachia is discussed generally in Chapter Two and in depth in Chapter Five below.

b. Scottish traveller language

An analysis of the language choice available to and used by Scottish Travellers in both their ballads and stories is critical to understanding how their identity is expressed in these two cultural areas. A limited number of works concern the language associated with the Travellers of Scotland—Cant.⁴ In addition to Cant, the Scottish Travellers have a rich vocabulary to choose from, mainly because they have at their disposal not only English and Cant but also Scots Gaelic, Irish, Rom,⁵ Scots, and Doric.

Scots Gaelic and Irish speakers are found predominantly among the populations of the Highlands and islands of Scotland, as well as among regions of the West coast of Scotland, areas where much of my research was conducted. Scots, sometimes called Lowland Scots, historically is debated among academics as either a dialect of English or a language that predates English in Great Britain. It offers a rich choice of colorful and unique word arrangements most evident in the works of Jess Smith and Duncan Williamson, as discussed in chapters two through five of this work. Doric, a dialect of Scots, is spoken mainly in the Aberdeenshire, a region in the Northeast of Scotland. Traveller Stanley Robertson most clearly exemplifies this language style, as will also be discussed more in depth later. Jess Smith and Dawson co-authored a short work titled *The Scottish Traveller Dialects*. This work has been very informative to my research, especially when analyzing Traveller ballad lyrics and specific word choice in stories.

⁴ The language used among Irish Travellers is sometimes referred to as “Shelta.”

⁵ I refer to Rom as being a variety of languages spoken by the Romany, a few words of which have been adapted into the works and ballads of a few of the Travellers I interviewed.

Dawson has also edited a work on the dialect of a group of English Travellers, *The Dialect of Derbyshire's Traditional Travellers*. Cant is shared between Travellers of Scotland and Ireland. In addition to Dawson's works, two theses have informed my research into the Cant words used by Travellers. A Master's thesis by Jared Harper, *Irish Traveler Cant: An Historical, Structural, and Sociolinguistic Study of an Argot* (1969), was very informative for my research in its examination of the use of Shelta and Cant among the Travellers of Ireland, including phonology and morphology and historical changes to the language. Harper's doctoral dissertation, *The Irish Travelers of Georgia* (1977), continues his research into this language and further informs my work in examining both the storytelling traditions of Travellers and my analysis of specific Traveller ballads in Chapter Five.

c. Folksong literature

In examining specific songs and stories of the Travellers in the following chapters, I refer to the historical background of the major ballads they sing, word choice, transmission, and musical elements within the songs. The historical collections of important ballads shed light on the variations inherent in the song repertoire of the Travellers. These variants, or lack thereof in some cases, can often highlight when the song entered the repertoire of a particular Traveller or Traveller clan. These variants also can show transmission of song and stories among Traveller clans, as well as the passing of song types from Traveller to non-Traveller populations, such as folk singers in Appalachia. Musical elements that appear in Traveller repertoire highlight not only the

inimitability of the performance styles, but also the ways Traveller ethnicity and identity are demonstrated.

In terms of folk song research, specifically Anglo-American folk song literature, many early works were simply collections of folk songs with little written commentary or historical matter. A few exceptions have proven to be invaluable in my research on Traveller balladry, specifically those songs considered to be the “big ballads.” (The Travellers I interviewed, as well as many folk song scholars, refer to longer, extended ballads as the “big ballads,” often referring to those known as the Child ballads.) Cecil Sharp’s folk song research in the Appalachian mountains preserves a collection of ballads that are remarkably similar to those sung by Irish and, in particular, Scottish Travellers. Sharp’s *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians* (1932) and F. J. Child’s *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1965) collections are seminal works in the field of ballad research. An examination of Sharp’s collections shows connections between the ballads sung by both singers in Appalachia and of the Travellers in Scotland and Ireland, as he includes hundreds of songs and tunes from an area that includes Virginia, Kentucky, and North Carolina. This collection includes songs known well in the United Kingdom by Traveller communities and performed by notable Traveller singers such as Belle Stewart and Jeannie Robertson.

A helpful work for examining possible relationships between the ballads sung by Scottish Travellers and ballad singers of Appalachia is Tristram Coffin’s *The British Traditional Ballad in North America* (1977). This work discusses Child ballad forms in North America and their variants. Another resource for this comparison of ballad traditions is G. Malcolm Laws, *American Balladry from the British Broadside: A Guide*

for *Students and Collectors of Traditional Song* (1957). This work examines the two song traditions using ballads not from the Child collection. Steve Roud's *Broadside Index*⁶ (2006) and *Folk Song Index*⁷ (2006) are electronic databases that allow for searching variants of songs using various search methods (singer, regions, collector, etc.) Also, Claude Simpson's *The British Broadside Ballad and its Music* (1966) is a collection of the tunes used for the broadside ballads; this has been a particularly helpful work on many occasions when I found lyrics, but no tune, for a ballad.

As mentioned previously, much of the "big ballads" in the Travellers' repertoire consist of those noted by and categorized by Francis J. Child. Bertrand Bronson's *The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads, with their Texts, According to the Extant Records of Great Britain and America* (1972), is a four-volume work that provides a scholarly framework for analysis of these ballads. William McCarthy's *The Ballad Matrix: The Personality, Milieu, and the Oral Tradition* (1990) introduces the main schools of thought on ballad creation and composition and analyzes more than two dozen ballads from the Child collection.

With regard to scholarly analysis of ballads, including style, characteristics, and format, I was able to find a wealth of useful works. Mary-Ann Constantine and Gerald Porter's *Fragments and Meaning in Traditional Song* (2003) is an important addition to ballad studies and discusses select ballads in terms of memory, context, intertextuality, resistance, and voice. Roger Abrahams and George Foss's *Anglo-American Folksong Style* (1968) discusses the characteristic style of folk songs, though mostly of American songs. David Buchan's *The Ballad and the Folk* (1972) places folk songs and ballads

⁶ http://library.efdss.org/cgi-bin/query.cgi?access=off&cross=off&index_roud=on

⁷ http://library.efdss.org/cgi-bin/query.cgi?cross=off&index_roud=on&access=off

within a social context and provides a structural analysis of texts; this framework is particularly helpful in connection with Traveller repertoire. Roy Palmer's *A Book of British Ballads* (1980) provides an interesting look at how ballads and broadsides can offer a connection between historical events and the reactions of people of those times showcased within lyrics. Roger Renwick offers an examination of the functions of folksong texts in *English Folk Poetry: Structure and Meaning* (1980). Ian Russell and David Atkinson's edited work *Folk Song: Tradition, Revival, and Re-Creation* (2004) offers a collection of essays that examine various theoretical perspectives of the field of ballad and folk song research. For my research involving early scholarship in folk music and ballad traditions, D. K. Wilgus's *Anglo-American Folksong Scholarship Since 1898* (1959) has proven to be most useful.

d. Ethnicity literature

In researching how music and storytelling traditions affect, create, and/or shape Traveller identities, I realized I first had to examine how this community came to be defined as separate from those who surrounded them. I examine in chapter three the importance of Travellers being able to identify themselves as a separate ethnicity and how this informs, shapes, and in many respects helps create their identity. Being part of a nationality is not as important to Travellers as being connected with an ethnicity. In this regard, I follow Max Weber's definition of ethnicity, "those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent" (Weber, 1978 vol. I: 389). I first looked at resources that examined ethnicity as a theoretical framework for looking at a society or

community, then narrowed my sources to those that specifically discussed ethnicity in relation to gypsies and Travellers of Scotland.

In examining a possible separate ethnicity for Travellers,⁸ I first looked at what could define a people's ethnicity. Works that were most helpful in this regard include Gudykunst's edited volume *Language and Ethnic Identity* (1988) in connection with my examination of how Cant, Shelta, Rom and other languages associated with Travellers and gypsies help establish a separate ethnicity for these communities. Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (2007) offers a semiotic discussion of subcultures that bond together against a greater mainstream normalcy. Horkheimer and Adorno (2007) also take a view similar to Hebdige in relation to examining a subculture in terms of its deviance from mainstream society. This highlights some arguments that Travellers are not a separate ethnic group in the United Kingdom or Ireland, but rather just a group deviant from the larger settled society. This runs counter to the beliefs and views held by most of the Travellers I interviewed. A continued examination of what constitutes ethnicities, especially in light of the dichotomy mentioned above, include Barth's *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969), Pierre Bourdieu's *Language and Symbolic Power* (1977), Ruth Finnegan's *The Hidden Musicians: Music-Making in an English Town* (1990), and Dave Harker's *Fakesong* (1985).

In relation to Travellers, ethnicity can become a point of contention when additional influences, such as economic factors, come into play. I discuss this further in Chapter Three, through an examination of how Travellers use the belief that they are a separate ethnicity for various means, including economic gain. Thomas Turino and James

⁸ There is still a point of contention in the legal systems of both Scotland and Ireland, where special legal protections and rights for Travellers based on their being a minority ethnicity in both countries have recently been cases heard in numerous higher courts. This is discussed further in Chapter Three.

Lea's *Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities* (2004) discusses transnationalism and global culture in relation to diasporic communities, with particular attention given to the reach and effects of capitalism and the commodification of both music and culture. I further analyze this view through a discussion of various concepts put forth by authors such as Jacques Attali (1985), Grossberg and Nelson (1988), and Weber (1978).

Several works specific to the discussion of ethnicity and Traveller have been published in the last thirty-five years. Sharon Gmelch's 1974 dissertation, *The Emergence and Persistence of an Ethnic Group: the Irish "Travellers"* explores how Travellers attempt to maintain a separate identity, often perceived in terms of ethnicity, in the face of modernization. Her work *Tinkers and Travellers* (1976) contributes to Traveller scholarship with her insight into the Traveller lifestyle. The work contains numerous images of daily activities of Travellers, a limited number of musical transcriptions and an analysis of Traveller identity (personal and communal), in addition to discrimination practices and photocopies of primary sources of settled peoples' views of their Traveller 'neighbors.'

Jane Helleiner's *Irish Travellers: Racism and the Politics of Culture* (2000) examines the racist and often violent attitudes of the settled majority in Ireland against the Traveller minority, examining current political policies of "racializing" or "ethnicizing" Travellers. Donald Kenrick and Colin Clark's *Moving On: The Gypsies and Travellers of Britain* (1999) discusses aspects of the Travellers lives rarely documented, such as a profile of their communities, self-representation of the Scottish Travellers, race relations, 'new' Travellers, and a discussion on gypsies and the majority society.

Perhaps the most useful work in analyzing the role ethnicity plays in the lives of Travellers is Brian Belton's *Gypsy and Traveller Ethnicity: The Social Generation of an Ethnic Phenomenon* (2005). His work on gypsy and Traveller ethnicity forces new thought on how Travellers see their own groups and questions as the basis for both their and others' claims of a specific gypsy and Traveller ethnicity. Belton argues that the concept of an ethnic Traveller is a social construct generated by mainstream society and opposes the view that they are a separate ethnicity or race.

One particular theoretical framework informing my analysis of the issue of Traveller ethnicity is cognitive dissonance. Leon Festinger's seminal work in this field is *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (1957). A social psychologist, Leon Festinger proposed that an inconsistency of one's beliefs would result in a change in beliefs to fit one's behavior. I discuss this in depth in Chapter Three when examining how cognitive dissonance shapes how mainstream society views and reacts to contact with Travellers, especially with regard to legal and political restraints developed to control both their movements and their culture.

e. Identity literature

Numerous works were helpful in determining the roles music and storytelling play in the creation and maintenance of Traveller identities. I again used major works that discuss and analyze what identity is and how it is formed, and then I focused on those works that specifically target gypsy and Traveller communities and how they maintain their identities, especially in the face of a drastic change in lifestyle—from nomadic, peripatetic lives to settled lives.

In looking at major works that deal with identity issues with regard to music's influences, I use Raymond MacDonald, David Hargreaves and Dorothy Meill's *Musical Identities* (2002), which examines the constructed identities (social and personal, as well as musical) of those involved in music, as well as offering an exploration into gender identity and national identity—all from a psychological approach. Jon Cruz's *Culture on the Margins: The Black Spiritual and the Rise of American Cultural Interpretation* (1999) is concerned with the problematic authenticity of black spirituals and how these have been viewed by American culture at large. This work crosses outside of its main focus and formulates theoretical issues, such as the questioning of authentic music and performance practice, commodification of objects and sound, and the institutionalization of a culture; these issues apply helpfully to other areas of research, notably, from my standpoint, the Travellers.

In addition, Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1991) provides a historical examination of the construction of nationalism and the development of communities based on ideologies. Though Anderson does not discuss the importance of dynamic processes in this work, he does include chapters that concern cultural roots, mass media, politics, and history and language. John Connell and Chris Gibson's *Sound Tracks: Popular Music, Identity and Place* (2002) is a comprehensive work on the geography of popular music, and looks at current issues, such as the rise of music tourism, while examining the complex links between places, music and cultural identities.

The seminal work *Ethnicity, Identity, and Music: the Musical Construction of Place* (1997), edited by Martin Stokes, examines both the construction of identity and

music as social practice. The authors discuss the construction of these identities, the media and identity, aesthetics, performance, and how these and other elements affect the inclusion of place in a musical discourse, concepts that I relate to an examination of musical identity among the Scottish Travellers. Steven Feld's *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression* (1990), refers to soundscapes, or the study of sound within the entire cultural system of a community, both in the man-made and natural world. This is particularly connected to the music of the Travellers in examining how music and place are connected. In Clifford Geertz's *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), he examines what he terms webs of significance, where he discusses the symbolic meanings of cultural events and interactions and how religious beliefs, cultural customs social interactions, attitudes and behavior all play a part on a socially constructed environment.

Two doctoral dissertations specifically have addressed various identity issues among Travellers and Rom. Jerome Cramer's 1996 dissertation, *Cultural Identity Maintenance: an Analysis of Rom Gypsies and Irish Travellers in North America and Great Britain*, though not focusing specifically on music, does add to the current research literature on how Travellers attempt to maintain their culture through their expressive art forms. Jane Helleiner's 1992 dissertation, *The Travelling People: Cultural Identity in Ireland*, analyzes both historical and contemporary contexts that affect Traveller identity, as well as how political contexts have attempted to reshape current Traveller mobility and culture.

Other useful sources include Pavee Point Press's *A Heritage Ahead: Cultural Action and Travellers* (1995), which discusses the Travellers Cultural Heritage Centre's

success since 1995 as a place where Travellers groups around Ireland can come and use creative means as a way to express their identity through dance, photography, music, and other options. The Centre also has made it a focus to collect oral histories of the Travellers, several of which are included in this source. Jim MacLaughlin's *Travellers and Ireland: Whose Country, Whose History?* (1995) examines the social conditions of the Travellers in Ireland in the present day. Frank Murphy, Cathleen McDonagh and Erica Sheehan's *Travellers: Citizens of Ireland: Our Challenge to an Intercultural Irish Society in the 21st Century* (2000) discusses the integration and involvement of Travellers in an Irish modern society.

Chapter Organization

I have organized my dissertation into six chapters. Chapter One, the current chapter, has introduced the areas of examination I will follow throughout in subsequent chapters, as well as provide the theoretical frameworks for which I will conduct these examinations. I also introduce my involvement with this subject, my fieldwork timeframe and locations, and a literature review of sources most helpful to my research.

In Chapter Two I provide a more detailed overview of who the Travellers are, especially the various theories of their origins, more recent histories, the locations of Travellers communities I used for my work, and the connection between Scottish and Irish Travellers—an important connection in my research analysis. In this chapter, I also discuss the current political and social climate for Traveller communities in Ireland and Scotland; notable Traveller musicians, singers, and storytellers; and issues involved in the “discovery” of the musical prowess of certain Travellers in the mid-twentieth century.

Chapter Three begins an examination of the theoretical framework of ethnicity and how this has shaped the formation of a musical identity for the Travellers. I discuss the social and economic influences that affect the role ethnicity plays in the lives of Travellers, as well as the political and legal fight currently engaged in Scotland and Ireland for the label “ethnic” with regard to Travellers. I also discuss how ethnicity plays an important role in the economic situation of those Travellers who make their livelihood from their expressive culture, specifically ballad singing and storytelling.

In Chapter Four I continue the discussion of Traveller ethnicity but in terms of how this shapes and creates a broader Traveller identity, specifically in terms of music and other expressive areas of their culture. In connection with the four Travellers on whom I focus, I discuss how various elements of their belief system, including the supernatural and religion, affect how their identity is formed. I also show how musical practices, such as competitions, as well as performance practices reaffirm a communal Traveller identity.

I offer an analysis of specific Traveller ballads and stories in Chapter Five to show how Traveller identity can be shown through their expressive culture. I analyze familial musical connections and lineages, shown through my transcriptions of songs Travellers have learned through successive generations, and I offer as well an historical and cultural context for those stories and ballads most often performed by Travellers. I also present a possible shared ballad tradition between Scottish Travellers and the people of Appalachia. I compare the preservation and survival of some of these older ballads in both the Traveller community and in my home region of southern and southwest Virginia, specifically through the ballads performed by Kentucky artist Jean Ritchie and

Scottish Traveller Jeannie Robertson. I conclude my work in Chapter Six with an overview of my findings of a musical identity of the Scottish Travellers.

CHAPTER TWO: THE TRAVELLERS

In understanding the musical identity of the Travellers, one needs to be aware of the history and origins of the Travellers and what makes one a member of this community. In addition one needs a basic understanding of the linguistic influences in their works and the role of folklorists in the creation of their public image. Answers to the origin of Travellers in the United Kingdom are as varied as the number of times I asked the question of my interviewees. Each had a different perspective on how Travellers came to be living in Scotland and on how they began as a community. Though discussed here in this chapter, I examine these varied viewpoints on Traveller origins more in depth in Chapter Three, where these differing concepts of Traveller history affect views on their ethnicity. Folklorists also had an influence on Travellers not only being seen as a different ethnicity from their surrounding settled neighbors, but also in shaping and even changing their performative repertoire and, in some ways, their culture. This chapter ends with a brief introduction to the four Travellers on whom the rest of this dissertation focuses: Stanley Robertson, Duncan Williamson, Jess Smith, and Sheila Stewart.

Historical Background

An attempt to understand who the Travellers are and where they are from is integral to any analysis of their culture and, in particular, their music. This is because their sense of historical identity is important to the Travellers, even though their background is a controversial topic with few clear answers for their origin. Not only is

the Travellers' origin open to debate, but also their connection to other gypsy groups and to the local settled community remains a matter of uncertainty.

Scholars of gypsy communities, as well as gypsies I have interviewed, have conflicting viewpoints on when Travellers first appeared, not just in the United Kingdom but also in Europe. Differing viewpoints also exist on whether Travellers have always been a separate ethnic group or developed as a tangential community over centuries from settled communities. As Brian Belton states in his work on Traveller ethnicity, "...the various theories regarding Travellers' origins all lack conclusive evidence to support them" (Belton 2005, 75). Examining these various views may not produce a definitive answer for where Travellers come from, but it may help achieve an understanding of who they are now.

Of the various possibilities for where Travellers come from, two main theories have emerged through scholarly debate over the past thirty years. The first postulates that Travellers, as part of a larger gypsy migration, left northern India approximately a thousand years ago. The second theory argues that Travellers were not part of this great gypsy migration from India, but rather were part of the settled community that, over centuries, evolved as a separate ethnic community mainly through economic stratification.

The beliefs of Travellers and scholars, in connection with these two main viewpoints, are often still conflicting even if they agree on which viewpoint to follow. In an interview I had with Traveller Jess Smith, she stated that Travellers were part of the group that migrated from northern India. However, on the back cover of Jess Smith's new book, it reads, "We were known as tinkers or travellers, descendents of those who

have wandered the highways and byways of Scotland for two thousand years” (Smith 2008, back jacket). According to this statement, Travellers would have already been in Scotland approximately a thousand years before the gypsy migration from India began, furthering the belief that they were part of a particular metalworking clan indigenous to the United Kingdom rather than an immigrant group from Asia.

According to the National Gypsy Council, Scottish Tinkers “...probably descended from Celtic metalworkers, and originally called tinkers. Their numbers were swelled by the massive Highland clearance campaigns of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They are still more likely than other Travellers to use bender tents as homes” (Belton 2005, 75).⁹ Another source from the Scottish government states:

Some people argue that they trace their roots to a Celtic or possibly pre-Celtic population in Scotland. Others suggest that Scottish Gypsies/Travellers may have descended from Roman slaves who were brought over to Britain as armorers. It is thought likely that over time the populations may have intermixed with other groups, such as the Gypsies who migrated from India. As with any ethnic group, there is considerable diversity within the Scottish Gypsy/Traveller population, and individuals are proud of their own distinct family histories. (“Gypsy Travellers 2010, 11)

Scottish scholar Ailie Munro considers Travellers mainly to be part of a dispossessed group of individuals:

An ancient caste of metal-workers and other craftsmen, their once recognized status was gradually eroded during the break-up of clan society, and their numbers swelled by those dispossessed during the tragedy of Culloden. Their enforced isolation, and their exposure, while travelling, to many different kinds and sources of traditions: these were two factors behind the strongly individualistic tradition forged at the Travellers’ campfire gatherings. (1996, 94)

⁹ “Bender tents,” also called bow tents, are tents made from flexible lengths of wood shaped to an arc and placed into the ground with a waterproof tarp thrown over them. Easy to transport, they are also easy to assemble into temporary living quarters.

Among the many varying ideas on Traveller origins are those that add to stereotypes or overly-romanticized views of their origins, “When the gypsies arrived in Northern Europe at the close of the 15th and beginning of the 16th centuries, after their fabulous thousand-year long migration from North-West India, they were at first greeted by the populace and the authorities with awe and even reverence; then, usually within a year or so, the authorities rumbled them, and they started getting hanged” (*Muckle Songs*, 3).

Of the Travellers I interviewed all claim that Travellers are a distinct group from the settled community but one that has interacted with non-Travellers for centuries. These four Scottish Travellers also mention interactions with Travellers in Ireland, both in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. In some cases these involved familial ties with Irish Travellers, further convoluting the origins of Travellers relative to whether they were part of those dislocated during the Highland clearances or the Irish potato famine. In chapter three I examine this issue of Traveller origins further in connection with Traveller ethnicity.

Linguistic Influences

An analysis of Traveller vocabulary might give some context for their historical origins. Collections of ballads acquired from folklorists working with Travellers have shown word choices with lyrics drawn from Irish, Gaelic, Scots, Doric, Cant, Shelta, Roma, and English (MacColl and Seeger 1977, Buchan 1972, Coughlan 2001, Douglas 2009). In my study of Irish and Gaelic, I have seen a commonality between the two. Irish (or Irish Gaelic) is spoken in certain regions of Ireland and Gaelic is spoken

predominantly in the Highlands and the west of Scotland. Gaelic was used liberally in the stories of Duncan Williamson. He also was well known for using the Scots dialect, but a type more notably called ‘Traveller Scots,’ in which many of the terms used were archaic and had passed out of current Scots use. I examine a few of these word choices within Duncan’s works in chapter five.

Of the other dialects, Doric is found in northeastern Scotland, notably in the ballads of Traveller Stanley Robertson. Cant is a localized language used among Travellers in both Scotland and Ireland, though having within itself various dialects; Shelta is a similarly indigenous language shared between predominantly the Irish and Welsh Travellers. Roma is the language spoken by many gypsies unconnected with Travellers. One source describes the Shelta dialect having links with Old Irish; this same source also shows a bias against Travellers or gypsies:

...the language or jargon presently spoken by certain vagrants in the British Islands—while it contains a number of words derived from other sources—is mainly ‘a systematic perversion of the pre-aspirated Gaelic spoken anterior to the 11th century’—and that many of the words so perverted are formed on the principle of the cryptic speech which a writer of the year 1677 says was ‘commonly called Ogham’. (MacRitchie 1899)

From this one might infer not only a previous connection between Scottish and Irish Travellers, but also some connection between Travellers and the Rom of Europe. This connection lends itself to an examination of Scottish Traveller ballads and stories to see whether particular word choices not only show an ancestral link with other Traveller or gypsy communities but also a borrowing of material culture between the various groups. Having at hand the use of these various languages and dialects enabled the Travellers I interviewed to have a rich choice of vocabulary for their ballads and stories. In Chapter Five I examine specific instances of the use of particular word choices from

these dialects and languages in connection with ballad performance and purposeful layered meanings (Gmelch 1975, Hall 1975).

An article appearing in the *Liverpool Echo* newspaper in 1971 discussed possible migration movements of gypsies, including movement direction and its influence on their languages:

The gipsy language is descended from Sanskrit (the ancient Hindu language) and one look at a romany (as opposed to a tinker, who usually has a strong streak of Irish) will detect the Indian blood from ancestors who folded their tents and began their wanderings out of the subcontinent around A.D. 1000.

Their language today shows the route those wanderings have taken down the centuries—while the original Sanskrit basis remains, it has picked up something from Turkey, Greece, Slavonic countries, Iran, Mongolia, Rumania, Germany, France and Britain. (Bell 1971, 7)

Though the article seems to have biases in connection with Travellers and the Romany, it does further the idea that an examination of language use could possibly add to the discussion of the origins of these nomadic groups.

Gypsy Categorizations

Given an understanding of the various theories of where Travellers may have come from, one can examine who the Travellers are in relation to other categories of gypsies, the term “gypsy” being used here as a collective term for the various ethnic groups mentioned in the chart to follow. Of course, how organizations and individuals create these categories are very subjective, including categorizing them by their economic means, level of “pure blood,” etc.

The National Gypsy Council released a listing of five categories of Travellers in 1994 (Earle 1994).¹⁰ The table below is from this work (18) and lists these five categories with basic descriptions of each. These categories below are based upon their supposed historical background and economic means:

Tinkers	From Ancient Roman descent, skilled metalworkers with particular specialization in tools such as knives. The Industrial Revolution limited this trade and many tinkers moved on to scrap dealing.
Peddlers	Travelling salespeople providing any commodity required by outlying communities. Wares were also sold at fairs and markets, especially as the pottery industry expanded, so diversifying the range of goods.
Romanies	Probably descended from Indian nomadic tribes travelling across Europe in the fifteenth century. Although the language and nationality of the host country may have been superficially adopted, their culture remained separate. The Romany language, rooted in Sanskrit, is their own.
Irish Tinkers	People whose families traveled for centuries throughout Ireland, many of whom have been driven from the country by eviction, famine and poverty. Their language is Gaelic based and called Shelta or Gammon. They have been joined recently by migrant Irishmen seeking construction work.
Scottish Tinkers	Probably descended from Celtic metalworkers, and originally called tinkers. Their numbers were swelled by the massive Highland clearance campaigns of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They are still more likely than other Travellers to use bender tents as homes.

Figure 2-1: Gypsy Categorizations

With this chart, one should note the recurring use of the word “probably,” as the criteria for categories such as this rely on non-scientific data and popular supposition.

Economic means is only one way the Travellers have been categorized. Brian Belton (2005, 34) also notes that the amateur gypsy scholar Clebert divided Travellers in Britain into four categories depending on their level of being “pure blood” gypsies:

1. Romanies: about 10,000 – these are true Roms.
2. Posh-rats: about 10,000 – half-bloods.

¹⁰ The National Gypsy Council is a European organization founded in 1985 in Hungary that represents the interests of gypsy groups throughout the EU.

3. Didikois: about 10,000 – mixed, less than half-blood.
4. Travellers: about 20,000 – no Gypsy blood.

As Belton states, Clebert offers no explanation for what does and does not constitute a “pure blood” gypsy. His categorizations merely state that Travellers are not “gypsy,” therefore, they are possibly part of this group purely for their nomadic background.

Brian Belton continues, “Travellers in the United Kingdom were speculated to be at 20,000 with ‘no Gypsy blood,’ but it was never established what would constitute a pure Gypsy” (Belton, 34).

Transmitting culture through songs and stories is prevalent in both the Traveller communities and in the communities of the Roma of Europe. The Travellers being often referred to as gypsies or as “the Roma of the British Isles” (Bohlman 2004, 222) is, however, clearly a misnomer. The origins of the Travellers are more clouded in myth than those of the Roma, who are invariably described as having migrated from India a thousand years ago. There exist various theories of their appearance in the United Kingdom, none of which have been proven as the most reliable:

Theories about their origins abound, but clear answers do not. Some scholars argue that the Scottish Travellers are a remnant of an aboriginal nomadic Scottish population. Others suggest that Travellers are composed of settled folk who lost their homes during social upheavals such as the Clearances. [The Highland Clearances of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries cleared crofters or small farmers from their plots in order for landlords to use the land for cattle and sheep grazing; the crofters often either relocated to towns or immigrated to other countries.] Another theory proposes that Travellers appeared in Scotland as the result of the migrations of Romani Gypsies that first reached Western Europe during the 15th and 16th centuries. Perhaps the most reasonable suggestion is that the current-day Travellers, like national Gypsy and Travellers populations in other European countries, are the result of some amalgamation of local groups and the Gypsy migrations. (Braid 2002, 295-6)

Despite the obscurity shrouding their origins, the modern Travellers have characteristics that set them apart from their European Roma counterparts, such as their appearance, their interaction with settled communities, and, most importantly for our purposes, their music.

Travellers do, though, have a higher instance of interaction with the settled non-Traveller community than do their Roma counterparts, including intermarriage. In addition, unlike the Roma, Travellers' songs are unaccompanied, and instrumental tunes often showcase a single performer on bagpipes or the fiddle. The dancing that accompanies group performance is the same set dancing found throughout the U.K. in ceilidhs (musical gatherings involving live music and set, or group, dancing in formations). The Travellers of Scotland have various living styles, similar to those of Europe's Roma. They are nomadic year long, semi-nomadic (traveling through the summer, and settled during the winter months), or completely settled.

Grievances

Robert North's article on "Cain Music" traces possible pariah connections to gypsies back to early Biblical times. He asserts that there are connections between gypsies and the sons of Cain, and quotes W. F. Albright's *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, suggesting,

The travelling smiths or tinkers of modern Arab Asia...depend for their livelihood on their craftsmanship, supplemented by music and divination, in which the women excel. It is probable that the Kenites of the *Bible*, with a name derived from *qain*, "smith," resembled these groups somewhat in their mode of living. It can scarcely be accidental that Cain's descendent Lamech had three sons, each of whom is credited with originating one of the three occupational specialties of this form of society: tents and herds, musical instruments, copper and iron working. (North 1964, 380)

Travellers I spoke with, as well as one folklorist, also mentioned the idea of early Christian ties with possible gypsy Traveller connections, suggesting that gypsies made the nails used to secure Christ to the cross.

In a *Liverpool Echo* article referred to earlier that discussed language influences, the same scholar that was interviewed, Dr. Dora Yates, a supposed friend of “the gipsy,” was also not above her own strong prejudices against Travellers, and not just Scottish Travellers, but Scottish people in general, “Dr. Yates is impatient with people who confuse the real gipsy with the tinker or the wandering dropout. She denies that gypsies are troublemakers, lazy, dirty, or untidy. ‘Of course,’ she answers patiently, ‘There are gypsies who can foretell the future. But then’—archly—‘so can a lot of Scots. There’s nothing strange about it. It’s because they are closer to nature than the rest of us. They are simpler, less cluttered up with layers of so-called civilization’” (Bell 1971, 7).

Though meant, perhaps, as an affirmation of the value of the gipsy community, her words still show a strong bias against gypsy acceptance.

Certainly there is much historical evidence for the prejudices against gypsies in general and Travellers in particular. In the laws created in various European countries since at least the fifteenth century, one can find numerous examples of the inequity of settled individuals against Travellers. Among the most notable laws are those below (Rudolph 2003, 37-39):

<u>Year</u>	<u>Law Passed</u>
1471	Anti-Gypsy laws are passed in Lucerne, Switzerland; 17,000 Romany are deported to Moldavia as slave labor
1504	Louis XII prohibits Roma from living in France
1526	First anti-Gypsy laws are passed in Holland and Portugal
1532	England introduces its first laws expelling Gypsies

1540	Gypsies are allowed to live under own laws in Scotland
1541	First anti-Gypsy laws are passed in Scotland
1568	The Pope expels Romany from the domain of the Catholic Church
1650s	Last known execution in England for being a Gypsy
1685	Portugal bans Romany language and deports Romany to Brazil
1710	Prague orders hanging without trial of adult Romany men; women and boys are to be mutilated
1773	Maria Theresa, Empress of Hungary, orders taking of Romany children over five years of age from parents for assignment to foster homes
1782	Romany charged with cannibalism in Hungary
1800s	Gypsy hunts become popular sport in Germany
1885	Romany excluded from entry into the United States
1908	England requires public education of Gypsy children
1933	In July, Adolf Hitler orders sterilization of Gypsies; citizenship of Gypsies and Eastern Jews revoked; In September, Law Against Habitual Criminals orders arrest of Romany
1934	Sweden passes sterilization law to keep Swedish pure
1994	England abolishes caravan (trailer) sites; 3,000 Roma are left without legal homes
1998	New Jersey rescinds the last anti-Roma law in the United States

Figure 2-2: Gypsy Laws

The above laws are just a small sample of the legal prejudices held against gypsies in Europe for hundreds of years. A close look at some of the laws show both irony and increasingly brutal reactions against gypsy involvement within settled communities. Two of the more ironic laws were in 1540 and 1541 when gypsies, having been ordered out of most other regions in Europe, were allowed to stay in Scotland and have their own legal system; however, this lasted for only a year before they were expelled from Scotland. In 1568, the Pope's expelling of Roma from the Catholic

Church was especially harsh, considering a majority of Roma at that time were devout Catholics. In the early 1800s the dehumanization of gypsies had reached a new, frightening level, with gypsies being used as human targets for hunts. Though the 1908 law (chart above), the requirement of public education of gypsy children in England, seems benign, it actually had a disastrous effect on Traveller families. The requirement forced Traveller children to remain in one location to be educated at a local school, thereby forcing the parents and extended families of the child to also remain stationary. The peripatetic lifestyle of the Travelling community was being destroyed by the enactment of a law that, on the surface, seemed quite benevolent.

Influential Folklorists

Despite advertising their appreciation and respect for Travellers and their way of life, many folklorists, even with the best intentions, still left evidence in their actions, works, or letters that show they had some contempt for this nomadic community. The influence researchers can have on the cultures they study has been noted by several scholars (Feld 1982, Seeger 1987, Barz 1997, Jackson 1987). Other folklorists meddled with the Travellers' images in order to make them appeal to a wider audience because of their supposed difference from the settled communities. Many others of those who did not reshape the public image of the Traveller still met early on with a difficult time in studying these communities.

Just as it has been discovered that the Nazis encouraged schoolteachers to use folklore "as a text for anti-Semitic propaganda" (Williamson 1989, 22), Travellers have also been persecuted through campaigns of propaganda and intentional stereotyping.

Indeed, just *being* a Traveller has at times in the past few centuries been a capital punishment crime in many countries. Songs and stories of the Travellers reflect these settled communities' views and the dangers Travellers faced in meeting with those who held these false beliefs about them. Duncan Williamson's story "The Noddies" reflects burkers (eighteenth-century criminal body snatchers for medical schools) who would prey upon lone Travellers. The song "MacPherson's Rant" tells of Johnny Faa, an actual historical figure, a Scottish Traveller fiddler who was unfairly sentenced to death and hung (McHardy 2004, 108).

The first major folklorists to begin working with Travellers in the 1950s and 1960s often met with difficulty in acceptance. Ironically, it was not the Travellers that refused to accept folklorists, but rather the non-Traveller settled community; to them, these folklorists were interacting with a pariah group. As Hamish Henderson, one of the earliest and best-known folklorists to live and collect among Scottish Traveller families, writes:

...as the School's [School of Scottish Studies] collectors have found in the recent past, these social barriers, although much less solid these days, do still form a real stumbling block. It does not pay to let some informants know that one has been consorting socially with tinkers—let alone camping with them, or scrounging peats with them. (Hall 1975, 41)

Some folklorists ignored Travellers completely when collecting ballads, songs, and folklore. The Scottish folklorist Gavin Greig, noted for his extensive collections of ballads from the North-East of Scotland, collected almost exclusively from non-Travellers.

He never made any attempt to collect folksongs from him [Geordie Robertson, Traveller]. The reason may possibly have been a social one; Greig got the great bulk of his wonderful collection from the farming community, and Geordie Robertson was a tinker—a settled tinker, a

crofter and a ‘made horseman’ but still a tinker. In Greig’s day this represented a real social barrier, and – as the School’s collectors have found in the past – these social barriers, although much less solid these days, do form a real stumbling block. (*Muckle Songs* 1992, 14)

Other folklorists, such as Hamish Henderson, ignored these social mores and not only studied Traveller folklore and music, but also lived and worked alongside them for extended periods of time. In doing so, Henderson was able to become intimately familiar with many Traveller families and find among them individuals with outstanding talent. The same can be said of folklorist and journalist Maurice Fleming, who brought the Stewart family of Blair, Perthshire to public notice. The Stewart family, of which Sheila Stewart is a member, became known throughout the folk music world as the “Stewarts of Blair,” recording numerous albums and performing extensively throughout Europe in the mid-twentieth century.

Notable Traveller Figures

Several Irish and Scottish Travellers have been recognized for their storytelling and musical talents over the past thirty years. Of these, I focus on four specific Scottish Travellers for this dissertation. All four are known for both their storytelling and singing abilities. These individuals are Jess Smith, Stanley Robertson, Duncan Williamson, and Sheila Stewart. Since the time when I began my research, two of these individuals have passed away—Duncan Williamson and Stanley Robertson.

Stanley Robertson

The first Traveller who informed my research was Stanley Robertson. Our initial encounter was at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival on the Washington, DC mall in the

summer of 2003, where he was a performer for the Scotland pavilion. Stanley Robertson was born on June 8, 1940. Known as a singer of ballads, a piper, and a storyteller, Stanley began his life the way many Traveller children do—being ridiculed and bullied by settled children, or *scaldies* (the Traveller cant word for settled people). In his introduction to his recording of songs from his Aberdeen childhood, Stanley wrote, “As a five year old I was regularly beaten up because I was a Traveller child. I used to walk home from my school ... in the stream, to avoid being bullied by the older boys” (Robertson *Rum Scum Scoosh*, 2006). His family was a support system for him in dealing with these encounters, and often the stories and songs of his relatives would both enchant him and take his mind away from his problems dealing with the wider community. His maternal grandfather, Joseph Edward McDonald, was a well-known storyteller from whom Stanley learned not only many of his earliest stories but also his style of delivering tales (*Muckle Songs* 1992, liner notes). He spent seven years of his adult life as a piper in the army, but otherwise he worked as a fish filleter.



Figure 2-3: Stanley Robertson¹¹

¹¹ I took this photo of Stanley Robertson during a performance at the April 2004 meeting of the British Forum for Ethnomusicology at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland.

Stanley spent forty-seven years working in one of the fish houses of Aberdeen (“Stanley Robertson” 2009). Many of the individuals he met and worked with there informed much of his storytelling and songs. These characters can be seen especially in two of his collections of stories, *Fish-Hooses* and *Fish-Hooses 2*. But more than this work experience, perhaps, is his connection with the liminal world outside of the Traveller campfire. Even after settling in a tenement house, his family would travel on the road in summer months when Stanley was young, often down the Old Road at Lumphanan, where stories around the campfire would reconnect Stanley with the world of fairies and magic, and reaffirm the connection between Travellers and ‘Jack Tales.’

Stanley would often speak of the way his Traveller culture and the connection with nature and the supernatural world affected his ballads and songs. When I first interviewed Stanley in April of 2004 he spoke several times of the influence of fairies not only in his ballads but also his songs. Stories of fairies’ interaction with the human world were not just a literary tool, but also a firm belief Stanley held regarding the real world about him. I analyze how this supernatural world influenced his music and stories in Chapter Five.

Of the four Travellers I focus on, Stanley Robertson had arguably the longest involvement with publicizing Traveller culture, writing several books of Traveller tales, especially concerning his own stories of his earlier years in the Aberdeen fish factories. He also had released several recordings of both songs and ballads. His aunt, Jeannie Robertson, was one of the first Travellers brought to the world’s attention in the 1950s, through the efforts of folklorists Hamish Henderson and Alan Lomax. Stanley’s ballad

singing was greatly informed by Jeannie's style and repertoire. I examine this musical relationship more in Chapter Five.

His cousin, Lizzie Higgins, is also well known as a Traveller performer. The daughter of Jeannie Robertson, Lizzie came into prominence as a ballad singer later as an adult, often overshadowed in her youth by her mother's singing skills. Lizzie was influenced vocally by her father's pipe music and eventually continued her parents' musical traditions.

Though influenced by his aunt and his cousin, Stanley's performance style included more of the supernatural traditions of the Travellers. Stanley, a high priest of the Mormon faith, had a mixture of religious beliefs and Traveller beliefs informing his works and performances. His childhood years were involved with traveling throughout the summer months, but from the age of five he lived in Aberdeen in a settled community, eventually marrying a non-Traveller wife. He performed throughout the United Kingdom, Europe, and the United States, and was part of the "Oral and Cultural Traditions of Scottish Travellers" project from April 2002 until April 2005 at the Elphinstone Institute at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland.

Stanley passed away on August 2, 2009. In an anonymous obituary, published in the UK newspaper *The Telegraph* [September 3, 2009], he was lauded as having been "recognised as a wellspring of Scottish travellers' lore; renowned for his phenomenal memory, he could recall ballads and stories dating back through 500 years of oral history, and his ability to hold audiences spellbound with lengthy tales was unrivalled." He was a rich source of Traveller lore, and learned much of his skills through his family

connections—his cousin Elizabeth Higgins, also a fish filleter and known for her album “*Princess of the Thistle: Lizzie Higgins*,” his grandparents; and his aunt.

Duncan Williamson

Duncan Williamson was born on April 11, 1928. He spent most of his life following a traditional Traveller lifestyle (travelling, living in bow tents, performing, creating baskets and tin smithing), up through the 1980s. He is best known for his stories. As Hamish Henderson writes of Duncan,

“Throughout his life he has been interested in stories and storytelling, and his peripatetic way of life ensured that he would pick up tales all over Scotland. He gradually came to realize that this meant more to him than anything else, and he became a conscious collector and champion of his people’s oral culture. Although stories came first, he was soon adding ballads and songs galore to his capacious memory-holdall.” (Williamson 1989, 26-7)

With the aid of his second wife, Linda, he published several volumes of work, both for children and adults. He was also known as a singer of various genres of songs—ballads, shorter songs, and humorous works. One of his sons, Jimmy Williamson, has continued in his father’s footsteps and now performs songs of the Travellers and his own original works.

The seventh of sixteen children, Duncan was born by Loch Fyne in Argyllshire, Scotland. Both his parents were illiterate, but his familial surroundings were filled with people from a rich oral tradition. His extended family included many well-known singers, pipers and storytellers. Duncan learned many stories and ballads from his family, where these tales had been passed down from generation to generation. Ken Hunt describes Duncan’s adherence to family tradition in Duncan’s obituary: “It was Duncan

who told me that when you tell a story, or sing a song, the person you heard it from is standing behind you. When that person spoke, he, in turn, had a teller behind him, and so on, back and back and back. I love this idea, the story has to speak to its own time, but the teller has also to be true to the chain of voices that inform him or her” (Hunt 2007). His stories were also infused with the same supernatural world as Stanley Robertson’s stories. Williamson wrote numerous volumes of Traveller tales, many of which speak of various magical characters and happenings, such as his work *The Broonie, Silkies and Fairies: Travellers' Tales* (1985).

As mentioned above, Duncan wrote several volumes of collected and original Traveller tales. Many of these were through the urgings and efforts of his second wife, Linda Headlee, an American ethnomusicology student whom he met while she was conducting her graduate research in Scotland. He was highly sought after as a performer, mainly because of his strong and charismatic stage presence and performance style. As the folklorist Hamish Henderson describes it, “Whether Duncan is telling a tale or sharing a ballad, he does so with such personal impact, you feel he is offering part of himself, an unforgettable gift, and as a listener, you cannot help but be touched by the experience” (Williamson 1989, 29).

During my extended time in Scotland from September 2006 to April 2007, I had several instances where I was able to see Duncan perform. His health had begun to fail toward the end of my stay, and I was not able to arrange a personal interview with him at that time. I arranged to return to Scotland to meet with him in December 2007, but unfortunately, he passed away from a stroke on November 8. Despite being the only Traveller of the four main ones in my dissertation that I did not have a chance to

interview, he remains included because of his immense repertoire, critique of his own culture, recordings and his noted performance style.

Sheila Stewart

Sheila Stewart is part of the well-known Scottish Traveller family called “The Stewarts of Blair.” Her mother, Belle Stewart, was a contemporary of Stanley Robertson’s aunt, Jeannie. Belle was well known as a singer and toured throughout the United Kingdom in the 1950s and 1960s with her husband, Alec, and her two daughters, Sheila and Cathie. The Stewart family was mostly settled by the time they became known for their musical abilities to a larger audience. Sheila spent many of her early summers not travelling, but rather at her family’s raspberry farm in Blairgowrie, a location that attracted many Travellers wanting summer work.

Sheila is a well-known singer of both Child ballads and humorous songs. In the past three years, she has also written two books—one a biography of her mother and the other a collection of Traveller short stories—as well as leading ballad workshops and performing widely throughout Scotland and beyond. The biography she wrote of her mother, *Queen Among the Heather* (2006), has garnered positive reviews, despite the early frustration of being told by a folklorist that she was not qualified to write the biography of her mother because she held no advanced degrees. Sheila told me, “I wrote it myself and no academic had a hand in it. I used normal words a Traveller would write” (Stewart interview, 2006). She also stated, “With Travellers, the mother rules the family. My mother would be all for the book” (Stewart interview, 2006).

As noted on the cover of the record “The Stewarts of Blair,” “there can be few more musically gifted clans or families in all Europe. Pipers, fiddlers, melodeon players, tin whistlers can be counted among them in dozens, and you practically never encounter an indifferent performer” (*The Stewarts of Blair* 1966). This same album cover says of Sheila, “Apart from Belle herself, the outstanding singer on the tapes (everyone agreed) was her daughter Sheila. From rare Child ballads like ‘The Twa Brothers’ to comparatively recent American folk songs like ‘The Convicts Song’ Sheila unfolded an extraordinary repertoire, displaying the most subtle and sensitive understanding of her material, and the most impressive technical expertise. This was the fine flower of a noble folk tradition” (*The Stewarts of Blair* 1966). Sheila also frequently performs alongside fellow Traveller Jess Smith at festivals, school lectures, and other public events. Below is a photo of them giving a performance/lecture for Scottish school children in 2006.



Figure 2-4: Sheila Stewart (on left) and Jess Smith

The Stewarts built a home on the Scottish town of Blairgowrie, where they also had a berry field. Summer lent itself to berry picking, where the Stewart family and many of Travellers would gather as workers in the field. As Hamish Henderson states on the album cover for the record “Folksongs & Music from The Berryfields of Blair:”

Unlike most of the rich berryfield owners in the area, the then proprietors of the “Standing Stones” were of traveler stock—Alex and Belle Stewart, themselves notable folk performers—and they were naturally on intimate friendly terms with the gaberlunz’ e families, still “on the road,” who camped on their land and helped to harvest their crop of berries. This gave the Standing Stones the feel almost of a little traveler principality of its own, a joyful snook cocked at orthodox law and order. . . . Down the verges of the field, when berrypicking was in full swing, you could see ragged rows of tents, and here and there battered second-hand cars, the veterans of countless scrap-dealing forays. A wooden hut near the entrance sold lemonade and miscellaneous groceries. . . . The pickers usually worked in little groups, and all day long you could hear voices raised in song in one corner of the field or another. Sometimes the songs were on-the-spot improvisations about the work itself. . . . After the day’s picking was over, and the evening feed cooked and eaten, there was a bit of moving to and fro between the camp-fires. Two or three folk from one ‘camp’ would join their neighbours, and a ceilidh would get under way. Sitting on the ground, or squatting on their hunkers, the travelers would gossip and exchange banter—folktales were told as if the protagonists were all still alive. . . . Then the singing would begin, or else a melodeon might be fetched out of the tent, and one of the gypsies would give a brilliant display of step-dancing on a bit of board laid down for the purpose, encouraged by hoochs and admiring cries. (*Folksongs and Music from the Berryfields of Blair*)

The Stewart family was very influential with both Traveller and non-Traveller ballad singers. During my fieldwork in Scotland in 2006, Sheila Stewart led a ballad-singing workshop at the Scottish Storytelling Centre in Edinburgh. The workshop was filled with singers from throughout the United Kingdom and abroad. During this workshop she spoke of her days in the berry-picking fields of Blairgowrie and of the wealth of music shared at these events. In addition, she discussed the musical influences of her family members on her performance style, notably her grandfather, John Stewart,

one of the best pipers of Scotland, as well as her parents, Alec and Belle Stewart.

Jess Smith

Jess Smith is the Traveller I have had the most contact with, both through personal interviews and performances. She was born in Perthshire, Scotland, into a travelling family and had seven sisters. She was one of the first Travellers to become an award-winning writer. She has written three autobiographical volumes, a novel, and a



Figure 2-5: Jess Smith, Perthshire, Scotland

collection of Traveller short stories for children. She is also a very talented singer and released a recording of songs and stories, though she still remains known mostly for her

writings. These writings give a personal and unique glimpse into Traveller life. In an interview with Jess, however, I became aware of the issues that works by Travellers can cause within the Traveller community. Whereas a number of Travellers are very concerned with their origins and history, including the four I focus on in this dissertation, other Travellers prefer to lead settled lives and ignore their earlier upbringing.

Autobiographical works such as those by Jess Smith keep the Travellers' culture in the public arena. Jess's sisters, upon the release of the first autobiographical work, were angered by this publication and have, with a single exception, disowned Jess. Jess was also the most informative regarding an introspective look at Traveller family dynamics. As mentioned earlier by Sheila Stewart, the mother controls the family. Jess Smith adds, "The women were in charge of the kids, the food and the money. Men just sat and made the tin. They were never allowed to do anything in the kitchen" (Smith interview, 2007.) Jess almost mentioned the prevalence of domestic violence within the Traveller community, including her own grandmother's plight, "My granny had not a finger that had not been broken, as well as her nose" (Smith interview, 2007).

A number of other Scottish Travellers were possible to use for my research, but I wanted to be able to interact with my subjects, so I chose current performers in the tradition, as well strong culture bearers of their communities. I also wanted those active in sharing their Traveller culture and who possess a high-level of talent. Jess Smith, Stanley Robertson, Duncan Williamson and Stanley Robertson became the obvious choices for the type of research I had planned to undertake. Their singing styles and repertoire will be examined more in depth in Chapter Five.

An awareness of the uncertainty surrounding Traveller origins and history, as well as the prejudices they have lived with over several centuries, will allow for a better understanding of why many Travellers have fought to be officially recognized as a separate ethnic group. This struggle for recognition both reinforces and shapes Traveller identity. The specific ways in which this happens, including in the music of the four Travellers who are the focus of my research, is examined in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER THREE: ETHNIC IDENTITY

“I am ethnic; what are you?”

from “Scotia’s Bairn” by Scottish Traveller Jess Smith

In determining what specifically about being a Traveller affects and informs their music, one has to examine what about the Traveller culture makes them not just a minority group within the larger social structure but rather a possible separate ethnic group altogether. All of the Travellers I interviewed believed themselves to be part of a separate ethnic group within the wider Scottish culture, while maintaining that they were also proud and patriotic members of Scotland’s population.

How then does this belief inform their music and stories? In examining the possible ethnic identity of the Travellers, one wonders about the usefulness, since ethnicity is as much a social construct as is race. The Travellers being associated with a separate ethnic identity has been used historically by outside groups with horrific results, yet most recently by the Travellers themselves for political power. What good would defining and understanding their ethnicity have for the Traveller community? Ian Hancock, an American gypsy and scholar, examines this question in his work on the Romani people of Europe. He examines the effects that a lack of a cohesive ethnic identity has on the greater gypsy community:

...in the Romani case, our history is vague. We ourselves have forgotten it and the non-Romani scholars have presented a great many confusing theories of their own about us; the result is that people don’t know who we really are, and we aren’t yet in a position to tell them...in the absence of a well-recognized history and clearly understood ethnic identity, our whole presence as a people remains in a sense confusing. When we are left out of discussions, or passed over in matters of legislative decision-making, it is not always deliberate; it is often simply because our identity and—

particularly—our representation, seems vague. Combined with our lack of political influence or a loud voice, we are very easily overlooked. (Hancock 2005, 63)

In this chapter I attempt to address these issues of history, identity, and political agency in an attempt to begin to define Traveller, and in some respects a larger gypsy, ethnic identity. I use an historical approach to examine how the gypsy and Traveller communities have been seen and even categorized in European culture, how they themselves respond to being part of a separate ethnic group, as well as an examination of theoretical viewpoints on ethnicity and how this may or may not apply to Travellers. Furthermore, I will include several ballad examples to illustrate the ways in which ethnicity is portrayed in their music.

Ethnicity and a Gypsy ‘Nation’

In the previous chapter I examined the various beliefs on the origins of the Travellers. Despite these differing views, the Travellers I interviewed were strongly connected to their own country of residence. Nationalistic pride is evident in their songs, stories, and personal histories. This was the case both for Travellers I had met in Ireland and those in Scotland. A sense of “Irishness” or “Scottishness” was evident in my conversations with them and also in their recordings and printed works. This connection to the wider community, however, seemingly ended with nationalistic pride. The Travellers saw themselves in a dichotomy with regard to their identity: they were Scottish as were their settled community members, yet separate because of their perceived ethnic differences. To clarify, the four Travellers I focus on in this research have been settled for decades, yet they all had grown up in families that travelled around

Scotland either every summer or for most of the year. When I refer to a “settled community” in my research it refers to those members of the community not of Traveller ancestry.

As Breathnach explains with regard to Irish Travellers, they “assert an ‘Irish’ [emphasis in the original] identity for a separate ethnic group living parallel to, but separate from the majority population. Curiously, Traveller’s ethnicity both supports and challenges ‘Irishness.’ By describing themselves as ‘Irish’ they validate popular assumptions about identity, while simultaneously demonstrating the reality of cultural difference in Irish society” (Breathnach 1996, 41). In this regard, Travellers both locate their history and themselves within a strong nationalistic position while simultaneously maintaining a separate ethnic identity.

This position is evident most obviously in the autobiographical works of Stanley Robertson, Jess Smith, and Sheila Stewart, where they proudly tell of their ancestors’ involvement and heroics with Scottish and British military regiments while maintaining a Traveller identity. Specific examples of this assertion will be discussed in Chapter Five. Such nationalistic pride, however, can also be reduced to a concept of the clan as being a nation. Charles J. Erasmus, in his article on traditional communities, writes of Irish Tinkers, or Travellers, seeing their nomadic groups as nations, “The Tinkers have been a separate Irish subsociety for several centuries, and they have carried their subculture with them as far as England and the United States...one informant regarded Travellers and settled Irish as distinct ‘nations’” (Erasmus 1981, 203). In this way, the clan becomes not just separate from the majority culture where it is seen as a minority group, but also separate in culture and identity.

In one regard, comparing Traveller ethnicity to nations has some precedents. As Walker Connor discusses in his article that looks at definitions of ethnicity, “*Ethnicity* (identity with one’s own ethnic group) is, if anything, more definitionally chameleonic than *nation*. It is derived from *Ethos*, the Greek word for *nation* in the latter’s pristine sense of a group characterized by common descent” (Connor 1994, 44). Connor’s definition applies to the one origin belief, that Travellers all came from northern India over a thousand years ago, but as Connor states, their ethnic identity is more “chameleonic” than this, especially with regard to the various other origin beliefs held by those both inside and outside the greater gypsy community.

Max Weber’s basic definition of “ethnicity” certainly pertains to Travellers. He states that ethnicity can be applied to “[t]hose human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; this belief must be important for group formation; furthermore it does not matter whether an objective blood relationship exists” (Weber 1978, 389).

Max Weber also draws connections between a perceived ethnicity and the concept of nationhood. In his work *Economy and Society*, he writes, “We shall call ‘ethnic groups’ those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent... this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists. Ethnic membership differs from the kinship group precisely by being a presumed identity” (Weber 1978, 395). The various origin stories of Travellers connect with Weber’s statement. Despite varied origin beliefs that include being descended from groups from India, ancient Celtic

metal-working classes, or uprooted farmers (or a combination of these), all the Travellers I spoke to and those I read of felt a subjective common ethnic identity in a shared nomadic culture that had spanned centuries.

Stuart Hall's view on ethnicity also applies to the shared culture of the Travellers. Hall writes, "The term ethnicity acknowledges the place of history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity, as well as the fact that all discourse is placed, positioned, situated, and all knowledge is contextual. Representation is possible only because enunciation is always produced within codes which have a history, a position within the discursive formations of a particular space and time" (Hall 1996, 446). This view of ethnicity places an importance on the individual's or the community's difference, its otherness, compared to another possibly dominant population. This view would also apply to minority groups or those living external to the mores and beliefs of the main population, something that undoubtedly pertains to Travellers.

Perhaps a better view of how ethnicity applies to Travellers is found in Glazer and Moynihan's introduction to their work *Ethnicity*: "there is some legitimacy to finding that forms of identification based on social realities as different as religion, language, and national origin all have something in common, such that a new term is coined to refer to all of them: 'ethnicity'. What they have in common is that they all become effective foci for group mobilization for concrete political ends..." (Glazer 1975, 18). This creation of a Traveller, or gypsy, ethnicity has been used most recently in the latter half of the twentieth century to politically motivate and organize a greater gypsy community throughout the European Union.

Ethnic Identity for Political Agency

As mentioned in the previous chapter, gypsies in Europe have been seen as pariahs to main settled cultures for centuries and have been victims of various legal systems because of their minority status. In many cases, laws were applied to gypsies as if they were a separate ethnicity and needed to be removed from mainstream society. A similar approach was applied to Jews in Europe at the same time, as will be shown later in this chapter. In referring to the anti-gypsy law chart from Chapter Two, it is obvious that gypsies were sought out for their differences in language, nomadic lifestyle, and occupation—many of the elements that Travellers use to help form their ethnic identity.

A historical song titled “MacPherson’s Rant” showcases the way Travellers were victimized simply for their ethnic minority status. The Traveller James MacPherson was arrested for being a gypsy and sentenced to hang in Banff, Scotland in 1700. Stanley Robertson, in an interview we had in 2004, stated, “[Travellers then] could be hung without any trial. It was just an awful law. And MacPherson, some thought he was a sheep stealer, but he was a Traveller. And that’s why he was hung. There was such a prejudice against Travelling people at that time” (Robertson interview, 2004). At the time, it was illegal in Scotland to be a gypsy. He was a well-known swordsman and fiddler. A stay of execution was granted, but upon being notified of this, the local sheriff put the town clock ahead and hung MacPherson before the official reprieve could arrive by messenger in the town. The Sheriff did so because of prejudices against Travellers. MacPherson had been reputed to be “an Egyptian and Vagabond, and oppressor of his majesty’s free lieges, in a bangstree manner, and going up and down the country around and keeping markets in a hostile manner” (Henderson 1996, 230). James MacPherson,

the day before his execution, wrote the tune and original lyrics for the song in his cell.

The surviving lyrics and story were used later by Robert Burns to create the following

lyrics (*MacColl 1977, 277-278*):¹²

Chorus:

Sae rantly, sae wantonly,
Sae dauntongly gaed he.
For he played a tune and he danced aroond,
Below the gallows tree.

Farewell, ye dungeons dark and strong
Farewell, farewell to thee;
MacPherson's time will nae be lang
In yonders gallows tree.

O, it was by a woman's treacherous hand
That I was condemned to dee;
Below a ledge o' a window she stood
A blanket she threw o'er me.

O, the Laird o' Grant, that Hieland saint,
That first laid hands on me
He placed the cause on Peter Broon
To let MacPherson dee.

O, come tie these bands from off my hands
And gie to me my fiddle
There's nae a man in a' Scotland
But brave's me at my word.

O, there's some come here to see me hung
And some to buy my fiddle,
Before I would part wi' her
I'd brak her through the middle.

I took my fiddle in both my hands
And broke her ower a stone;
There's nae anither will play on thee
When I am dead and gone.

O, it's little did my mither think
When first she cradled me,

¹² These lyrics are written in Scots dialect. These lyrics are from a version sung by Traveller Jock Higgins.

That I would turn a rovin' boy
And die on a gallows tree.

O, his reprieve was comin' o'er the brig o' Banff
To set MacPherson free
They put the clock a quarter afore
And they hung him tae the tree.

Brian Belton, in his work on Traveller ethnicity, discusses how the formation of identity is a combination of several factors, notably social, economical and political. He writes,

in terms of Traveller identity, the traditional mechanisms of identity are at work alongside social and economic influences and it might be argued that it is this combination of effects that give rise to Traveller ethnicity. This book has argued that this amalgamation of social and economic phenomena arises out [of] the social formation (the political environment) and as such would be seen by Weber as having the capacity to motivate the development of ethnic identity: "ethnic membership does not constitute a group; it only facilitates group formation of any kind, particularly in the political sphere. On the other hand, it is primarily the political community, no matter how artificially organized, that inspires the belief in common ethnicity" (Belton 2005, 145).

Kalwant Bhopal and Martin Myers continue this discussion of the roles race and ethnicity play in the development of a gypsy political agenda in their book on gypsies and identity.

They state,

In the last ten years the concept of ethnicity has tended to replace ideas of race both within legal frameworks and the assignment of rights to groups of individuals, and also within work that has examined identity and culture.... The definitions and limitations of ethnicity or race become particularly important at junctures where legal designations are required, as without the categorization and recognition of ethnicity there is a very possible danger of ethnic groups being denied civil rights. (Bhopal 2008, 215)

Since the creation of the European Union in the twentieth century, the role of human rights and of minority groups in EU countries has repeatedly been the focus of

legal rulings and decrees. Signing the *European Convention on Human Rights* is a requirement for membership in the EU. “Article Two” of the *Treaty of European Union* focuses on the fundamental rights of the citizens of the EU, stating the EU is “founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities.”¹³ With this article as part of the foundation of the EU, gypsy communities as a whole (Roma, Travellers, etc.) have begun to group together to gain political power and push for better legal standing in their respective countries. To do this, they join together under the auspices of a shared ethnic identity and place themselves in a unique position. With the creation of the EU, a political unit that crosses national borders, as do the gypsies, the gypsy communities of Europe can combine together for the first time in great numbers to act as one political force.

Several organizations have formed to support a new political force among the gypsies of Europe, such as the International Romani Union. These organizations have been instrumental in pushing for pro-gypsy laws in the EU, as well as bringing specific cases of hate crimes to the attention of EU courts and the media. This publicity has led to numerous cases where EU political and humanitarian organizations have censured countries for their treatment of gypsies. Recent instances include:¹⁴

<u>Date</u>	<u>Incident</u>
2008 May 20	The European Parliament censured Italy for its treatment of Gypsies.

¹³ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:115:0001:01:EN:HTML>

¹⁴ <http://www.timelinesdb.com/listevents.php?subjid=562&title=Gypsies>

2009 Dec 22	The EU Court of Human Rights said Bosnia’s constitution discriminates against Jews and Roma because it does not allow them to run for parliament or president.
2010 Jan 13	Amnesty International said the Czech Republic is defying a European court by continuing to place thousands of healthy Gypsy children in schools for the mentally disabled.
2010 Aug 26	The EU’s justice commissioner denounced French officials’ discriminatory tone about the vulnerable minority—gypsies.
2010 Sep 9	The European Parliament called on France to suspend its expulsion of gypsies.
2010 Sep 14	The European Commission threatened legal action against France over its crackdown on Roma minorities, drawing a parallel between their treatment and World War II-era deportations.
2011 Apr 7	Amnesty International urged Serbian authorities to “take urgent and immediate action” to halt forced evictions of Roma.

Figure 3-1: Political Censures

Many of these European groups, especially those in Eastern Europe, have focused attention on gypsy issues by commenting on their separate ethnic identity. In a report on gypsy concerns in Slovakia, Viliam Zeman writes, “For several centuries, there has been an ethnic minority with its own national characteristics living within the territory of the

CSFR¹⁵ – the Roma. Inadequate awareness of the ‘Rom question’ has been typical of the way in which it was handled. Neither the specialists, nor the general population in general, ... had access to sources of information on the Rom ethnic group which might shed light upon their behaviour and its causes” (Zeman 1994, 121). Zeman proposed in his work that the Slovakian government “grant ethnic status [to the Roma] equivalent to that of other national minorities in the CSFR” (Zeman 1994, 127). This work and numerous others available from advocates in Eastern European countries discuss gypsies in terms of their having their own ethnic identity. Perhaps one of the most ambitious political moves, however, came with a delegation of Romanies from various countries that attended the World Conference Against Racism in 2001 in Durban, South Africa. At this conference, the Romani delegation delivered a petition “to the United Nations asking that Romanies be recognized as a non-territorial nation with a seat and voting rights in the UN General Assembly” (Hancock 2005, 124).

With regard to the treatment of Travellers in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, many legal rights are still being debated. In particular is the location of caravan sites where Travellers can live temporarily, usually over the winter months. As mentioned earlier in this work, most Travellers in Scotland have become settled, with few still taking to the roads in the summer months. In the case of England and more so in Ireland, a substantial number of Travellers and gypsies still follow a nomadic, or at least semi-nomadic, lifestyle, hence a greater number of legal rulings against caravan sites in these locations. Legal rulings, often called the “Caravan Acts” with various year designations, have been implemented to supposedly aid Travellers in establishing their

¹⁵ CSFR: Czecho-Slovak Federal Republic, known since 1993 separately as The Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic

rights to land, but in reality these laws have made it harder for Travellers to find legal and safe places to locate their caravans. The Caravan Act of 1960 was created to control the use of private caravan sites, making it illegal for gypsies to reside “on the private land of farmers they were working for.”¹⁶ Sociologists of the time facilitated actions such as these with their descriptions of Travellers as “neither racially nor physically distinct from the population as a whole: they were simply rural or urban migrants, society’s rejects and failures” (Gmelch 1975, 58). Travellers were considered simply vagrants, and any concept of them as having a separate cultural identity or ethnicity was ignored. The Caravan Sites Act of 1968 attempted to rectify some of the unfairness of the previous act, but many local Councils still discriminated against Travellers trying to reside in their region. As one Traveller advocacy group states of the 1968 Act, “The reality of this legislation is that the minimum number of pitches and sites have been provided and therefore any of those Travellers not able to find a pitch are hounded out of the area.”¹⁷

In 1983 a committee was set up in Dublin by sympathetic non-Travellers to “defend the rights of nomads as an ethnic group” with regard to the EEC’s (European Economic Committee) economic program (O’Brien 1994, 119). Ireland led the way in referring to Travellers as an ethnic group entitled to protection as a minority; this view would eventually spread into the dialogue of Traveller protection in the United Kingdom in the 1990s. In Ireland in the 1990s, the movement for Traveller rights was gaining more power. An organization called the Irish Travellers’ Movement was created which became an umbrella organization for many smaller pro-Traveller groups. This organization “defined ‘Travellers’ as a clearly identifiable ‘ethnic group,’ which had the

¹⁶ <http://www.gypsy-traveller.org/your-rights/law/historical-laws/>

¹⁷ <http://www.gypsy-traveller.org/your-rights/law/historical-laws/>

right to continue to lead a nomadic way of life and to have a decent standard of living without being forced to settle down in order to receive welfare benefits and have access to health and education. It demanded that the government provide ‘culturally appropriate’ services, which respected the nomadic way of life and ‘ethnic differences’” (O’Brien 1994, 119). This organization not only pushed for equality of Travellers under social service programs and the legal system, but it did so through claiming that Travellers were not just a minority but a separate ethnic group.

Ironically, another Irish advocacy group has noted problems in establishing a separate identity for Travellers that arise from similarities that exist between Travellers and the settled community. Belton writes, “The Dublin Travellers Education and Development Group, although seeking to identify a distinct Traveller culture, demonstrate the difficulties in establishing cultural unity, or definite distinctiveness, arguing that customs, beliefs and superstitions are much the same as those of settled people to the extent that it is sometimes impossible to identify the root of particular cultural practices” (Belton 2005, 75). Though many aspects of Traveller culture do differ from the settled community, there are enough similarities that it can be difficult to establish a necessary unique ethnic identity in order to push properly for minority rights.

A new law in the UK, the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, removed the duty of local Councils to provide caravan sites for Travellers and increased the opportunity to evict and remove Travellers from a particular town. The government, responding to criticism of these new laws, said Travellers could buy land on which to reside, but as doing so requires using local government channels, these purchases were often denied. As one Traveller advocacy group has stated, “Although nomadism and

unauthorized camping are not, in themselves, illegal, the effect of the legislation has been to criminalise a way of life.”¹⁸ The main premise of these laws has yet to be overturned, but through advocacy work of organizations such as “Friends, Families, Travellers” the British Home Office has developed a manual on how law enforcement should properly work with Travellers using caravan sites.¹⁹ In addition, in 2000 the British government’s Commission for Racial Equality created a pamphlet titled “Travellers, Gypsies and the Media: Guidance to Journalists” that includes examples of best practices for media outlets encounters and reports on gypsy groups.

In Scotland, issues of determining race or ethnic status of Travellers have often been brought about through legal cases concerning housing. A document titled “Statutory Code of Practice on Racial Equality in Housing in Scotland” addresses various laws that pertain to housing practices in the country. After briefly mentioning two housing cases before the courts from years prior to the publication of the document, the work states,

Whilst the first two cases referred to above would be likely to be of persuasive authority that both Gypsies and Irish Travellers have ethnic status under the RRA [Race Relations Act of 1976] in any case brought before a court in Scotland, neither of these judgements are binding on the courts in Scotland. This is because Scotland has its own legal system and judgements of the Court of Appeal and the London County Court are not binding on Scottish courts. Moreover, none of these test cases made any reference to Scottish Gypsies/Travellers. At the time of writing, there is therefore no legal precedent in Scotland that explicitly recognises Gypsies/Travellers or Scottish Gypsies/Travellers as a distinct racial group under the RRA. (*Code of Practice* 2009, 30-31)

Ironically, an update in the same manual states, “Racial groups are defined by race, colour, nationality (including citizenship), or ethnic or national origins. All racial groups

¹⁸ <http://www.gypsy-traveller.org/your-rights/law/historical-laws/>

¹⁹ This manual is available as a PDF document at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/guidancemanaging>.

are protected from unlawful racial discrimination under the RRA. Romany Gypsies, Irish Travellers, Jews and Sikhs have been explicitly recognized by the courts as constituting racial groups for the purposes of the RRA” (*Code of Practice 2009, 99*). Scottish Travellers have yet to be so recognized.

In addition, one of the long-standing problems of local governments with Traveller families has been education. How does the local government see to the education of all children in its precinct when Traveller families are often not settled and living in one abode during the academic year? Advocacy groups have enabled legislation that allows for mobile teachers trained to interact with Traveller families to work in the communities and locations of Traveller families. Many groups now exist to support this uniquely accommodating educational opportunity for Traveller families, specifically Traveller Education Services, which has numerous online resources and a lively listserve for teachers of Traveller children. Jess Smith, one of the Travellers I focus on for this work, is a part of this group and often go into public schools and tell settled children about Traveller culture, including telling stories and singing Traveller songs. In sharing her music and traditions, she continues an ever-broadening group of Travellers that are bonding together as an ethnic group to advocate for better legal rights and a greater understanding of their way of life. Problems encountered by Travellers because of their ethnicity do not, unfortunately, end if they become settled. Once they are identified as a Traveller family by the neighborhood they settle in, they often still face prejudice as many other minority groups do, from bullying of children in schools to job discrimination for adults (Hancock 2005, 120). In seeking official recognition as a specific racial or

ethnic group, Travellers can hope to seek recourse from some of these prejudices through the legal system.

Language and Ethnic Identity

The role language has in forming an ethnic identity also affects how Travellers see themselves separate from the non-Traveller community. As Zeman mentions with regard to gypsies and their language, “With the Rom renaissance, there is a growing interest in language. An individual can only be integrated into society if he is able to establish his own identity correctly. That entails being aware of and appreciating his ethnic group, his language and his culture; otherwise he becomes a prey to social schizophrenia, with all the negative behavioural effects that this implies” (Zeman 1994, 124). Travellers, an ethnic minority in Scotland, are dependent economically on the larger non-Traveller population, just as their language has also taken on a dependence to that same dominant population.

Though the four Travellers I include in my dissertation all have English as their main language, each also proudly used Cant or Traveller dialect in their songs and stories, as well as Scots, Gaelic, or Doric to locate themselves within their own geographic home within Scotland. As George Castile writes with regard to language use in the creation of an ethnic identity, “a ‘national’ language may be an important element in reinforcing the belief in a separate ethnic identity for the enclave, but it is not a final requirement for defining boundaries when there are many who are certainly members of the group but who make no use of it” (Castile 1981, 175). Zeman also agrees with the importance of language in determining identity: “their [gypsy] ethnic identity was preserved by the use

of the Rom language for inter-ethnic communication; it was thereby possible to preserve the stereotypes of behaviour, morals and ethical standards (proverbs, stories, texts of songs, legends)” (Zeman 1994, 124).

Benedict Anderson, in *Imagined Communities*, also discusses the role of language, specifically print language, in the formation of communal identity. He shows how the print language not only led to the demise of minor vernaculars and dialects in the history of Europe, but also how it created a belief in states in a political sense, where the population began to share a more common language, one with the power of ‘print’ (Anderson 1991). Travellers in Ireland and Scotland, as well as the settled population, “knew little or nothing of Latin, Norman French, or Early English” (Hutchinson 1994, 92), so they continued to speak Gaelic or Irish or Cant—their respective languages. As modern English has taken over through time in the United Kingdom, vestiges of Traveller dialects and language have survived now in written works.

The books by Stanley Robertson and Duncan Williamson, in particular, are known to be written in particular dialects and use Traveller Cant terms. This use of local dialects familiar to Travellers, but especially the use of Cant, allows the increasingly settled and literate Traveller community to not only see the perseverance of their language but to also take pride in its survival. They lay claim to a shared language, albeit endangered, and therefore a shared identity.

Eric Hobsbawm also discusses the link between language and ethnic identity in an article concerning ethno-linguistic nationalism. He gives an historical example of difficulties in diplomatic relations in the early twentieth century between the English and the French, where the French deride the English because of their mixed language heritage

(Anglo-Saxon, Scots, Irish, Norman, etc.); he states, “Linguistic and ethnic nationalism thus reinforced each other” (Hobsbawm 1994, 182). The Travellers I spoke to and had contact with took great pride in their ability to speak not only English and Scots, but also Gaelic (in some cases) and, in all cases, Cant. Their pride in knowing Cant terms and being able to use Cant phrases, whether it was in performance, print or just conversation, connected them to one another and allowed them to share a heritage if not a bloodline. This identification with a language aided them in sharing a subjective ethnic identity.

Ethnic Identity as a Means of Eradication

As mentioned briefly earlier, the gypsies (Travellers, Sinti, Rom, etc.) were historically viewed as an ethnic group separate from the surrounding population. This detached view of the gypsies was used as a means to subjugate and persecute them for centuries. A more modern example of how this twisted use of ethnicity was put into motion was by the Nazi regime during the Holocaust. The Nazi regime resurrected this misguided scientific theory as a means to perpetuate their ideal of social stratification of races and of racial purity. The gypsies of Europe became one of the first ethnic minority groups to fall victim to this plan (Hancock 2002, 37).

Discussing this historical event is more than just a simple recounting of events concerning gypsies in the twentieth century. Two of the Travellers I interviewed spoke at length about the horrors faced by gypsies during the Holocaust and how being singled out specifically because of their ethnicity affected the current generations of Travellers. With the death of friends and family members as a result of the Nazi extermination plan, both Travellers recognized a shared communal identity through their ethnicity. This traumatic

event had a decisive and bonding effect on the group's membership and became an important part of their shared history.

In the early twentieth century gypsies were still an ostracized minority, seen as pariah members of a society. Even the famous Béla Bartók, when collecting folk melodies in Romania, wrote in 1914, "Gypsies pervert melodies, change their rhythm to 'Gypsy' rhythm, introduce among the people melodies heard in other regions and in the country seats of the gentry—in other words, they contaminate the style of genuine folk music" (Brown 2000, 119). This eerily foreshadows how the Nazi regime would attempt to exterminate the gypsies for contaminating the purity of Aryan blood. In the same essay, Brown notes how Susan McClary made a connection between the treatment of gypsies and Jews during the Holocaust: "Susan McClary describes how Gypsies were frequently represented through Orientalist tropes as figures of otherness, dark, exotic and slightly threatening in the European context. Jews were similarly represented. As figures of racial otherness, McClary notes, the two were considered virtually interchangeable" (Brown 2000, 124). This racial otherness would set the gypsies up for not just discrimination but, in this case, extermination.

The music of the gypsies paralleled how they were viewed socially at this time. Much as Bartók described gypsies as contaminating the 'pure' folk melodies he was trying to collect, the settled European community saw gypsies as contaminating their culture. Brown writes, "Understood as Orientalist, Gypsy music was backward, the antithesis of the aspired-to modernism. But entwined with this understanding of the Orient as inherently backward were theories of cultural intermixture drawing on the 'science' of race. In wider European culture in this period, racial and evolutionary

thought served as new, scientific proofs legitimizing long established prejudices against Jews and Gypsies” (Brown 2000, 125). As eugenics, or simply the purifying of the human gene pool, gained a foothold in scientific communities in the twentieth century, scapegoats were being used as examples of poor human progress; the gypsies were often this unfortunate example. Even musically, they were seen as a regressive human element. Brown writes of Cesare Lombroso’s work on a distinction between higher and lower races. On the music of the gypsies, Lombroso writes that their musical gifts are simply “a new proof of the genius that, mixed with atavism, is to be found in the criminal” (126). Some aspects of the higher races had rubbed off on the gypsies, but they were still firmly rooted among the lowest rung of races.

The Holocaust was not the first time there was a movement to exterminate gypsies in Europe, as can be seen by reviewing the historic law chart from Chapter Two. However, the Nazi movement to create a gypsy-free Europe was responsible for “ultimately destroying over half of the Romani population in Nazi-occupied Europe” (Hancock 2005, 34). As Ian Hancock, a noted American gypsy and scholar, writes in his work *We are the Romani People*, numerous conferences were being held and decrees issued prior to World War II with regard to what to do with gypsies. A conference held in 1925 on “The Gypsy Question” (36) produced laws that required unemployed gypsies be sent to work camps ‘for reasons of public security’ (37). In 1937 Heinrich Himmler issued a decree entitled “The Struggle Against the Gypsy Plague” stating gypsies were prone to participate in criminal activities (37). Hancock also notes,

Danish sociologists Erik Bartels and Gudrun Brun wrote in 1943:
The pure gypsies present no great problem, if only we realize that their mentality does not allow of their admittance to the well-ordered general society...the mixed gypsies cause considerably greater difficulties (...)

nothing good has) come from a crossing between a gipsy and a white person ... Germany is at present contemplating the introduction of provisions of sterilization in the case of such families. (Hancock 2005, 38)

Orders for the sterilization of gypsies had occurred in several different regions of Europe years prior to this statement, and had already begun in Germany almost a decade earlier. Gypsies were seen as not only a separate ethnicity, but a separate race, whose blood could be drawn and tested to prove their inferiority as members of the human race, whose culture was inferior and whose existence should come to an end; Johannes Behrendt of the German Office of Racial Hygiene issued a brief in 1939 stating “all Gypsies should be treated as hereditarily sick; the only solution is elimination” (Hancock 2005, 42).

Ethnic Identity, Social Oppression, and Music

Travellers’ social distance from the settled community affects their being not only a minority within the Scottish population but also reinforces the feeling of being a separate ethnicity. As Aoife Bhreatnach states when discussing the cohesion of Travellers as a minority, “Travellers developed an ethnic identity owing to increasing isolation from the settled community and the growth of a distinctive material culture” (Bhreatnach 2006, 39). Common Traveller historical occupations—tin smithing, basket making, and horse trading—had separated them previously from the non-Traveller community and also necessitated their nomadic lifestyle. A Traveller woman from Perthshire was quoted in a manual for the media by the Equality and Human Rights Commission of Scotland as saying, “There seems to be tolerance of other cultures but not ours. People believe that you should do exactly the same as them because your skin is white” (“Gypsy Travellers

in Scotland” 2010, 6). As stated previously, their nomadic lifestyle has kept them separate from the settled communities through which Travellers would pass; they never remained long enough in a community to develop ties or to overcome stereotypes or suspicions of the settled community members. As Ian Hancock writes, “Behaving in an exclusivist way can easily lead to an assumption on the part of those who are ‘left out’ that such a group is secretive, and must be hiding something. The maintenance of cultural and/or religious restrictions that keep outsiders at a distance must certainly be seen as one major historical factor accounting for both antigypsyism and anti-Semitism” (Hancock 2005, 58).

Current research on gypsy history has shown gypsies were derided for their nomadic lifestyle even as early as the Old Testament (North 1964, Hancock 2005). In Robert North’s 1964 article “Cain Music,” he writes of the Kenites of ancient Israel, a nomadic metal-working and musical tribe, “In Max Weber’s analysis too, pariah people were gypsies. They were a tuneful and bohemian folk who did not mind getting their hands dirty, or their souls dirty either, doing odd jobs beneath the dignity of the host population. The production of musical instruments requires certain technological skill, but also along with it some wearying use of mechanical tools. At first we should consider such work less filthy than, for example, the making of mud bricks and mud jars. Yet in Semitic tradition no opprobrium ever attaches to these ‘soil-ing’ pursuits” (North 1964, 381).

It is this nomadic lifestyle that sets up a view of Travellers as being a separate ethnicity through oppositional forces on group cohesiveness. Charles Erasmus examines this concept when he writes about the influence of these forces on a minority group

(1981). He states that in the face of these oppositional forces the survival of the group's identity requires enculturation of the young and a strong participation of all the group's members in the continuation of their beliefs and traditions (Erasmus 1981, 204). His concept is directly applicable to Traveller culture, where both economical and cultural survival rely on group bonds. Traveller children are regarded highly within the culture and are instructed very early in Traveller beliefs, culture, and history through stories and songs. Many Traveller children are also taught to play musical instruments, such as the fiddle and pipes, from an early age (Stewart interview, 2006). These songs and stories are incorporated in family activities, enabling the children to be socialized through music. John Blacking writes about the need for music to be part of a social context,

The value of music in society and its differential effects on people may be essential factors in the growth or atrophy of musical abilities, and people's interest may be less in the music itself than in its associated social activities. On the other hand, musical ability may never develop without some extramusical motivation. (Blacking 1973, 43)

Examples of the enculturation of Traveller children have been recorded in numerous publications, such as Duncan Williamson's book for children *Tell Me a Story for Christmas: Traveller Tales* (Williamson 1987) and Stanley Robertson's two-CD recording of stories and songs for children titled *Rum, Scum, Scoosh!* (Robertson 2006). Two short songs that Stanley includes in this CD set concern the Traveller fear of 'Burkers.' Burker songs and stories are about people who supply cadavers to medical schools. In Scotland in the 1800s two individuals, William Burke and William Hare, initially robbed graves to earn money by selling bodies; then soon began to murder individuals (often solo travelers or vagrants) to increase their income. From William Burke comes the name for the "Burker" legends. Travellers, including all the ones I

spoke with, had a fear of Burkers since they felt a missing Traveller would be seen as a positive happenstance to a settled community.

Two of Stanley's rhymes for children address this fear and warn children of the danger of running into a Burker. The first song is called "Doctor Knox," the individual Burke and Hare sold bodies to:

Doctor Knox, Doctor Knox
Pits bodies in an aul tin box,
One for a penny, two for a pound
And three for a golden sovereign. (Robertson 2006, 24)

The second children's rhyme is titled "Pipe Fu the Hashie Gavals." This rhyme warns children of taking tea from strangers, tea that may be drugged. Stanley writes this rhyme in both Traveller Cant and Gaelic:

Pipe fu the hashie gavals,
Deek how the hashie haas,
Shan culloch, shan pottach,
Bing avree an fake awa.

Haa aa the hantel's habbin,
Haa aa the hantel's haa,
Fake I neddies tae yer naggings,
Dinna sleuch the hantel's slab. (Robertson 2006, 24)

Stanley provides a translation for this rhyme in the liner notes: "Listen to what the woman's saying and watch what she's eating. Beware of the old woman and man. Get out and get away. Eat any and all of the food; take as much tatties [potatoes] as ye like, but don't drink the tea" (Robertson 2006, 24).

In addition to children's rhymes, Traveller children would have heard stories and songs about their history and culture (Williamson 1994, 8). The song "Lament for Wull Faa, died 1847" is an example of how music is used to pass along Traveller history. This

song is about the king of the Scottish gypsies, William Faa, who died at Kirk Yetholm, Scotland in 1847. The lyrics speak of the fame and glory of the Traveller leader:

The daisy had faded, the yellow leaf drops,
The cold sky looks grey o'er the shriveled tree tops;
And many around us, since summer's glad birth,
Have dropt, like old leaves, into the cold earth –
And one worth remembering has gone to his home,
Where King and the Kaiser must both at last come:
The King of the Gypsies – the last of his name,
Which in Scotland's old story is rung in by fame;
The cold clod ne'er pressed down a manlier breast,
Than that of the old man now gone to his rest.

It is meet we remember him; never again
Will such a foot as Old Wull's kick a ball o'er the plain;
Or such hands as his, warm with the warmth of the soul,
Bid us welcome to Yetholm, to bicker and bowl.
Oh, the voice that could make the air tremble and ring
With the great-hearted gladness becoming a king,
Is silent, is silent; oh wail; for the day
When death took the Border King, brave Wullie Faa.

No dark Jeddart prison e'er closed upon him,
The last Lord of Egypt ne'er wore gyve on limb,
Though his gray locks were crownless, the light of his eye,
Was kingly—his bearing majestic and high.
Though his hand held no scepter, the stranger can tell,
That the full bowl of welcome became it as well;
The fisher or rambler, by river or brae,
Ne'er from old Wullie's hallam went empty away.

In the old house at Yetholm we've sat at the board,
The guest, highly honoured, of Egypt's old lord;
Of his feats on the border, his prowess of old.
It is meet, when that dark eye in death hath grown dim,
That we sing a last strain in remembrance of him;
The fame of the Gypsy hath faded away,
With the breath from the brave heart of gallant Wull Faa.
(Whyte 2001, 70)

As an interesting historical aside, this particular story holds strong pride for the Scottish Traveller community. With the passing of William Faa (a surname which also sometimes

appears as “Farr”), Charles Blythe was crowned the new King of the Gypsies. Charles’ brother Andrew emigrated to the United States. His great-great-great grandson is William Jefferson Blythe IV, who changed his name in 1962 to William Jefferson Clinton and became the forty-second President of the United States.²⁰

As many Travellers become part of a settled community (as did all four of the Travellers I focus on in this work), the various reactions of the members of those settled communities reinforce cultural, and even ethnic, differences. As Erasmus states with regard to Irish Travellers, “Thrust into ever closer and more permanent contact with settled Irish, they are exposed to constant reminders of their social inferiority, for discrimination against them is strong and undisguised” (Erasmus 1981, 205). This discrimination could then buttress cohesion within a Traveller community, having members seek the acceptance of their fellow Travellers in opposition to the antagonism of non-Travellers (205).

Travellers in Scotland and Ireland often do not physically differ from the general settled population around them, including the four Travellers I focus on for this work. Their belief systems and cultural differences (former nomadic lifestyle, etc.) separate them from others. As Erasmus states, “Despite the fact that Tinkers are genetically Irish and physically indistinguishable from the rest of the population, they are readily identified by the settled Irish, who treat them as pariahs. They are identified by dress, carts, livestock, surnames, vocational practices, accent, and the secret argot they speak among themselves when dealing with settled Irish” (Erasmus 1981, 205).

²⁰ A detailed family tree showing this connection for Bill Clinton can be found at www.wargs.com/political/clinton.html

In addition, some Travellers willingly self-identify as being Travellers for economic reasons; the four I focus on—Stanley Robertson, Jess Smith, Duncan Williamson, and Sheila Stewart—all use their ethnic identity for economic purposes. To showcase their heritage they participate in workshops, performances, and publications that confirm them as Travellers and place them into a saleable, commodified group. According to Max Weber, “social class is based on economically determined relationship to the market (owner, renter, employee etc.)” (Weber 1978, 237). An examination of Scottish Traveller identity is possible using a Weberian perspective; when examining Traveller relationships to non-Traveller communities, music often is used as an economic tool. Historically having a lower social class than the settled community, Travellers can often use their material culture not only to support themselves, but also to advance their culture within the main population. The four Travellers I focus on all make or made their living through their publications, musical recordings, and public appearances. This raises not only their socio-economic status, but also their shared heritage. In this case, the same characteristics that have often set them apart and made them pariahs in their own communities, has now enabled them to succeed economically and socially using those same characteristics to their own advantages.

Scottish Traveller Jess Smith wrote the poem “Scotia’s Bairn” (Scots for child of Scotland) as her response to a derogatory non-Travellers’ view of Traveller culture. In her poem, she addresses a Traveller ethnic identity and the differences in culture between Travellers and the settled community. I include a transcription of the entire poem below to illustrate a Traveller’s viewpoint of being not just culturally different from the surrounding community but also ethnically different:

Yes, it may be said you're better than I.
Your peers have obviously blessed you with a grand home, fine clothes,
and the best of schooling, while I, I on the other hand, saw life from the
mouth of a Tinker's tent.

But I have felt the breath wind of John o' Groats.
And I have seen the hills of Glen Coe clothed in purple heather, heard her
mountain tops whisper a thousand curses on the murderers of the
Macdonald bairns. The ghosts of Culloden brushed against my cheek as I
sat on a rock seat, watching heaven's lightning streak across the land to the
sea beyond.

Can you say you've tasted the first ripened strawberries of Blairgowrie?
Sucked on raspas until their red juices filled your taste buds with flavor fit
for the gods?
Is there a time in your life you've washed in the early morning dew in a
field flowering with cowslip, pink clover, and wild daisies?
Did you ever swim below the belly of a giant basking shark?
Have you sung to a curious seal?

Have you heard the weasel's whistle pierce the eardrums of a hypnotized
rabbit?
Seen the fear in the eye in the Monarch o' the glen as the stalker's finger
pulls back upon his gun?
Did your protective parents tell you tales of the feared Fian warriors of
Glen Lyon?
Do you know how old the yew tree of Fortingall is?

Have you ever listened to a deaf child sing a beautiful Scottish ballad,
music and words unwritten?
Have you tasted the morning milk from the cow before she suckled her
calf, or tasted the freezing waters of a burn at its source?
Have you ever watched the dolphins follow the Lord of the Isles as she
sails majestically from Oban to Mull?

Saw a fight to the death between two Traveller warlords ruled by their
forefathers, adhering to the rules of their clan?
Have you seen the banshee washing shrouds at the river's edge in the thick
ghostly mist of a lonely glen?
Have you held the hand of an old woman as she breathes her last breath
and stretches her body for the final time?

I am a child of the mist, what are you?
I am ethnic; you are accepted. I tell a tale of your ancestors, and you are
taught not to.

Would you converse with a road tramp?
Does a Tinker's encampment fill you with excitement or do you draw back
in disgust?
Do you give thanks for each breath God gives you, or do you take life for
granted?

We are different you and I: I am the wind in your hair, you are the voice of
mistrust.

I am the blue of the Atlantic as she thrusts her watery fingers into
Scotland's west coast.

You are the gate that stops me from entering the forest.

I am the grouse in the purpled heather; you are the hunter who denies me
my flight.

I am the salmon as she leaps to her favorite spawning stream; you are the
rod who would end my epic journey.

I am the seed of all who went before me. I am from the brave ones who
hid, not burned the tartan. I am from those who spoke the Gaelic in secret
places. I am part of the true earth, the sea, and the sky.

I am the SCOTIA BAIRN. (Smith, *Matted Cat*, 2005)

Jess Smith's other numerous poems and songs also speak of Travellers as having a
separate ethnic identity. Smith's and select items from the repertoire of the other three
Travellers in my research will be examined further in terms of cultural identity and
musical elements in the next two chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR: TRAVELLER IDENTITY

“*You have to be confident in yourself, and bugger everyone else.*”²¹ – Sheila Stewart

As previously mentioned, Travellers do not possess a single, agreed origin theory. They do not have their own nation, nor do they share one location, religion, or dialect. So how does this affect a discussion of their identities, especially about how these varied identities are reflected in their music? An examination of what they do agree upon—such as their general belief system, superstitions, and customs—and how this appears in their music and stories will help create an understanding of both individual and group Traveller identities. I investigate how their communal identity was shaped in the mid-twentieth century by the efforts and influence of folklorists, in some ways to the detriment of the Traveller singers. I also discuss how Travellers view their stories and relate these to ballads, in order to both show how these reflect communal Traveller identity and to lay the groundwork for a deeper musical discussion of ballads and their connected stories in the following chapter.

Philip Bohlman, in *The Music of European Nationalism* (2004), discusses how place and music affect how a marginalized group is viewed by the greater community,

The music of nationless peoples is well suited to the processes of displacement. Music that maps history as change and adaptation, an expression of the individual and the collective body, rather than as repertory rooted in soil, is the music that distinguishes Europe’s nationless people. It is perhaps for this reason that the nationless people of Europe have been recognized publicly as peoples whose cultures are marked by music—Roma and Jews, Travellers in the United Kingdom and Ireland, and minorities of all kinds. (Bohlman 2004, 218)

²¹ Said during her *Conyach* song workshop in Edinburgh, Scotland, which I attended in the fall of 2006.

Many Traveller stories and ballads refer to their wanderings and to individuals or historical events, not to a particular location or town.

The reason for this becomes apparent in light of Bohlman's theory on how nationless people and their music are connected. Bohlman also states, "...Traveller repertoires express the seasonal movement of the groups who cultivate them. For those lacking land of their own, music ascribes identity by not depending on the institutions and process of collection and inscription that turn music itself into national property" (Bohlman 2004, 219). (This collection process as it pertains to Travellers will be further discussed later in this chapter.) In several songs and stories popular among the Traveller people, a cohesive travelling identity is expressed in opposition to the 'Other,' or the non-Traveller community.

Travellers, therefore, place themselves in a shared group identity against those who have often repressed them. As Mario Valdes writes, "There are innumerable stories that express the idea of the Other who is unlike the story-teller and his audience is contrary to the norm. These are specific designations of difference, either attributed to the other person or to the views held by the other. In all these descriptions and their derivations we are dealing with differences, with struggle, with opposition and with tension, with or without resolution, and these designations derive their meaning from the stories that continue to give a community its identity" (Valdes 2004, 10). The Traveller story and song repertoire relates directly to their existence and historic nomadism and allows them to express a group identity against what is a perceived Other.

With the Travellers I interviewed, stories and ballads were a way they could express their shared identity as an ethnic group. Foucault (1984) and Ricoeur (1988) are

just two who have written on the connection between storytelling and cultural identity. In his essay “What Is an Author?” (1984) Foucault discusses how storytelling plays a large role in the survival of cultural identity and how the author is really a combination of both text and culture. Ricoeur in *Time and Narrative* (1988) argues storytelling is grounded in both time and human action, and in doing so creates new interpretations and meanings. Mario Valdes writes, “national and cultural identity are based on the specific repertoire of stories, both fictional and non-fictional, that have been privileged in a community. The significant role that stories and the history of storytelling plays in developing the ideology of national identity goes hand in hand with a system of exclusions and marginalizations of sectors of the community from cultural participation” (Valdes 2004, 23). This storytelling identity has certainly applied to the Travelling community, and perhaps especially so in the second half of the twentieth century as their stories and ballads have enabled them to not only gain greater financial success through concert and publications, but also recognition and a level of respect for their culture from the settled community. For Travellers, ballads and stories were also not separate entities, but were related to one another closely. A ballad was just a sung story. I mention several stories in addition to ballads in these last two chapters, since often a sung version of a story can be located within a Traveller’s repertoire.

Belief System

With each of the four Travellers I focus on, their supernatural beliefs were evident, both in the stories and ballads they performed, as well as in interviews and published works. A belief in the supernatural—creatures, locations, superstitions—is a

strong component of the Traveller culture and helps to establish a communal identity among them. Their stories and ballads helped hold their communities together; without a specific location to refer to as their neighborhood, their literary culture is what helped them share their histories, their morals, and their beliefs. Their movements helped them add to their repertoire, and their oral culture is what has helped them to preserve their identity,

Moving at will between Gaeldom and the Lowlands, they have picked up treasures on every hand, and their oral culture is on that account a kind of synthesis of the numerous regional cultures which are still flowering in Scotland, a country with a very variegated folk landscape. In addition, the travelers have produced a voluminous folksong reflecting their own group identity and way of life, and are quite capable of producing new songs to old (or modern) tunes at the drop of a hat, whenever personal, local or national events seem worth commemorating. (J. Robertson, *The Cuckoo's Nest* liner notes)

Stories and songs shared within a family at the campfire at night, or during visits and meetings with other Travellers, were one way to reconfirm their communal identity as Travellers.

So then what constitutes an oral tradition for stories and ballads? Mario Valdes describes this tradition as having several components,

The oral story-telling tradition has significant traits that separates it from that of written stories: first and foremost, it always is performed to an immediate audience. Second, the story-teller is both narrator and performer, often dramatizing the story's characters. Third, the subject matter of the oral story-tellers repertoire is controlled by traditional categories such as ghost stories, historical tales, natural disasters as well as the moralizing fable. Fourth, the origins of these stories are mixed, some have elements from classical literature while others are local events where the two can be mixed. (Valdes 2004, 17)

This description fits the Traveller oral tradition of stories and ballads, especially those works that combine a supernatural element and historical events. Supernatural elements are one of the key traits found in many Travellers' tales.

Stanley Robertson, on his CD "A Keeper of the Lore," sings "Are You Sleeping Maggie?" a song written by Robert Tannahill that is popular among the Traveller community. In the liner notes to the CD, Stanley describes the song as "A night visiting song to the tune of "Sleepy Maggie." A lover braves the haunting cries of the 'banshee' and the eerie 'War-lock Craggie' to call his sweetheart, Maggie" (S. Robertson 1999):

Mirk and rainy is the nicht
There's no a star in a' the carry
Lightening gleams across the sky
And winds they blaw wi' winter fury

O are you sleeping Maggie
O are you sleeping Maggie
Let me in, for loud the linn
Is roaring o'er the warlocks craigie

Fearfu' flows the boortree bank
The rifted wood roars wild and dreary
Loud the iron yett does clank
And cry of howlets mak me eerie

Aboon my breath I daurna speak
For fear I'll rouse your wakeful daddie
Cauld's the blast upon my check
O rise, O rise, my bonnie lassie

She's op'ed the door, she's let him in
He's cruist aside his dreeping plaidie
Ye can blow ye worst, ye winds and rain
Since Maggie noo I'm in aside thee

O noo that you're wakin, Maggie
O noo that you're wakin, Maggie
What care I for howlets cry
For roaring linn or warlock's craigie.

Though not an older ballad that many Travellers have become known for, these lyrics and the song's popularity among Travellers show the importance of nature and the connection Travellers have with works that showcase a supernatural element.

The first ballad I encountered with strong supernatural connections was one sung to me during an interview I conducted with Stanley Robertson in Aberdeen, Scotland in 2004. The supernatural elements, interestingly enough, were not so much in the song, but rather in what happened to Stanley at the actual location of the ballad's action:

At Mill o' Tifty there lived a man
In the neighborhood o' Fyvie
And he had a lovely daughter dear
Wha's name was bonnie Annie.

Lord Fyvie had a trumpeter
By the name o' Andrew Lammie
And he had the airt tae win the heart
O' Mill o' Tifty's Annie.

Lord Fyvie, he cam tae the mill
Whar lived bonnie Annie
His trumpeter rade him before
Even the same Andrew Lammie.

Her mither cried her tae the door
Sayin', "Come here tae me, my Annie.
Did e'er ye see a bonnier man
Than the trumpeter o' Fyvie?"

Nothing she said, but sighing so
Alas for bonnie Annie
She darena own, her heart was won
By the servant Andrew Lammie.

That night as a' gaed tae their beds
A' sleepit soond but Annie
Love so repressed, her tender breast
Thinking on Andrew Lammie.

“The first time my love and I met
Was in the woods o’ Fyvie
He called me mistress, I said no
I was Tifty’s bonnie Annie.”

Her faither cam tae hear o’ this
And a letter wrote to Fyvie
To say his dochter was bewitched
By the trumpeter o’ Fyvie.

Lord Fyvie, he came tae the mill
Sayin’, “What ails ye, bonnie Annie?”
“Oh it’s a’ for love that I’m cast doon
For the love o’ Andrew Lammie.”

“Oh Tifty, Tifty, gie consent
And let yer dochter marry.”
“Na, it’ll be tae ane o’ a higher degree
Than the servant Andrew Lammie.”

“If she’d been born o’ as rich a kin
As she is rich in beauty
I wad hae ta’en the lass myself
And made her my ain lady.”

“Oh Fyvie’s lands are far and wide
And they are wondrous bonnie.
But I wadna trade my ain dear love
No for a’ your lands o’ Fyvie.”

At this her faither did her scorn
And likewise did her mither.
Her sisters they did her disown
Oh but wae’s me for her brither.

Her brither struck her wondrous o’er
Wi’ cruel blows and mony.
He’s broke her back on the temple stane
A’ for likin’ Andrew Lammie.

“Oh faither, mither, sisters a’
Why sae cruel tae yer Annie?
My heart was broken first by love
Noo my brither’s broke my body.

Oh mither, mither, mak my bed
And turn my head to Fyvie.
For it's there I'll lie and there I'll die
For the servant Andrew Lammie.”

Before singing “Tifty’s Annie” (Child ballad 233) to me, Stanley told me of how he was taking a tour of visiting leaders of the Mormon Church in America to the actual location of this ballad. (He mentioned to me that he was a high priest in the Mormon faith.)

While at the site in the evening, his group heard the sound of a trumpet. Stanley, who had seen on several occasions the ghost of the dead girl from the ballad in this location, said the sound was made by the ghost of the trumpeter in this song. The story behind the ballad is believed to be real, and for Stanley the ghosts and trumpet sounds were real and could be heard frequently at the site, as happened when he took his visiting religious dignitaries to Fyvie. What made this ballad even more memorable was Stanley’s telling of the story of the ballad, complete within itself, then he sang a version of this song, showcasing how a good ballad was just as easily a good story.

Many Traveller tales mention supernatural creatures, such as fairies, brownies or broonies, silkies, kelpies, witches, and ghosts. Some of these stories are also found within oral traditions of non-Travellers. Many are distinctly of Traveller origin and have long been a part of their oral tradition. As Duncan Williamson states in the introduction to his book *The Broonie, Silkies and Fairies*, “All my stories I’ve told you these past years belong to dead people—they’re all gone. And that’s why I want to tell them to you and to the world, because some day I’m not going to be around and I want people to remember and enjoy the stories that were passed down from generations of people, from the West Coast to Aberdeenshire, through Angus to Perthshire, down into Ayrshire, around the Borders, and all over—these beautiful stories that were not written down but

were traditional” (Williamson 1987, ix). Duncan has numerous volumes of Traveller stories in publication, dozens of which, including those in the book just mentioned, contain stories with otherworldly happenings.

These creatures were connected to general locations often encountered by Travellers on their journeys. Witches were connected to old houses or structures in wooded areas, the devil was associated with a crossroad, and kelpies were water demons often appearing as a horse or human near a waterfall. Brownies were associated with old buildings, and fairies with hills or rings of flowers.²² Three of the more frequent supernatural creatures to appear are fairies, brownies, and silkies (seal people).

Fairies were associated with nature, spring and summer, and music. In Traveller oral culture, fairies would sleep under small hills in the fall and winter, only to appear in spring to help Mother Nature with new growth and then to play and have ceilidhs (musical gatherings) in the summer. Fairies were thought to disguise themselves as plants or small animals or butterflies; Travellers would avoid harming these things that could be a fairy in disguise to avoid bad luck, even avoiding camping in locations associated with fairies to avoid disturbing them. Fairies were thought to trade fairy babies that had mental or physical developmental problems with healthy Traveller babies. In many written sources and during one of my interviews, I became aware that Travellers would look upon Traveller children with mental developmental issues as special children to be cherished, as gifts from the supernatural world. Fairies were also believed to be very musical, often gifting Traveller musicians with a specific song or tune, usually through a

²² I was raised in Henry County in southern Virginia near an area called Fairystone, known for unusual rock formations the Cherokee said were made by the tears of a Cherokee maiden. Settlers to the area believed fairies made the stones. Rings of flowers growing in the wild were called fairy rings, similar to the rings and hills in the Traveller tradition. Fairies are revisited again in Chapter Five.

dream. As Duncan Williamson states, "...with the Travellers, they are deep in belief with the fairies. There's plenty of folk believe they have heard 'a fairy tune,' music played on the fairy pipes or the fairy fiddle. And if anybody is a good piper, the Travellers say he can 'play like a fairy,' meaning he plays the right notes in the right manner" (Williamson 1987, xvi). In the next chapter I examine in depth a belief mentioned by Stanley Robertson on how these supernatural creatures create the best ballad singers.

Brownies were strong creatures that could take any form. They often would appear as an old beggar or tramp asking for food or shelter, to test the kindness of mortals. In many ways these creatures could be seen as a counterpart to Travellers, some of whom traditionally would beg or sell homemade items door-to-door. Stories and songs about brownies would emphasize moral lessons as opposed to specific plots. As Duncan Williamson states, "All these stories are a matter of teaching, to show what can happen to you if you are evil and bad, or good and kind" (Williamson 1987, x).

Silkies were the most frequently referenced supernatural creature in my research sources. Silkies were also known as the seal people, or seals that could take the form of a human and interact with humans on shore; often the human would join the seal community, changing into a silkie and disappearing into the ocean's waves never to be seen again. Both Duncan Williamson and Stanley Robertson published numerous stories concerning silkies. Interestingly, of the four Travellers I focus on, these two both grew up and lived the closest to the ocean, encountering seals almost on a daily basis. Duncan Williamson describes the Travellers' historical and musical connection with seals,

The Travellers were very attached to seals. In the past, privileged camping for many was on the shoresides, which were good to nobody else.

A large part of many Travellers' lives was spent camped right on the beaches. Here they were out of the way....And Travellers enjoyed the seals, their company. When they played their pipes and sang their songs, made music round the campfires, the seals used to gather out and listen....Seals are very fond of music, any kind. Even if you whistle they will come right up to you. That's what attracted Travelling folk to seals in the first place. (Williamson 1987, xiv)

Duncan also wrote of his own father's interactions with seals, "My father used to take the bagpipes, walk along the shore, and play tunes to the seals. And the thing was—they loved it! Their heads would pop out of the water and they'd sit up straight. It was the greatest thing in the world to see fifteen to twenty seals gathered, all listening..."

(Williamson 1987, xiv). As with many Travellers, Duncan's father also had a strong belief in silkies, or the seal people:

He [Duncan's father] believed the seals would come at night and throw stones at you if you were bad to them during the day. I remember him telling me the seals or the silkies will never do you any harm, not unless you are bad to them. Then they set out to teach you a lesson. If you are good to them, then all good things happen, you get what you want. Silkies are only out to protect their own families, the same as Travellers. And Travellers have no fear of being taken away with the silkies: they think by going with the silkie and joining in the seal-folk's world they will have a better way of life. And they look forward to it. (Williamson 1987, xv)

Jess Smith, one of the Travellers I interviewed, remembers being told a story about a kelpie as a young child. The following story, "The Kelpie," was the same story told to her as a child by her parents,

There was this beautiful girl and she lived in the countryside, and one night when she had been visiting with an aunt she'd left it a bit late. The sun had gone down and the moon was rising in the sky. There was a slight wind coming and she could hear the rustling of the trees as she rushed by the wood. She pulled her shawl up around her shoulders, and she looked here and there and her eyes darted into the dark shadows all around her. She was terrified, she was vulnerable, she was alone.

As she passed the little locheen²³ she heard a sound. She didn't want to look around. She didn't want to stop. She wanted to keep going for away down at the end of the hill, at the bottom of the hill, was her father and mother's cottage, and she knew by the light coming out from the window and the lantern that was being swayed back and forward that there was her safety. There was her father waiting on her.

She ran past the locheen and all of a sudden she heard this great wishhh...of water, and she turned round and there he stood...The Water Kelpie,²⁴ the Demon himself. She didn't want to look at his eyes for she knew the minute that she caught his gaze that he would entrap her and keep her forever.

But as she ran, she stumbled over a stone, and as she did so she looked up like that and her eyes caught the gaze of the Demon, and he smiled at her, and then he was gone. Then as she ran and ran, she stumbled and she fell and she skint²⁵ her knees and her elbows, she ran into the arms of her father and he said: "What's wrong?"

"The kelpie Father, he's seen me. He's put his eye on me. The evil eye of the kelpie of the water horse has been put on me. I'm cursed." "No, no," he said, "I'll send you away. I'll send you away down to Leeds. Your aunt lives there, your mother's sister. She'll look after you. She'll care for you."

So she was packed up and she was rushed away from there. They didn't have cars in those days. It was horse and cart, and it took a long time, but she got there, and whilst she was there she lived there, she was happy there, she met a young duke, quite a highly royal man, and he said to her on day, "You are very beautiful and I thin, I think I would like to marry you."

She was very very...so she says, "Oh no, no I'm only visiting Leeds." "No," he says, "I think you should stay here with me, marry me." So she said, "Ok I will, I'll marry you, and I'll live here in Leeds in your lovely house, but I've got to go home to Galloway to get married in the church where I was christened. That's our way."

So the wedding day was all set, and the church was decked with flowers, and she walked up the aisle with her handsome husband, and they both looked so happy, and just before the minister said, "I pronounce you man and wife," the doors opened by themselves. The church doors flew open,

²³ small lake

²⁴ water demon

²⁵ skinned

and standing there was the kelpie horse with the demon on its back. He trotted up.

The people looked terrified, pulling their shawls over their eyes not to find his gaze, and he walked up and he pushed her husband aside. He picked up his cursed bride and she could do nothing about it, and he took her away and he put her in the water, where for ever more her soul would be trapped, and she would look from the water. (*Open Roads* 2006, 28-29)

The story was told as a warning not to walk too far from camp at night, especially near water. As Jess states, “these stories were told to Traveller children to keep them safe, make them aware of darkness where danger lurked” (Ibid, 29).

These various supernatural creatures were often part of stories or songs shared over campfires, in published stories, or at public events by Travellers. The Travellers I interacted with, to varying degrees, all believed in the supernatural world and both its interaction with and influence over humans. They were also a metaphor for the Travellers and a basis for communal identity. As Duncan Williamson states,

The Broonies, the silkies, and the fairies are the same to the Travellers, for they have their strong beliefs in them all: they’re part of an Other World for Travellers that they love. Because the people of this Other World have freedom, have the power, they are immune from persecution by the local public and can’t be disturbed. People of the Other World are part of nature—same as the Travelling folk. (Williamson 1987, xix)

These stories and beliefs are part of a great communal identity among Travellers. As Bhopal and Myers write, “[Traveller] understandings of community are very strong—individuals, family groups and community groups are bound very closely together by various obligations and responsibilities” (Bhopal 2008, 114). The performance of stories and ballads, both of which exhibit elements of the shared belief system of Travellers, aid in this strong feeling of community.

Bhopal and Myers, concerning Traveller survival within the larger boundaries of an often hostile settled community, write “[Traveller] communities exhibit a fluidity that does not place itself easily within the idea of community as a feature of the nation state. Such fluidity is a strength that binds individuals, families and wider networks together in the face of hostility and within a context in which the response to such hostility may involve movement, dispersal or the concealment of identity” (Bhopal 2008, 114). This need for movement and concealment challenges the continued existence of a group’s identity, but the shared beliefs and literary culture of the Travellers help in its survival. As Bohlman writes, “The music of the Travellers represents the zones of displacement through the performance of mobility, making the margins dynamic and fluid, and ideally safe in a climate where the specter of violence is never far behind” (2004, 270).

The Influence of Folksong Collectors

As mentioned previously, Scottish and Irish Travellers with noted singing abilities became known to the world, beginning in the 1950s, through the intervention of folklorists such as Alan Lomax and Hamish Henderson. These Travellers quickly became known as notable repositories of Child ballads. The ballads Francis J. Child collected were expanded upon by the work of Bertrand Harris Bronson and others, such as Gavin Greig. In making the ballads in their collections known to a wide audience, the Travellers, as the purported repository of the ‘best versions’ of these ballads, quickly became musical targets for many folklorists searching for additional songs.

Alan Lomax “arrived in England in October 1950 with a new Magnecord portable tape recorder—his calling card for the next several years—and a contract with Columbia

Records to produce a series of long-playing record albums of the world's vernacular music" (*Songs of Seduction* 2000, liner notes). While based in London Lomax forayed into the countryside of many areas of Europe, including Scotland and Ireland where he recorded several Travellers and their song repertoires. In addition to making recordings, Lomax also published works on his encounters, and introduced singers he "discovered" to a wider audience through producing concerts and creating BBC radio broadcasts. His work also inspired others to follow him:

...a stellar group of young folk revivalists and field workers who, like him, saw their work as part of a crusade on behalf of a fast-disappearing folk culture. They included Peter Kennedy and Seamus Ennis, who were hired as staff field recorders by the BBC at Lomax's urging; singer, songwriter, actor, and playwright Ewan MacColl; Scottish folklorists and poet Hamish Henderson; English singer and scholar A. L. Lloyd; and singers Peggy Seeger, Shirley Collins, and Isla Cameron. Together they inspired a folk revival that continues to this day. ...Traditional singers such as the Copper Family, Harry Cox, Jeannie Robertson, Jimmy MacBeath, John Strachan, Margaret Barry, Flora McNeill, and others were given national and international exposure and were thus able to reach across cultural, generational, and class barriers to audiences hungry for all that these heirs of the bards and minstrels could teach them. (*Songs of Seduction* 1961, liner notes).

One of the first Travellers to become a star under this folksong-collecting spree was the aunt of Stanley Robertson, Jeannie Robertson. Hershel Gower, a ballad scholar from Tennessee, states, "If only Francis James Child could have heard this!" when speaking of Jeannie Robertson's musical abilities (*Muckle Songs* 1992, liner notes). She was from Aberdeenshire, Scotland, where Hamish Henderson states "as, indeed, are the majority of our best and most prolific informants" (Ibid). In most cases it may be hard to ever prove how much of a singer's repertoire was influenced by his or her interaction with a folklorist. In the same liner notes as mentioned above, Hamish Henderson also

notes how the “first traditional singer to record his entire repertoire for the School [of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh] was Willie Mathieson” who “was quite capable of discoursing knowledgeably about different ‘weys’ of a ballad, and he would often quote ‘what Gavin thocht about it’” (Ibid). As folklorists had increasingly greater contact with rural singers, they would often influence these singers with what were “worthwhile” or highly sought-after songs, methods of singing, and preferred lineages for the songs. They would also, through creating recordings and arranging public performances, influence how Travellers songs were heard and how they, as a communal group, were viewed by the settled community.

Folklorist Robert Graves, in a letter to Peter Kennedy and Alan Lomax in 1960, wrote of how early folklorists of the nineteenth century would change the songs they collected, “The folksongs they harvested, and too often bowdlerized, lost most of their poignant magic when regularized in drawing room ballads with piano settings. Here nothing is lost or falsified” (*Songs of Seduction* 2000, liner notes). When Graves states “here” he means that the songs being recorded by himself and other folklorists in the mid-twentieth century were keeping true and accurate accounts of what they heard and presenting this to the public. His naïveté is apparent when one looks at what was actually happening with what he and his counterparts were doing.

When folklorists were making records to sell of folk songs, they were limited by the material they were using for their LPs. Long ballads, such as some of the Child ballads, consisted of numerous verses. To include a variety of songs on a recording, some ballads had verses removed to fit on the record. These records then were released and influenced other singers during folk song revivals in the United Kingdom, the United

States, and elsewhere. These records and their shortened versions of ballads became a standard way of performing the songs for some singers. Some folklorists also inserted themselves into the fame of their informants. Peter Kennedy recorded folklorist Hamish Henderson singing “The Overgate” with Belle Stewart on the album *Songs of Seduction*.

As Peter Kennedy states in the liner notes to the album *Songs of Seduction*, “Some [singers] have even moved into performing at clubs and concerts around the country while others have reaped greater financial rewards in the entertainment business” (2000). Among these singers were Travellers such as Jeannie Robertson and Belle Stewart, the mother of Sheila Stewart. These opportunities provided by the folklorists to perform for financial gain was a change from what had been for years a difficult subsistence. In order to keep this financial gain, often they were influenced by these same folklorists in how to sing a ballad, what to emphasize about their background in interviews, and what verses to be sure to include in the performance of a ballad.

The folklorists who collected ballads in Scotland beginning in the 1950s had their own agendas, in addition to helping the Travellers they would record. Folksinger Ewan MacColl, in a letter to Hamish Henderson in 1951, wrote of his knowledge of Alan Lomax coming to Scotland to record singers. MacColl writes, “He [Lomax] is not interested in trained singers or refined versions of the folksongs. He wants to record traditional-style singers doing ballads, work songs, political satires etc.... You know the kind of thing he wants... This is important, Hamish. It is vital that Scotland is well represented in this collection. It would be fatal if the ‘folksy’ boys were to cash in” (Henderson 1996, 46-47).

Researchers do have agendas; in this case, however, this initial desire to find rustic singers then affected what concert promoters sought in Travellers—singers who looked rustic, sang rustic, and spoke rustic. Jeannie Robertson, Stanley Robertson’s aunt, wrote in a letter in 1961 to Hamish Henderson, “I wonder if you could send me a copy of the tape so that I could get the right tunes and words, you know I would not let anyone hear them. I mean the tape” (Henderson 1996, 110). Jeannie is speaking of a recording Hamish had that contained songs ideal to be used for a public performance. In my interview with Sheila Stewart, she stated, “We [Travellers] were accepted when the folk music scene came on. Hamish Henderson accepted us as Travellers, and he didn’t want us to change” (Stewart interview, 2006). In my interview with Stanley Robertson, he also spoke of Hamish Henderson’s influence when speaking of the history behind the song “MacPherson’s Rant.” Stanley said, “The laws against gypsies were still enforced then, and MacPherson died. And I know that because Hamish Henderson told me that. And Hamish said it were so I believed it was so” (Robertson interview, 2004).

It was not just individual songs, however, that were influenced by folksong collectors. Sometimes entire repertoires were changed. Britta Sweers writes,

Scottish Traveller Jeannie Robertson, for instance, ‘had picked up a few Harry Lauder songs, a half-dozen music-hall pieces, and a handful of cowboy or ‘sentimental’ ballads of American origin, mainly from gramophone recordings’ in her earlier years, as her biographers Porter and Gower (1995:77) observed. After she became renowned as a traditional singer, however, this part of her repertoire (which was about 10 percent, Porter and Gower estimates) was no longer evident after 1953. (Sweers 2005, 51)

Travellers were encouraged to portray a stereotype in performance, which affected how others saw them and in turn how they saw themselves, altering their identity.

Travellers' communal identities were also being affected. MacColl and Seeger write about jealousies created within Traveller communities brought on by folklorists' recordings. In their book on the Stewart family of Blair they write about how the sisters Rena and Sheila had said they only sang originally for their own families and never for audiences, "We didnae learn the songs to entertain other people. We never sung them to an audience...it was just in the family or other family that came in. We didn't learn them for any gain or anything. We learned them because we loved them" (MacColl 1977, 33). Yet MacColl and Seeger write how the recordings done by folklorists created rifts within Traveller communities,

One cannot avoid the suspicion that the editors of this book, and folklorists, collectors and journalists in general, are—to some extent at any rate—responsible for the alienation of individual Travellers from their communities. We have entered into the orbit of their family groups, bringing with us concepts, values and attitudes which have forced them to regard themselves in a new light. They have discovered that their songs and stories are held in high esteem by scholars and that, occasionally, even the mass entertainment industry is prepared to view them as viable commodities. (MacColl 1977, 33)

Jess Smith also encountered difficulty with the publication of her four-volume autobiography. Her six sisters had begun to lead settled lifestyles and no longer wanted to be known as having been part of the Traveller community. They were of course mentioned in Jess's works; angered by this they all disowned her and no longer communicate with her, with the recent exception of one sister. Becoming well known through either one's own efforts or that of folksong collectors often had detrimental effects upon cohesive Traveller communal identities.

Many Traveller musicians being recorded during this time quickly became aware of a hegemonic relationship with folklorists. Following along with the stereotype view

enabled them to be booked for more performances, and therefore earn more money, but they were also aware of when they were being taken advantage of. Jeannie Robertson was known to be very verbal when she felt she was being treated unfairly. In a letter to Hamish Henderson, Jeannie complains of an earlier encounter with Doctor Macmachon, a folksong collector. He asked her to cancel a return train ride to Scotland in order to record songs from her, leading her to believe he could help her with a record deal. When he reneged on this, she wrote to Hamish Henderson, “I thought Doctor Macmachon could do bigger things for me, as I know he is able to do, that sort of thing. I would be very disappointed if I did not get that chance” (Henderson 1996, 73). Perhaps more telling is a letter she wrote to Henderson complaining about a gentleman who had wanted to sign her to an exclusive contract but kept changing the terms to her detriment, “I knew it was only a pack of lies that they were telling all along—and then he started running down my LP record in the U.S.A. and that was why I would not sing for him. I told him why the hell did he know about my record in the U.S.A. Believe Hamish I know he is selling plenty of my records he has plenty of outputs for them. I know a lot more than they think, I am no fool” (Henderson 1996, 77). The power of the folk song collectors, however, often won the argument. They not only managed to influence how the singers would sing and what repertoire they would continue to use, but collectors also had the power to pick who would make it out of obscurity and become famous for their skills. These folksong collectors’ choices of singers to record would become influential on the Western view of traditional singing.

Stories as Songs, Songs as Stories

For Travellers, ballads are just stories that are sung. These ballads are part of the oral culture of the Travellers that encompass their beliefs, history, and even language.

These enable a sense of communal identity:

People are born into communities but they belong because of the stories with which they want to be part of....A community, like a language, grows out of human interaction and an open public life that will eventually encourage group identity. The foundation of community life is dialogue, the willingness of persons to talk and to listen to each other, the expression of mutual concerns, and a debate on differences of opinion and, above all, the stories persons tell each other that give a sense of belonging and therefore of having vested interest in the life of the community.
(Blayer 2002, 9)

Traveller communities have maintained a cohesive existence through tales and songs. As the philosopher David Carr states, “A community exists when a narrative account exists of a ‘we’ which has continuous existence through its experiences and activities” (Carr 1986, 163).

Travellers and the settled community may share some songs and stories, but there is a repertoire of ballads and stories that are noted as definitely belonging to the Traveller tradition. As Alan J. Bruford writes in the liner notes to the CD “Scottish Traditional Tales,”

Only within the past few years, since these recordings were first planned, has renewed collection, notably the sustained fieldwork of a researcher²⁶ permanently living under canvas as a traveller, begun to show just what a wealth of both international folktales and legends very different from those of the settled landward folk is still remembered among travellers.
(*Scottish Traditional Tales* 2000, liner notes)

²⁶ This researcher is Linda Williamson, an American graduate student who conducted fieldwork in Scotland for her dissertation on Travellers. She met Duncan Williamson and married him, subsequently helping to publish numerous volumes of his stories.

Even those shared among the communities and not of Traveller origin, some songs and stories take on a new meaning when used in a way that helps provide a communal Traveller identity. Timothy Rice, in his article on remodeling ethnomusicology, describes music as being historically constructed, socially maintained, and individually applied (Rice 1987). Music and stories, therefore, can be influential in the transmission of culture and identity. An example of this would be Jack tales.

One of the most memorable recorded interviews I heard during my field research was of the Traveller Duncan Williamson. He explained why Jack tales, or stories involving a character named Jack, are so popular among the Travelling people. Following is a portion of his discussion of these tales and their connection to Travellers,

We have a great tradition in old Scotland today. Jack stories. Who was Jack? Many people ask the question, ‘Who was Jack?’ Well Jack, actually, is a part of us all. There is a Jack in everybody. And if some night you cannot sleep, and you want to think yourself to sleep, which is a good idea, think how many Jacks you can actually find. And you’ll go on and you’ll be sound asleep before you realize how many you have. And just to start with, you’ve got your steeplejack, bootjack, Jack Frost, carjack, jack knife, ... you can go on and on forever.... Why Jack? And among my culture, among my Travelling people, it was a famous name. My father was a Jack, my brother was a Jack, my grandfather was a Jack. And I didn’t know why. And most of these Jack tales were told around the campfires of my people. And the little children would sit around... And these stories were not for only entertainment; these stories were teaching. And you learnt many things from these stories. Because you knew as you grew up to become a young person that you wouldn’t always be with your parents, and you would have your problems along the way. And these stories of Jack would run into the thousands. Later, in the life of Jack— sometimes he was lazy, sometimes he was clever, sometimes he was poor, sometimes he had three brothers... never very much mention of his father. And of course he was always with his mother, and she did everything for him. Sometimes he was a drunkard. All these wonderful stories, but the main idea of the whole story was just a plot. And no matter what the plot was, Jack would always get through that story. He would always end up; the story would finish and Jack would always come out the winner. So to be a winner, you had to listen to the tale and when you had a problem you fell back to a Jack story. (*Travellers’ Tales* 2005)

Stories such as this were important to the Traveller people, and would be used to enculturate each successive generation of Traveller children into ways to deal with the difficulties of their lives. Even as adults, these stories were often retold in the homes and would provide a continual basis for a group identity through these shared memories and shared works. Jack stories, obviously, do not just exist within the Traveller communities, but for them these works have extra meaning. They provide a character that is very relatable, one who undergoes hardships yet always seems to find a happy ending. These stories provided a sense of belonging to the community, a shared identity, even through showing their exclusion from a wider society.

Language use in stories and ballads also further shows a cultural identity. As Bohlman states,

Nationless peoples hold on to their languages with extreme tenacity. They take pains to retain it as a vernacular, keeping it alive in oral tradition. They foster literary practices and forms of print culture that formalize it through inscription, keeping it alive in written tradition. And they sing it. They sing old songs, and they compose new songs.... In the culture of displacement, song anchors language to the places remembered and monumentalized in the music of nationless people. (Bohlman 2004, 224)

Two examples that show this continuation of language and the use of remembered places are “The Gaberlunzie Man” and “The Berryfields of Blair.” “The Gaberlunzie Man” is just one example of a Traveller song interspersed with Cant words, Cant often being called the “secret language” of the Travellers. This version was sung by Sheila Stewart’s mother, Belle:

“O, a sprachin’²⁷ gadgie²⁸ bung owre yon lea,
Sprachin’ a skipper²⁹ for charity;

²⁷ begging

²⁸ man--often referring to a settled individual, not a Traveller

²⁹ sleeping place

Sprachin' a skipper for charity,
Wad ye pad³⁰ a sprachin' gadgie?

O, there's she's comin' oot owre yon lea,
Wi' a black patch on her e'e;
A baby on her back and anither in her lap
And a third yin comin' hame." (MacColl 1977, 187)

Songs such as these, ones that use Cant words, were sung at the campfire or at gatherings of Travellers. These songs were ways to preserve a language. Other songs such as "The Berryfields of Blair" did not necessarily use Cant words, but would contain words using a local dialect for a Traveller family, in this case the Scots dialect. The song "Berryfields of Blair" was written and sung originally by the Stewarts of Blair, of which Sheila Stewart was a member. They also owned the berryfield mentioned in this song. This song immortalized an annual summer gathering of Travellers and migrant workers in Blair, Scotland to pick raspberries. At this event, Travellers would sing songs in the fields during the day then have numerous ceilidhs in the evening. Many songs and stories would be shared, aiding in the continuance of a communal identity:

When berry-time comes roond each year, Blair's population's swellin',
There's every kind o' picker there and every kind o' dwellin';
There's tents and huts and caravans, there's bothies and there's bivvies,
Ay, and shelters made wi' tattie-bags and dugouts made wi' divvies.

There's Travellers fae the Western Isles, fae Arran, Mull and Skye,
Fae Harris, Lewis and Kyles o' Bute they come theirluck to try;
Fae Inverness and Aberdeen, fae Stornaway and Wick,
A' flock to Blair at the berry-time, the straws and rasps to pick.

Noo, there's corner-boys fae Glesca, kettle-boilers fae Lochee,
And miners fae the pits o' Fife, mill-workers fae Dundee;
And fisherfolk fae Peterheid, and tramps fae everywhere,
A' lookin' for a livin' aff the berryfields o' Blair.

Noo, there's some wha earn a pound or twa, some cannae earn their keep,
And some would pick fae morn to nicht, and some would rather sleep;

³⁰ lodge

There's some wha has to pick or starve and some wha dinnae care,
There's some wha bless and some wha curse the Berryfields o' Blair.

Noo, there's families pickin' for one purse and some wha pick alane,
And there's men wha share and share alike wi' wives that's no' their ain;
There's gladness and there's sadness tae, there's happy hairts and sair,
For there's comedy and tragedy played on the fields o' Blair.

But afore I've put my pen awa', it's this I would like to say;
You'll traivel far afore you'll meet a kinder lot than they;
For I've mixed wi' them in field and pub, and while I've breath to spare,
I'll bless the hand that led me to the berryfields o' Blair. (MacColl 298-9)

In examining identity, one has multiple levels to consider in its construction: an individual's identity, the group's identity, and the identity given a group by the Other. With Travellers I examined in this chapter these three levels of identity through an examination of their stories and ballads and how these have been used both within the Traveller community and been influenced by outsiders to affect the construction of Traveller identity. In the next chapter, I examine the musical characteristics and elements of specific ballads in relation to a Traveller identity.

CHAPTER FIVE: SONGS AND STORIES

*“Collecting tales in the Blairgowrie berryfields that year (1954) was like holding a tin can under Niagara.”*³¹ --Hamish Henderson, School for Scottish Studies

Following an exploration of Traveller history, ethnicity and identity, a deeper understanding of Traveller identity is possible through an examination of their music. In this final chapter, I first show how their repertoire has been linked to the ballad tradition of Appalachia, examining historical ties and the flow of ballad repertoires in both directions during the 1800s and 1900s. I then examine familial connections between Traveller families and show through a musical analysis the passing on of a musical tradition. I conclude with a study of specific musical styles of Travellers in terms of their performance styles in order to attempt to show how Traveller musical identity is distinct from other ballad singers.

A Shared Ballad Tradition: From Scotland to Appalachia

Since folklorists first began studying the ballads of the Appalachian Mountains, they have noticed a connection with the ballads of Britain, Scotland, and Ireland. As Maud Karpeles (1973), Cecil Sharp (1972, 1944), and James Francis Child (1965) have discussed in their major works, the ballads of all these geographic locations are related, both in melodic form and in lyrics. Though early folklorists, such as Child, had thought the ballad tradition was disappearing, communities in both Appalachia and Scotland eventually were discovered as having kept this ballad tradition not only alive but thriving.

³¹ Neat 2007, 340.

They shared this strong ballad tradition. In my interview with Stanley Robertson, he mentioned, “The song ‘Barbara Allen’—I know of over 1,000 verses for that song, and in America there are only about 100 known. And the song “Oxford Girl” is known in North America, maybe better known as “The Banks of the Ohio,” but there’s an older version among Travellers that goes back to the 1400s” (Robertson interview, 2004). What allowed these ballad traditions to survive in these areas?

In Scotland, the ballads often survived within the Traveller communities. Marginalized as a community, much like the people of Appalachia, they developed a strong musical tradition that kept ballads and tunes alive for centuries, many unknown to the non-Traveller population. Only in the 1950s, when folklorists such as Alan Lomax and Hamish Henderson began to study the Travellers, did the world discover the rich ballad and musical tradition of which some Travellers were the bearers.

The Appalachian region stretches from Pennsylvania to South Carolina, though many discussions (Abrahams and Foss 1968, Brocken 2003, Coffin 1977, McNeil 1988, Roof 1955, Sharp 1932) on the ballads of Appalachia are concerned with southwest Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and North Carolina. This area, in addition to being mountainous, has areas of rolling hills and fertile farmland. This same description can be applied to the regions of Scotland where one can find the Travellers with the strongest ballad tradition—Aberdeenshire in northeast Scotland and Perthshire on the southern edge of the Highland region.

Several factors would enable the Traveller communities and the people of Appalachia to continue the ballad tradition. Geographically, the people of Appalachia were often in areas of sparse population centers, or at least in areas not easily reached by

main traffic routes. Though they were by no means isolated from the “civilized” world, their remoteness did allow them to rely on each other for not only survival, but also entertainment. This entertainment involved the ballads and tunes that had passed on through their families for generations.

These people of Appalachia were the descendants of those who had settled the area as America was developing as a nation. Many of the earliest settlers along the Appalachian mountains were the Scots-Irish: “Many of the mountain folk in southwest Virginia are descendants of English, Scottish and Irish pioneers who came seeking better political, religious and economic conditions” (Shellans 1968, 4). The settlers brought with them a remarkably rich and strong musical tradition, one that continued to grow in the New World, while this same ballad tradition began to wane in England and Ireland. As William McCarthy writes in his essay “Single-Rhyme Ballads in the Child Corpus,” “The song tradition in Scotland and in Scotch-Irish parts of North America was stronger than in England and English parts of North America” (W. McCarthy 2003, 147).

There is, however, a possible direct historical tie with the early settlers of Appalachia and with the Travelling community. Mike Yates states in his work *Traveller's Joy*, “Later Gypsies who were caught in Scotland were usually transported to the colonies of Virginia, Jamaica, or Barbados” (Yates 1975, 8). By “later” Yates refers to at least a hundred-year period beginning in the mid-1600s when Travellers were frequently executed because of their ethnicity. Families of executed Travellers and others suspected of crimes were frequently shipped to newly established British colonies in the New World. At that time the colony of Virginia stretched across what would become the initial area of the United States, but many Travellers are suspected to have

settled in the regions now known as Georgia up to the southern region of Virginia (Dawson 2001).

In Robert Dawson's work *British Gypsy Slavery: The Caribbean and Americas*, he writes of Queen Anne's act of 1713 which states, "all persons pretending to be Gipsies or wandering in the habit or form of counterfeit Egyptians ore pretending to have skill in physiognomy, palmistry or like crafty science or pretending to tell fortunes' ...were to be taken as 'apprentices or servants' to Her Majesty's plantations or in any British factory beyond the seas'" (2001, 8). Those who tried to return home were executed. Dawson, through an analysis of historical records, suggests that as many as twelve thousand gypsies from the U.K. were transported to the U.S. and Caribbean during this period (27).

Jess Smith also told an interesting story of a Travellers' belief of how they were able to provide both crucial assistance to the founding of the United States and helped name a popular genre of American music. She states:

The language of the Travellers, the gypsy Travellers, who arrived during the early days of America was called "the rokk." The r-o-k-k in the old English Cant language, the secret language of the Travellers, meant "to talk." When they showed all the other settlers how to build these wagons...they [Travellers] were great horse people as well, cause if you remember when the first English and Scottish settlers went across they didn't know anything about horses, but the Travellers did. And they knew because they lived in these wagons and moved in and around the country. And it was their expertise that actually helped the early settlers to survive. And they built the wagons and they said you can live in this and move about. And as the wheels were going around, rolling around, and as the wheels were rolling, they were rokkering [talking]. And that's where the saying "rokk [rock] and roll" came from. That's where it originated from. People say rock and roll is from music, but the words come from the Travellers who first settled there. They were rokking and rolling. (Smith interview, 2007)

Through their physical location, the people of Appalachia were marginalized. The Travellers also existed in marginalized communities, but more through racist fears and ethnic bias than for pure geographical reasons. It is even possible that some Travellers settled in the Appalachian region, though further study is needed to definitively prove this. One song in the Appalachian ballad repertoire imparts the forced relocation of Travellers, “The Radical Gypsy David.” Herbert Shellans describes this song: “It is believed that this ballad originally recounted one of the exploits of Johnny Faa, who was sentenced to hang for refusing to leave the country when a Parliamentary act of 1609 ordered the expulsion of gypsies or ‘Egyptians’ from Scotland” (1968, 36). Because of their separate language (*Cant*), beliefs, and early nomadic lifestyles, they were marked as outcasts by settled communities. Therefore, they relied upon themselves for survival and entertainment, much like those settlers in the Appalachian region.

As Dawson states, though, in answer to where Traveller descendents in America are now to be found, “The short and honest answer is that no-one can be sure” (27). Possible clues remain, however, in some regions of Appalachia that point to a direct Traveller connection. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the region I am from in southern Virginia has historically had similar beliefs in fairies as the Travellers, but more pointedly is the remains of Cant words in some of the local dialect. When I interviewed Jess Smith in Perthshire in 2007 she told me several histories and stories related to her family. Among these were scattered Cant words, several of which I recognized as having been in use in my own extended family. Surnames associated with Travellers in Scotland are found readily throughout the southern Appalachian region, as well as similar versions of ballads sung by both Scotland’s Travellers and noted ballad singers in Appalachia.

The ballads of England and Scotland, and the same that are prevalent in Appalachia, often tell stories involving lords and ladies, hardships, and death. Why should these stories appeal to communities who are poor and have no direct connection with their own lives? Russell Ames in *The Story of American Folk Song* comments on this phenomena:

It has often been remarked that it is odd that the folk should sing so much about matters apart from their daily lives, and that American farm folk especially should care about lords and ladies with their castles, tapestries, swords, and steeds. This is not really so odd, however. The finest of the old ballads developed in the wild, poor country near the border of Scotland and England. There the common people were relatively close to the lords and ladies, who were not so much richer than they. The American farmers and frontiersmen lived a similarly rough and violent life and were at home with the stark tragedies described in the old songs. A feud on the Border was not so different from a feud in the Southern mountains. (Ames 1960, 21-22)

Though their cultures and communities were different, the conditions the Scottish people and the people of Appalachia lived under were similar.

Two of the best-known ballad singers of the twentieth century are perfect examples of this shared ballad tradition: Jean Ritchie from Viper, Kentucky and the Scottish Traveller Jeannie Robertson. Both singers' families were musical talented and considered music vitally important to their lives. The photo shows Jean Ritchie on the left and Jeannie Robertson on the right.³² In addition to singing as a means of entertainment, these people had songs to accompany nearly all of their activities, from sweeping to churning to working in the fields and, for the Robertsons, as a way to make money.

³²*The Cuckoo's Nest* liner notes



Figure 5-1: Jean Ritchie (on left) and Jeannie Robertson

PBS's online companion site to the 1995 film "Mountain Born: The Jean Ritchie Story" had described Jean Ritchie as "a traditional musician by virtue of her life and works, but she is also a commercial performer, author, recording artist, composer, and folk music collector."³³ She was born in the Appalachian region of Viper, Kentucky in 1922. Her family was very musical and had a wealth of songs in their repertoire, including hymns, ballads, and popular songs. As with the Travellers of Scotland, the performance of ballads was usually without accompaniment and learned orally within the community. In both communities, though, if songs were accompanied, it was by the dulcimer or the fiddle. Both Jean Ritchie and Jeannie Robertson also had no formal musical training as they grew up in their communities. Their musical education initially came from other family members (Ritchie *Field Trip* 2001, liner notes).

³³ This site has since been retired from <http://www.pbs.org/>, but the film, which includes an extensive biography of Jean Ritchie, is still available through various retailers. Information used for the PBS online guide can now be found at <http://www.ket.org/mountainborn/>.

Jean Ritchie and Jeannie Robertson actually met in the 1950s. In 1952 Jean Ritchie was awarded a Fulbright fellowship to study folk music in the British Isles. There, Jean again met Alan Lomax on one of his fieldwork expeditions and was introduced to Jeannie Robertson; Jean had originally met Lomax during her childhood when he was collecting folksongs in Kentucky (Dicaire 2010, 220). Jean and Jeannie developed a friendship and shared their ballad repertoires, many ballads of which were surprisingly similar. The Virginia Folklore Society noted over fifty Child ballads among its early fieldwork of southwest Virginia ballads (Davis 1969, xii). Some of these shared ballads are “Lord Randall,” “Twa Brothers,” “Barbara Allen,” “The Cuckoo,” “Lord Lovel,” and “The Gypsy Laddie” among others. H. Wiley Hitchcock writes of the survival of many Child ballads in America, “There is [a] large repertory of Anglo-Scottish-Irish “folk songs” that have come down to us. These were, of course, the “pop songs” of the day—a living music of everyday use by all” (1969, 29). Hitchcock continues by making a connection to the ballads in Britain, “About 100 of the 300-odd traditional British ballads, the “Child ballads,” ... have been traced (and are still sung) in this country—more than in living British tradition” (1969, 29).

The Child ballads Hitchcock mentions include those stated above, as well as “Little Musgrove,” “Jimmy Randall,” and “Foggy Dew,” among others. A comparison of Child ballads listed both in Cecil Sharp’s work (1966) on folksongs from the Appalachian region and the Virginia Folklore Society book (Davis 1969) of Virginia ballads also include, “The Elfin Knight,” “The Faust Knight upon the Road,” “The Cruel Mother,” “The Unquiet Grave,” “Mary Hamilton,” “The Jolly Beggar,” “Lady Alice,” “The Mermaid,” and “The Demon Lover.”

Jeannie Robertson, from Aberdeen, is well known throughout the Scottish Traveller community and the United Kingdom. She was the most notable Scots performer of ballads. Aberdeenshire in Scotland is especially rich in Traveller singers, being home to such musical Traveller families as the Robertsons, Stewarts, Hughes, and MacAllisters (Coughlan 2001, 20). As children, Jeannie and “her contemporaries were often told the story of a song before it was sung” (Porter and Gower 1995, xxxii). As mentioned in the last chapter, Jeannie was “discovered” by Hamish Henderson during the folksong revival in the U.K. in the early 1950s. Through his influence, Jeannie began to appear at festivals throughout Scotland and the U.K., and quickly became known to a much wider audience for her remarkable skill at singing. It was during this same period that Alan Lomax became acquainted with her and further promoted her to the world, most notably through television appearances and sound recordings. As stated earlier, it was through her friendship with Alan Lomax that Jeannie met Jean Ritchie.

As explained in Chapter Four, Travellers transmit songs and tunes orally from generation to generation, often leaving an indelible mark of a family’s particular rendition on a musical work. One can see this in the piping versions of standard Irish tunes of the Doran family in Ireland or in the ballad tunes of the Robertson family of Aberdeen, Scotland. These ballads provide more for the Travellers than a source of entertainment or income when sung for a paying audience. Stanley Robertson, the nephew of Jeannie Robertson, when speaking of the Travellers’ storytelling and ballad traditions, stated how he “was receiving not only amusement but also language, literature, and history through the ballads and stories of his folk” (Braid 2002, 96).

Whereas the Travellers in Ireland are best known for their instrumental prowess, the Travellers of Scotland are best known for their skill at singing ballads. Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger, when collecting ballads from Travellers throughout the British Isles, stated:

Our Scots texts were more complete, more coherent, more structurally sound than our English ones. The Scots singers were more articulate, had a fuller vocabulary than their English counterparts. (MacColl 1977, 23)

These stories and songs also conveyed “deeply held values and beliefs and pragmatic knowledge of how to survive in daily life” (Braid 2002, 96).

As stated before, the repertoire of ballads sung by both the people of Appalachia and the Travellers of Scotland have much in common. Over the past hundred years, many folklorists and ethnomusicologists have noted the shared existence of the same (or very similar) ballads in both Scotland and in Appalachia. The people of Appalachia often are described as having “saved” a ballad tradition vanishing elsewhere in America (Sharp 1966, Laws 1957, McDermitt 1986). Some scholars have also observed the same of the Travellers of Scotland (MacColl 1977, Seeger 1960, Okely 1996). Whereas most of the older ballads were no longer being sung in the United Kingdom, folklorists and collectors, such as Alan Lomax (1960) and Hamish Henderson (1992), discuss how these ballads were alive and thriving among the Travellers. Though separated by distance, these two marginalized communities share a remarkable musical heritage.

Familial Connections—Stanley and Jeannie Robertson

As mentioned in Chapter Three, music can allow for the enculturation of younger generations. As Marie McCarthy discusses in *Passing It On*, “Musical cultures are

created within particular communities whose members participate in and share a common musical practice” (1999, 23). Shared ballads and stories can help contribute to community formation as well as to the musical identity of a particular lineage of performers. One can see this in examining the connections in musical lineages.

This way of transmitting culture through songs and stories is prevalent in both the Traveller communities and in the communities of the Roma of Europe. Travellers, unlike some European Roma, usually blend in with the settled population of their local rural communities because of similar appearances—light hair, light-colored eyes, and fair complexions. Travellers also have a higher instance of interaction with the non-Traveller community than their Roma counterparts, including intermarriage. One of the singers discussed in this work, Stanley Robertson, for example, was married to a non-Traveller. Though both Stanley and his aunt Jeannie were raised in semi-nomadic families, they became settled Travellers after their respective marriages. Stanley Robertson is remarkably educated for a Traveller. Prior to his death, he was completing a doctorate degree at the University of Aberdeen while a fellow on a government-funded project to document the oral and cultural traditions of Scottish Travellers. It was from his aunt Jeannie that he learned most of his repertoire and his singing and performance style.

Many of the Child ballads have numerous versions extant. Traveller performers will often know several versions of a song, but within a strong familial relationship between singers, one will usually prevail. As Hamish Henderson writes,

In a really thriving ballad community, such as that of the Scottish Travellers, a singer will often hear different versions of the same ballad from quite a number of other singers, with sometimes striking variations in both text and tune; if he begins to sing one his growing version will as likely as not be ‘hit’ by one or more invading versions (not necessarily the ones he will eventually prefer), and this process can continue virtually for

his or her lifetime. However, in most cases (probably) the singer's version will gradually gel, until it becomes pretty fixed and stable, if not immutable; finally, he will be prepared to defend it, and claim hotly that it is the 'right' traditional version. (Henderson 1987, 25)

An examination of a specific ballad performed by two closely related Traveller singers may help show whether one version of a ballad becomes dominant within a family. For this I use Stanly Robertson and his aunt Jeannie's performances of the Child ballad "Son David."

Aberdeenshire, Jeannie Robertson's home region, is especially rich in Traveller singers, being also home to such musical Traveller families as the Stewarts, Hughes, and MacAllisters (Coughlan 2001, 20). As children, Jeannie and "her contemporaries were often told the story of a song before it was sung" (Porter and Gower 1995, xxxii). Her version of the song "Son David" that is used in this analysis was taken from an Alan Lomax recording.³⁴ Following Traveller musical traditions, Jeannie learned her tunes from her parents and other family members. Jeannie had learned this tune from her mother, "like most of her repertoire, she learned it from her mother under difficult circumstances during World War I, though she came to 'relearn' it later" (Porter and Gower 1995, 273). She in turn transmitted this musical knowledge to her daughter and to her nieces and nephews. Her most notable protégé was Stanley Robertson.

Stanley Robertson was a gifted singer, storyteller, and piper. The majority of his ballad repertoire was acquired directly from Jeannie. In learning Jeannie's ballads, he states,

If I was asking her for a ballad—asking her to teach me—she was very, very strict, very, very hard. "All right, laddie, I'll learn you this song, but I want you to sing it right, sing it proper, an' sing it real." If I did not sing it *exactly* as she told me, I was in trouble. She would say, "Noo, listen again

³⁴ *Jeannie Robertson: The Queen among the Heather*. Rounder Records. 1998.

an' listen careful." By the time she was through she'd put *you* through.
(Porter and Gower 1995, 87)

His style of singing the major ballads, or what Stanley termed the "big ballads" (Robertson 2004), is influenced by Jeannie's teaching. When performing a big ballad, Stanley stood, raised his arms by his side, inhaled deeply to "take in the ballad" from around him; he would remain still for several seconds then began the song (Robertson 2004). The version of Stanley's "Son David" used in this section is taken from an interview I had with him in Aberdeen, Scotland in April 2004. This initial interview lasted over two hours, with Stanley generously sharing numerous stories, songs, ballads, and beliefs held by the Travelling community. Stanley remained seated for the interview except when either I requested or he volunteered to perform a big ballad. For any other songs or stories he remained seated to perform them.

The song "Son David" is, as Stanley terms it, a big ballad. A big ballad refers to those songs in the Scottish Travellers' tradition that are dramatic, have a wide tonal range, and require great breath and vocal control to perform. Jeannie describes a big ballad as, "one that had to be sung in a grand or deliberate style" (Porter and Gower 1995, 281). Often a singer will perform "Son David" a song about fratricide, with a related ballad titled "Twa Brithers." Stanley considers "Twa Brithers" a preamble to "Son David" (Robertson 2004). The two brothers in "Son David" are David and John. During a wrestling match between the two brothers, a dirk from David's boot falls onto John, mortally wounding him. The song "Son David" concerns the elder brother David and how he eventually tells his mother of his brother John's death.

Jeannie made various recordings of "Son David," the song having been one of her most popular ones. The song, as sung by both Jeannie and Stanley, should be very

similar, especially when considering the earlier quote by Stanley concerning his aunt's teaching style. The two recordings used in the section, however, show variance in both text and melodic line. The transcriptions in the Appendix record the text and melodic line of each individual stanza of both song versions in order to show this variance.

Big ballads such as “Son David” often have little description, relying instead on dramatic dialogue. “Son David” is conveyed by only two characters, the son David and his mother. The ballad does not contain any third-person description; instead, it depends on the interaction between the two speakers to convey its dramatic content. The song contains no chorus or refrain, which is often used to emphasize a particular point or theme. Instead, it relies on repetition and parallelism to convey emphasis. For example, the word “blood” is repeated in all but two verses in Jeannie’s version, stressing the violence and death of the fratricide subject, a theme of the song.

Each verse also contains a phrase repeated by the person the speaker is conversing with, whether it be “my son David, ho, son David” or “hi, lady mother, ho, lady mother,” emphasizing the discourse between the two subjects and the direct dramatic dialogue that is occurring. As for the actual language of these two songs, both versions are sung in English, though one can find words drawn from a variety of dialects—Cant (Traveller language), Scots, Gaelic, Romani, Doric—in Scottish Traveller songs. The only non-English word in either discussed version is “owre,” a Traveller Cant word meaning “too” (Porter and Gower 1995, 325).

For each version of the song, melodic and lyrical phrases correspond to every two measures, with each stanza containing four phrases. Within each stanza, the initial melodic phrase is repeated following the address to the other speaker (David or the

mother). This structure occurs in every stanza in both Jeannie’s and Stanley’s versions. This repetition gives both versions a text structure of ABAC. This repetition leads to the song’s parallel structure lyrically, where the repetition occurs not only within each stanza, but also is reflected with every stanza of the song. Both versions also have an avoidance of strict rhyme, where only the same repeated word counts towards rhyme, such as “hound” and “hound.”

Each of these versions of the song is arranged lyrically into four-line stanzas, a tool that both enables the singer to better remember the words because of this repeating pattern, but also to lead the listener with its repetitive structure. The words in the lyric of both versions are, with few exceptions, monosyllabic. This adds to a feeling of somberness that can be further portrayed by the performer.

A musical analysis of Jeannie’s version of “Son David” reveals its modal qualities. The mode is mixolydian, with an avoidance of the fourth and seventh degrees of the scale. The notes of the song, as reflected in the transcription, are G-A-B-D-E, a pentatonic scale. The range of notes are from D above middle C, a fourth below the tonic, to D an octave higher, or a fifth above the tonic—a plagal range.

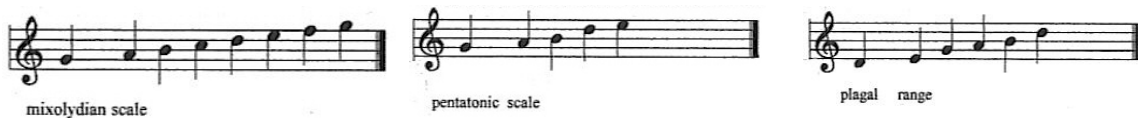


Figure 5-2: “Son David” scale/range

Jeannie performs the song in common time, with the appearance of a steady beat. She does, however, often play with the tempo by holding out the high notes at the middle of phrases, marked in my transcription with a fermata. And though a metronomic mark can be deduced from the recording, her singing of this version shows a freedom from strict adherence to a beat. She also gives an extra beat in one measure of her final stanza. I have notated this by adding a measure of 5/4 in the transcription.

Jeannie's performance of this version of "Son David" showcases a characteristic technique common to Traveller singers. Often, these performers of ballads will delay fixing the performance style (tempo, etc.) until the second or even third stanza of the song (MacColl 1977, 22). Jeannie's performance shows a slight hesitation and play with the tempo in stanza one, then gives in to a consistent performance through the following stanzas. Stanley's version does not show this tendency. Both singers perform the song in a similar style, though proof of this is more evident in Stanley's version where I was able to view a live performance. Both singers have a distinct, slightly nasal quality to their vocal tone. Though only assumed from Jeannie's recording, Stanley's performance was given with an open-throated, full-voiced, and direct delivery. His version also was performed at a slightly slower tempo than Jeannie's.

My recording of Stanley's version of "Son David" was taken from my interview with him at the University of Aberdeen in April 2004. During this session, Stanley willingly discussed the transmission of ballads among Travellers, his specific song acquisitions from his aunt Jeannie Robertson, as well as the background of the tunes that were recorded. Stanley's mother also performed this song, and provided him with an historical basis for the tune. She considered "Son David" to follow the song "Twa

Brothers,” a preamble to “Son David.” “Twa Brothers” gives the story of the fratricide event where David kills his brother John. Various versions of this tune give different reasons for the death of John, from an accident occurring from a wrestling match, to envy over inheritance rights (Bronson 1962, 58).

A musical analysis of Stanley’s version of “Son David” is fairly straightforward in revealing its modal qualities. The song is in the mixolydian mode, with an avoidance of the fourth and seventh scale degrees (C and F), and is again plagal. The melodic variation of the two versions occurs mainly in the final cadence of each stanza. Whereas Jeannie’s version goes from the bottom (dominant) of the plagal range to approach the tonic, Stanley’s version leaps to the B above tonic before resolving.

Both versions also share a mixed metrical rhythm in the final stanza. Measure four in the final stanza of both versions has an extra beat, notated by a time signature of $5/4$ in my transcription. This extra beat adds a delay in the expected rhythm of the song, given a somewhat dramatic effect to the performance of the last half of the final stanza. Both versions also begin each stanza with an anacrusis, or upbeat, while ending on the tonic. These similarities could show the direct transmission of the song from aunt to nephew.

Lyrically, the main variance between the two versions of “Son David” concerns the excuses David gives to his mother for the blood on his clothing. Simple variances exist in each version, such as the “brown steed” of Stanley’s version and the “gray mare” of Jeannie’s. Jeannie’s version of “Son David” recorded by Alan Lomax consists of eight verses. Jeannie’s version omits the verse concerning the hunting hawk that is contained in Stanley’s version, as well as the “ne’er ken” verse and the “bottomless boat” verse. In

the liner notes to the Lomax recording, Jeannie admits that there are verses missing from her version, “Two or three verses [are] missing” (J. Robertson, 14). In 1961, when she sang this song for a BBC broadcast while in London with Alan Lomax, a producer asked her to cut three verses because of time constraints, “I [Jeannie] cut the three verses which I knew would nae be missed, an’ I then sung it over, a matter o’ twice. An’ I had it--the six verses, ye know” (Porter and Gower 1995, 52). This event may be one of the reasons that these verses are missing from this recorded version, since this recording and the television broadcast occurred in close proximity to each other.

A comparison of the two versions of this song shows possible lyrical and melodic relations because of the direct transmission of the song between the two singers, Jeannie and her nephew Stanley. Musical analysis shows both song versions share the same modal qualities. Lyrically, the number of verses may vary, as well as minor word choices, though the appearance of one specific Cant word, “owre,” appears in both versions. The story told in the ballad, however, remains essentially the same. The performance style of both versions is also similar in that both singers performed their respective version with a slightly nasal quality and with an open-throated, full-bodied tone. Though recorded approximately forty years apart, both versions of “Son David” demonstrate a remarkable familial musical lineage.

Performing Identity: Traveller Musical Style

In this section, I examine how music reflects the cultural identity of the Scottish Travellers and explores how this identity is clearly portrayed in the elements of their music, particularly through transmission and performance. Music can reflect a

performer's identity, as shown by examining those performance elements which, in realizing the sound, display how selfhood is an intrinsically social, interactive, and mobile experience. Musical identity is portrayed in not just the lyrics of the ballads but also through how Travellers learn their repertoire and through performance practice. A close examination reveals how music and the elements of a musical performance reflect culture, place, and a community's traditions.

Is there a Traveller singing style? Researchers of Travellers could most likely hear a recording and recognize it as a Traveller performance, but noting specifically how one knew it was a Traveller, other than recognizing a specific individual, is difficult to ascertain. MacColl and Seeger, in their 1977 work on Traveller songs, included just a two-page section on this topic and came to no conclusion other than a brief discussion of respiratory health issues of some of their English Traveller informants. A close examination of what makes a Traveller singing style has yet to be done, but one can find some shared characteristics.

Three characteristics of Traveller style are most noticeable. The first is the use of the diaphragm to create a strong, forceful resonance to the voice. Regarding singing the big ballads, Stanley Robertson said, "I have to stand to sing these. You've got to have your lungs full of air and your diaphragm ready" (Robertson interview, 2004). Travellers are also known for a heavy, nasal timbre when singing. This nasal quality is not apparent in the speaking voices of those I interviewed, but became very apparent when they began to sing, especially with the Child ballads. They are also known for having a strong stage presence. Their ability to command both the stage and the attention of their audience was evident to me at every performance I attended. They were experts at conveying the

narrative elements of their songs, as well as giving detailed histories of the songs they sang. At those events where the stage was shared by both Travellers and non-Travellers, the Travellers without exception commandeered the concert. They were dramatic in their presentation in both singing style and body movements, and would often have the audience join them in sections of songs as sing-a-longs.

Jess Smith, Sheila Stewart, and Stanley Robertson were all experts of phrasing in ballads, giving emphasis and dramatic delay at crucial points in the big ballads. They also had strong rhythmic control over the beats in the songs, often playing with the rhythm and even punctuating specific points with an emphatic rhythmic delivery of syllables, much as one would hear in diddling or mouth music. This effect may have a direct correlation with their familiarity with piping music. Sheila's father was a piper and Stanley was a piper himself. Both were familiar with *canntaireachd*, or the singing of syllables that represent what one would play on the pipes. This very rhythmic singing style is apparent in some songs in both Sheila's and Stanley's repertoires.

One can find recurring general characteristics in each style of the four Travellers I focus on in this work. Of course, there are not only differences in singing style from singer to singer, but also within a specific singer's performance repertoire. In discussing storytelling, Stanley Robertson states, "In ... camping grounds the 'jack tales' became alive to the listener. There were castles, woods, hills, lochs, forests ruins, flowers, bushes, broom, herbs and animals. You could identify yourself as 'Jack' and the environment was a natural theatre of visual aid. Nature was all in all to [the Travellers]" (Robertson 1988, 119). The liminal context of the campfire creates a musical space for their performance of tunes and songs. Nature surrounds the camp, with the music of the

birds, trees, and water all adding to the musical landscape that surrounds the Traveller clans. Their alienation from the main population of Scotland, the non-Travellers, not only reinforces their own communal identity, but may also reinforce their attachment to nature. This alienation from the surrounding community, and the Travellers close connections with the environments they migrated through, is embodied in their musical performances. These songs and tunes provide the Travellers with a means to embody their surrounding nature and a means to perform their historical way of life.

In examining ballad traditions, Thomas McKean describes the performance process where, “a static, rhythmic accretion of words becomes a living song through the addition of melody, a dynamic of performance, and a personalized, internalized emotional expression” (McKean 2003, 5). Their interaction with and close ties to nature permeate not only the lyrics of their songs, but also the way they learn and perform these ballads. Perhaps Traveller identity, however, can best be shown in their performance practices. The ability to be a great singer or musician, though, is not dependent solely upon the talent of the individual. In my interview with Stanley Robertson, he states that a person may possess some talent, but to be truly gifted one must be chosen by a muse. He describes how his aunt, the noted singer Jeannie Robertson, said that to be gifted with song one had to have an encounter with a muse, “The muse crowns you with a wreath. You get a gift that can never be taken off you, and only then can you influence other people” (Robertson interview, 2004).

Similarly, becoming an extraordinary piper requires another brush with the supernatural, because having crooked fingers from birth symbolized the mark of a true piper:

Goin' back hundreds of years ... the clans looked at their newborn baby boys to see if they had the mark of great pipers. My father had the two mis-shaped crookit crannies, an' the mis-shapen second fingers as well...It's a rare gift o' God, you can put it like 'is. (Porter and Gower 1995, 34-35)

Among some Travellers, then, outstanding instrumentalists and singers were not created by their own desires, but by a supernatural force. Playing an instrument also influenced one's singing style. Stanley Robertson told me how his version of "MacPherson's Rant" "was not based on the popular ballad tune for the song, but rather the piping tune" that gave his version a more bouncing, rhythmic feel (Robertson interview, 2004).

I mentioned earlier how Stanley would stand to sing a big ballad. He learned this technique from Jeannie, who said you had to consume it to sing it. Stanley describes the proper way to prepare to sing a big ballad,

Breathe in your ballad. Let it fill your senses. Take it in as best you can. The ballads are in the trees and the air. Like all Travellers would say when you're lying in your camp at night, what is the wind saying to you? Listen to the wind and the trees rustling, or listening to the water cascading and playing wee tunes in the camp. You can hear all the nocturnal creatures and everyone plays a different tune. And if it all come together, that's real balladry and that's your music for the ballad. (Robertson interview, 2004)

Perhaps then, one cannot separate music, either tunes or songs, from an embodiment of one's environment and one's history. Traveller singer and author Sheila Stewart believes for one to sing well, to sing from the heart, one must have "the conyach." She describes the conyach as the feeling behind the words and music. The song comes from the heart and not the head; there must be a separation from the mind, as if singing to one's self unselfconsciously. In a workshop on the conyach that Sheila gave in Edinburgh in October 2006, she described the process whereby one can achieve this separation by being introduced to your soul. She first asked the attendees where the soul is located. She

then went through a process whereby the attendees tried to reach their own soul to free it with their voice. With Stanley and Sheila's examples, both nature and the soul become one and are mixed together in the creation of music for the Travellers. For them, neither the inward being nor the influence of the world can be ignored if one is to perform and to perform well.

Travellers are known for a distinctive performance style, one often setting them apart from other comparable folk performers. Though often placed on panels and in performances with other Travellers (most likely because of their shared ethnicity—'a Traveller panel'), they would also appear alongside non-Traveller performers. When I would see these mixed performances, without fail the audience would react most positively to the Traveller performer. Ballads and stories take on a life of their own when being performed by a Traveller. I often heard such similar comments being said by audience members at each of the Traveller performances I attended in Scotland. Each of the individuals I focus on—Duncan Williamson, Sheila Stewart, Stanley Robertson, and Jess Smith—have numerous shared elements in their performances, but with subtle differences that provide for an individuality of style.

Travellers have individual characteristics, of course, among their performance styles, but a general description of a shared Traveller performative ethos exists. Britta Sweers describes the Scottish Traveller style in comparison to Irish and English ones: "The Scottish Travellers, for example, tend to sing in a highly ornamented style and create a very intense sound that is the result of tight vocal cords. Irish singers not only have developed their own styles like the nasal sean-nos, but they also sing highly ornamented lines, yet less intensely than Scottish singers, with a less throaty voice.

English singing, in contrast, is less embellished than in the Gaelic areas, and the voice is often less intense and more closely related to the speaking voice” (Sweers 2005, 144).

Duncan Williamson was probably best known as a storyteller, though he had a healthy repertoire of songs, as well. His performance style matched his physicality. He was a large man, and his gestures and movements were large as well. According to folklorists I spoke with, he could also be aggressive, and this energy was evident in his voice and motions during a public performance. Folklorist Barbara McDermitt describes his style,

[we] sat hours on end spellbound as Duncan has taken us into his special world of wonder and magic. Each tale is told dramatically and vividly with an intensesness and directness that draws you in and holds you riveted until the tale’s end. Duncan’s verbal facility is edged with a razor sharp timing, and his large powerful hands punctuate his stories with strength and subtlety. He knows how to build suspense, bring out humour and release emotions both tragic and joyful. One cannot listen placidly to Duncan’s stories. (Williamson 1987, 28)

While in Scotland, I was also able to interview several folklorists who had worked with Traveller performers over several decades. Folklorist and singer Ewan McVicar said of Duncan:

[Duncan] likes neat stories. He likes polished stories. Duncan is distinguished because he has such a phenomenal knowledge, a memory of stories. He can hear a story and remember it almost exactly. And a sense of cultural confidence, ownership stuff again. But not owning, the story belongs to the Travellers. Duncan in song is a creator; in story a preserver. There is an eclecticism at one level [in his stories]. Duncan’s singing style is very inclusive, but he is from a different part of Scotland, from Argyllshire...horse trading and social interaction. Rather than going out and getting money and then going back to your tent. (McVicar 2007)

The same way performance styles in traditional music may vary from one region to another, the same can be said of Travellers depending on their location in Scotland. In Argyllshire, Travellers were more involved historically in horse trading, and needed to

have stronger connections to local settled individuals. This tended to make Travellers in these regions more gregarious, because their economic skills required it. Duncan hailed from this region and was known to not only make friends easily, but to also be able to pull an entire audience into his stories. On a light note, Ewan also told me of his first meeting with Duncan, “When I first met Duncan he got me in a headlock... Duncan makes me nervous...that bullet head comin’ at you” (McVicar 2007).

Stanley Robertson’s style had the same power of voice, but he came across as very thoughtful and serious to his audience. His repertoire did include humorous stories and songs, but he was best known for his personal histories and dramatic works. This reflects his training by his aunt Jeannie. Jeannie and Stanley shared exceptionally strong vocal control. Sweers writes,

A voice like Jeannie Robertson’s is based on a strong sound production similar in style to the American style presented by...Joan Baez. However, the aural impression of Robertson’s voice is much fuller, as she, like many other Travellers, predominantly used the chest voice, in which the vocal cords vibrate to their full extent. Because the Scottish singers are more in control of the physical side of sound production, including the muscles around the vocal cords and the diaphragm, the manipulation of vocal quality is an integral part of their musical interpretation. (Sweers 2005, 154)

This control is evident in the numerous recordings of both Jeannie and Stanley. As mentioned previously, they also shared a belief in breathing in the ballad in order to properly deliver it in performance. The use of air for a powerful voice, all under the auspices of a controlled delivery, was very characteristic of their musical styles. They were both also noted for careful phrasing in their ballads, bringing an additional level of meaning and emotion to their songs.

Stanley's repertoire was eclectic, but he was known as a performer with stories and songs containing a supernatural element. As Ewan McVicar states, "Stanley likes the eerie stuff; the eerier and spookier is what I think suits him best. I mean I could totally be proved wrong; my perception, Stanley is a life affirmer really at heart" (McVicar 2007).

Sheila Stewart is the heir to a family of established Traveller performers, and arguably the most noted living Scottish Traveller ballad singer. Sheila sings in a highly ornamented style and with an easily observable nasal quality to her voice. She appears to have the voice of a contralto, easily reaching the husky sounds needed when singing about a male character in songs. Like the other Travellers mentioned above, Sheila also used a chest voice for her singing. Ewan McVicar sees a strong contrast between Stanley Robertson's and Sheila's repertoire and performance styles:

Sheila Stewart likes the high drama and gore and death. Sheila has got blood in her eye to me, and Stanley doesn't. [Stanley is] gonna tell you stories with the warmth and the point, whereas Sheila, she is the tragedy of life. Neither of them tell funny stories very much; you get a few but they tend to be ribald, bawdy, bloody from Sheila. Stanley, probably, is generally reflective. These are just my thoughts. They might laugh in rueful recognition or in gentle appreciation, but not in that gut laughing way. But Sheila is much more high drama. The thing that distinguishes them both is again, we've talked about it a lot, confidence, separateness and identity and difference and being exemplars of a noble, rich tradition that has been highly oppressed. (McVicar 2007)

Sheila was the only one of the four Travellers I have focused on that seemingly always included a bawdy song in her public performances. On two different occasions I heard her tell one particularly humorous story about her father, once during a 2006 performance at the International Storytelling Festival in Edinburgh, Scotland and again later that week during a singing workshop she conducted. Her father, Alex Stewart, was a nine-year champion on pipes. He was hired to play for a formal dance for the

aristocracy. At one point, while on break, Alex was approached by a wealthy woman who asked him to dance. During the dance, Alex twirled the woman, who farted noisily. Sheila's father, being chivalrous, took the blame and apologized loudly to those nearby. At the end of the dance, the lady quietly thanked him and paid him five pounds. Alex told his family later, that it was the only time I was ever paid for farting (Stewart "The Conyach," 2006).

Sheila was also very open about her personal history and family events. She was the least reserved of those I focus on for this work. One reason was her earlier performing career: she travelled and performed as part of the Stewarts of Blair for years, and she was under the tight control of her mother, Belle Stewart. I participated in a singing workshop led by Sheila Stewart in Edinburgh in 2006. When asked about her performing with her mother in her youth she stated that her mother, Belle, would not let her speak while growing up, or speak out, and now that her mother has passed away, she is very open about speaking out and performing. Now that she has come into her own as a solo singer, she seems to be the least reticent of any of the currently performing Travellers.

During this singing workshop, Sheila also mentioned her way of approaching singing. She called it a search for the *conyach*, a comparison being *duende* in flamenco music. In order to explain it to those of us in attendance, she would use a sponge analogy. She said "When I do the conyach properly, I can feel the sponge in my fingers," which was full of the song and the emotion (Stewart "The Conyach," 2006). One squeezes the sponge and the song leaks out.

Jess Smith is possibly the least characteristic of the four Traveller performers I focus on. She did have singers and musicians in her family as a child, but not to the extent as the others, and certainly not stage performers as Stanley and Sheila did. Jess's work is more focused on her literary works and poetry. Her public performances will often be a combination of songs and poetry. She does, however, have an appealing singing voice and a clever way of phrasing lyrics that keeps an audience's attention. Her singing voice is more controlled than Sheila's, but she also has the same chest voice that all four of my subjects possess.

Unique to Jess Smith's performance style among these four Travellers, however, is her subtle use of gestures that represent elements of Traveller culture. I had seen Jess perform numerous times and only during my interview with her at her home in Perthshire in 2007 did her use of gestures become evident. For example, Jess had begun to tell me a Traveller tale from her youth that involved rokking, or communicating with individuals in the settled community, such as selling wares from door to door or palm reading. She interrupted her story to say that when palm reading, one can intensify the experience with a well-told tale (Smith interview, 2007). Instead of simply looking at a person's palm and stating what one "sees," you can create a story out of the details and ensnare the customer's attention much more effectively. Jess then resumed her tale yet continued to hold out her hand as if reading a palm, the fingers of one hand pressing at places on the palm of her other as each element of the tale unfolded. What I had assumed in previous performances of Jess's to be simple hand gestures in retrospect were motions used in palm reading.

Each of the performance styles of these four Travellers involves both blatant and subtle characteristics that relate to their culture. The interaction with the audience is important and shapes the performance of their identities at that particular time. I have seen Sheila Stewart exaggerate her bodily movements and intensity of voice depending on the audience and whether the event was billed as a “Traveller” event or a general storytelling/ballad event. Michelle Kisliuk’s concept of socioesthetics can be associated with the need to re-examine the role of audience and location. Kisliuk states,

The “aesthetic system” paradigm ... is compelling but limited because such approaches—which look for and interpret internally coherent attributes that make up a given cultural system and/or celebrate the expressive “genius” of a circumscribed “people”—tend to underestimate the particulars of time and place, the variability of social situations, the possibility of internal contradictions, and the immediate, multiplex consequences of power politics. (Kisliuk 2001, 12)

During interviews with both Jess Smith (Smith 2007) and Sheila Stewart (Stewart 2006), I was told of their worry over festivals including fewer and fewer organized Traveller panels. Being invited to perform and lecture was a significant part of their livelihoods. Having to give a performance that spoke to their unique culture was becoming an imperative. As mentioned previously, I have discussed the detrimental role some folksong collectors had on the portrayal and repertoires of particular Travellers. The current power structure of festival and event organizers may yet add another unwelcome change to Traveller performative culture.

Foretelling the Future

As Travellers have become more and more settled over the past few decades, the future of their musical culture is questioned, as the previous importance of the campfires

and travels is replaced by the TV and the immovable house. Of the Travellers I have spoken to recently, a few have children that are continuing the musical traditions in their family, but most have children who are not interested in the ballads and songs their parents and grandparents sang. Jess Smith—a Traveller author, singer and storyteller—began writing about her life and culture once her children became adults; “I’d be wakening up in the middle of the night. It seemed ghosts from the past were visiting me, telling me the culture was dying and I needed to write it down.” When I asked what she considered to be the future of Traveller music and culture, she responded:

My own personal gut feeling—there is none. It’s too modern a world. The gypsy Traveller will survive, but they’ll have to stop being who they are. They’ll have to be the norm. They’ll have to be accepted. They’ll have to be a part and parcel of what is allowed. No one is saying ‘You’re a gypsy; I’m gonna kill you’. They are saying ‘Go through the refining machine and come out the same as your neighbor or don’t come out at all. (Smith 2007)

Traveller singer Sheila Stewart frequently at public appearances states that she is “the last of the line” of the Stewarts of Blair to keep the tradition alive, that none of her children or grandchildren wish to follow in her steps and learn the songs and ballads she, her sister and parents were known for. She states, “I was raised on storytelling and ballad singing. My people didn’t want to let them die. I ...am the last to be keeping the tradition alive by going out and performing. I know that none of my kids will do it” (Smith 2007). The recently released biography of Traveller storyteller, piper and singer Willie McPhee was titled *The Last of the Tinsmiths: The Life of Willie McPhee*. Ironically, the “demise” of the Traveller culture has been forecast for years; in 1979 the School for Scottish Studies in Edinburgh held a conference on “Scotland’s Travelling People,” with a special

panel titled “Survival in the 80s.” Or perhaps this 28-year-old conference title was prophetic, considering the statements made by Jess Smith and Sheila Stewart.

As stated in Linda Williamson’s 1985 dissertation on Traveller performance, “The destiny of narrative song among the Travellers is the same as its destiny among other communities with a valuable oral tradition: Its life depends on performance” (138). Sheila Stewart states, “Storytelling and ballad singing are shared things” (Stewart interview, 2006). In this case, the Traveller’s musical and cultural tradition is alive and well, and being performed by important members of the community, both on stage, in recordings and through autobiographical works. The future of this remarkable and rich tradition remains uncertain as the tradition bearers age and pass away, but their works will have great affect on its being shared for years to come.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND FUTURE AREAS FOR RESEARCH

Traveller Origins and Ethnicity

In this dissertation, I have tried to show the ways in which the music of the Travellers has been shaped by both their ethnicity and their cultural identity. I have attempted to examine specific elements of their expressive culture, both in their music and oral literature, which exemplify the possibility of a Traveller musical identity. Through the information and analysis presented in the chapters of this work, I explored the ways in which Traveller ethnicity and identity have been formed through various factors and how they have influenced the role music plays in Traveller culture.

Understanding the role ethnicity plays in defining what is a ‘Traveller,’ and following this their musical identity, is vital. As part of a greater gypsy community, Travellers have argued for official recognition as a separate ethnic group in order to not only fight prejudice against them but also to define who they are. The role ethnicity plays in identity formation and recognition among a greater population is implicit for some groups but absent for others. For example, when speaking of friends, I may say, “She is Korean” or “He is a Traveller.” I would not likely be asked “What is a Korean?” but I frequently am asked “What is a Traveller?” In this instance, familiarity plays a role but in defining the term “Traveller,” then, a Traveller would need to go beyond a national identity construction in order to adequately represent their claim to being ‘ethnic.’ This connection with Travellers and ethnicity is not readily made in current scholarship. (By current here I mean within the past fifteen years.) Brian Belton is one of the few scholars who has attempted recently to provide a comprehensive work that deals with either

Traveller ethnicity identity (2004, 2005), yet his work does not discuss music or stories. My research has added to the scholarly discussion on Traveller ethnicity and applied it specifically to an examination of their music and storytelling tradition.

In addition to defining themselves by their ethnicity, Travellers' use of language in the creation of both an ethnic and musical identity is an area of important consideration. While the use of Cant has at times estranged Travellers from the greater population, at the same time it also adds to the richness of vocabulary and meanings in their oral tradition. Through an examination of Traveller ethnicity and the political agency they pursue in acquiring official recognition, in addition to their use of language, I have shown the importance of a Traveller communal ethnic identity and how this is evidenced in their expressive culture.

Traveller Musical Identity

Through this research, I have hoped to not only show how ethnicity can play an important role in the shaping of a Traveller identity, but specifically their musical identity. The Travellers have a long history of being known as ballad singers and storytellers, yet traditions are not static entities, but rather changing with influences from within and without the group. Hobsbawm and Ranger wrote of the fluidity of tradition in *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), where new traditions come into play as older traditions begin to fade. This fluidity of tradition affects Traveller musical performances and repertoires. As mentioned in Chapter Three and Five, stories and ballads can reflect various aspects of a people's culture, such as historical events and instrumental figures in the group's past. In the case of the Travellers, these works are often used to enculturate

the younger generations and to reaffirm a sense of communal identity for the adult members.

Strong tradition bearers become pivotal figures within the community, as they continue previous traditions but possibly reshape them as well. In this dissertation, I examined four of these tradition bearers among the Scottish Traveller culture: Stanley Robertson, Duncan Williamson, Sheila Stewart, and Jess Smith each are recognized as significant culture bearers of Traveller music and oral traditions. Their efforts at publishing and performing the stories and songs of their culture, both traditional and original, have aided Traveller expressive culture to flourish despite major changes to their way of life in the twentieth century, notably increasingly becoming settled families.

As mentioned in previous chapters, scholars in ethnomusicology (Porter 1976, 1985; Porter and Gower 1995; Bohlman 2004), folk studies (Philip 1991; Seeger and MacColl 1960, 1977, 1986), and literature (Braid 2002, Niles 1986) have looked at the ways in which Traveller songs connect with a cultural identity. But these works each look at Travellers from a generation immediately before those I include in my research. Russell and Atkinson's (2004) work includes some more contemporary folk singers, but very little of the work deals directly with Travellers. My research continues this body of scholarship regarding Traveller musical and cultural identity to the present and begins to examine avenues for further exploration, such as technology and the effects of becoming settled. These two areas, in addition to four other areas for future research, are discussed in the following section.

Musical identity is also tied to musical lineage. Sheila Stewart and Stanley Robertson both come from noted musical families. My examination of the influence of

family on their musical repertoires and performances styles demonstrates how strong cohesion in their families both reinforced their Traveller identity and also affected the performative context of culture in their ballads and stories. This performative context showcases a fluid musical tradition. As Christopher Small discusses in his work *Musicking* (1998), music involves a process where no one is passive, neither the performer nor the audience. Music performance, according to Small, involves active participation by all present at a performance and, thereby, creates both relationships and meaning. I examined how this is shown in the performance styles of the four Travellers I focus on in this dissertation and in turn how this creates a musical identity.

Further Areas for Research

My examination of who the Scottish Travellers are, particularly through a closer inspection of the four specific Traveller performers I have chosen for this dissertation, shows a strong formation of identity through music reinforced by a communal ethnic identity. Persecution, shared history, language, lifestyle, and culture help to cement the idea of a separate ethnic identity for the Travellers. This identity is then shown through the music repertoire and style of the four Travellers on whom I focus my research:

Stanley Robertson, Duncan Williamson, Jess Smith, and Sheila Stewart.

Many areas of research into the music of the Scottish Travellers remain possible. The more I researched these Travellers, the more avenues for inquiry opened to me. Six areas are particularly worthy of continued study: connections between Scottish and Irish Travellers, how the younger generation of Travellers are continuing the music tradition,

an historical look at Traveller history, a thorough linguistic analysis, musical instrument styles, and performance styles.

As mentioned in this dissertation, many of the Scottish Travellers have ties with Irish Traveller families, not just as friendly relationships but rather through familial ties. I have discussed this briefly with regard to Sheila Stewart. A question for further research involves what in their repertoire and style has been influenced through this connection; what songs, specific lyrics, stories, and performance techniques may have cross-national boundaries between the Traveller communities of Ireland and Scotland and to what degree a possible cross-influence exists. In a similar vein, what influence on repertoire exists between the greater folk music communities of the United States and the Traveller communities? I discussed the ties between the U.S. folk singer Jean Ritchie and the Scottish Traveller Jeannie Robertson, but what other influences exist, and in what ways might these have changed the musical repertoires of the Travellers?

While conducting research in Scotland in 2007, I saw a performance by William Williamson, the son of Duncan Williamson. His style was quite different from his father's, and he was known for his new song compositions. I also became aware of children of Stanley Robertson who were attempting to carry on his musical legacy, though I was not able to see them perform myself. The ethnomusicologist and former wife of Duncan Williamson, Linda Williamson, concludes her dissertation on the Travellers with a similar question about the younger generation of Travellers continuing this rich musical tradition. I have not found any work that is systematically trying to examine how the newest generation of Travellers are reshaping or renewing the musical heritage of their parents and extended families. Research on this subject could prove

fruitful for looking at the continuation of Traveller performance styles and specific repertoires, as well as showing ways in which technology may, or may not, be used to give a modern dimension to not only the dissemination of Traveller music but also its creation. This avenue of research may also expose a new transformation in the ongoing tradition of Traveller music.

Another area of inquiry into Traveller culture that many scholars find lacking is the history of this ethnic group. Finding an agreed upon origin for the Travellers may not be possible, but a thorough search of historical records may bring to light other notable Traveller performers, occupational avenues, performance possibilities, and historical accounts of movements and personalities in Scotland. How has the historical musical tradition of the Travellers been shaped through interaction with other nomadic groups or settled communities, through laws, or broader travels? Recent archival research by Richard Dawson has shed light on laws enacted on Travellers over the previous three hundred years, including their forced relocation as both slaves and indentured servants to the 'New World.' This leads to a new avenue of research on Traveller influence on musical traditions in the United States and the Caribbean.

An in-depth linguistic study of the Travellers is also called for concerning future research on this group. One of the unique characteristics of the Travellers, especially in connection with their song tradition, is the use of the Traveller Cant. I discuss this to some extent in my current research, but a comprehensive examination of Scottish Traveller Cant has not yet been undertaken. I mentioned work done as part of a Master's thesis (Harper 1969) and later continued in a doctoral dissertation (Harper 1977) in an earlier chapter, but I have not come across any other work dedicated to the study of

Traveller Cant. There have been works that have addressed Cant (Andereck 1988, Stanley 1990, Williamson 1985), but no major studies. Traveller songs often can be found to contain Cant words, in addition to other linguistic influences, such as Doric, Lowland Scots, and Gaelic. An in-depth study of the language would not only help preserve it, but also give a better understanding of the use of their language in Traveller song and story repertoires.

One final area of research I see needing continued exploration is in the performance practice of the Travellers, concerning the delivery of their stories, songs, and instrumental performances. Concerning their instrumental practice, what about Traveller piping and fiddling styles sets them apart from others who perform Celtic music? Is there some aspect of their technique or abilities that makes them unique? The same can be said of their singing and storytelling performances. Would further research into their dramatic deliveries, movements, etc., give a better understanding of the power of their performances? Two archival collections in particular would be helpful for this investigation. The archive at the School for Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh contains hundreds of hours of recordings done since the 1950s. Many of these recordings are of Scottish Travellers not yet released through commercial outlets. A second rich source for examining Traveller performance practices is the John Niles collection at the Library of Congress's American Folklife Center. This collection includes eight videotapes recorded in Scotland in the 1980s of important figures in Traveller storytelling and musical circles, including Duncan Williamson and Stanley Robertson. This gave me access to over twenty-nine hours of unique and informative recordings of both interviews and informal performances of these musically important

Travellers. Combining these archival sources with current field research would offer a bountiful amount of information to conduct an in-depth study of performance styles.

As I conducted my research to answer my initial questions concerning Scottish Travellers, these aforementioned avenues of investigation continued to grow. The repertoire, history, culture, and music of the Scottish Travellers is a rich field to explore. Those I have met and worked with during my research have simply reinforced the need for continued research into not just a unique ethnic group, but a culture in need of more understanding, not just for their culture's ability to survive and thrive under difficult prolonged circumstances but also through their rich contributions of their musical traditions.

APPENDIX

Transcriptions of "Son David"

"Son David" by Stanley Robertson, page one

Oh, what's the blood that's on your sword, my son Da - vid, oh, son Da - vid. What's the blood that's
For, that's the blood of my grey hound, hi, lady mother, ho, lady mother. That's the blood of
But, oh, the blood it's far owre clear, my son David, oh, son David. But, oh, the blood it's
For, that's the blood of my brown steed, hi, lady mother, ho, lady mother. That's the blood of
But, oh the blood it's far owre clear, my son David, oh, son David. But oh the blood it's
For, that's the blood of my hunting hawk, hi, lady mother, ho, lady mother. That's the blood of
But, oh that blood's too ne' - er ken, my son David, oh, son David. But oh, that blood's too
For, that's the blood of my brother John, hi, lady mother, ho, lady mother. That's the blood of
But, I'm gone a - wa' on a bottomless boat, on a bottomless boat, on a bottomless boat. For I'm gone a - wa' on a
But, when will you return to me, my son David, oh, son David. When will you re-
When the sun and the moon meet in yon glen, hi, lady mother, ho, lady mother. When the sun and the moon meets

“Son David” by Stanley Robertson, page two

on your sword? Come promise, tell me true.
my grey head, cause he would nae rule by me.
far owre clear. Come promise, tell me true.
my brown spear, cause he would nae rule by me.
far owre clear, Come promise, tell me true.
my hunting hawk, cause he would nae rule by me.
ne - er less. Come promise tell me true.
my brother John, cause he would nae rule by me.
bottomless bog, 'til the boat comes o'er the sea.
- turn to me? Come promise, tell me true.
in yon glen, it's I'll re - turn to ye.

“Son David” by Jeannie Robertson, page one

Oh, what's the blood, that's on your sword, my son David, ho, son David? What's that blood that's
Oh, that's the blood of my gray mare. Hi, lady mother, ho, lady mother. That's the blood of
Oh, that blood it is owre clear, my son David, ho, son David. That blood it
Oh, that's the blood of my gray hound. Hi, lady mother, ho, lady mother. That's the blood of
Oh, that blood it is owre clear, my son David, ho, son David. That blood it
Oh, that's the blood of my brother, John. Hi, lady mother, ho, lady mother. That's the blood of
Oh, when will you come back again? My son David, ho, son David. When will you come
When the sun an' the moon meets in yon glen. Hi, lady Mother, ho, lady mother. When the sun an' the moon meets

“Son David” by Jeannie Robertson, page two

on your sword? Come promise tell me true.
my gray mare, ³ be-cause she would nae rule by me.
is owre clear. Come, promise, tell me true.
my gray hound, ³ be-cause it would nae rule by me.
is owre clear. Come, promise tell me true.
my brother, John, ³ be-cause he would nae rule by me.
back a - gain? Come, promise, tell me true.
in yon glen, will I'll return a - gain.

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