

VARIATION AND STABILITY IN TWO MURDER BALLADS OF PLACENTIA BAY, NEWFOUNDLAND

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This paper will discuss variation and stability in Newfoundland singing tradition by focusing on two native North American ballads which are part of a large folksong collection made in Placentia Bay in 1978. My purpose is to show how the makers of these two ballads were influenced by the conventions of their tradition. Where innovation occurs, I will suggest possible sources of inspiration for change, and reasons for these variations.

The songs discussed in this paper were collected in the summer of 1978 by Eric West, unless otherwise noted. The singers who provided West with this material were almost all former residents of Red Island and Merasheen, islands in Placentia Bay. They are predominantly Roman Catholic and of Irish descent. These people were "resettled" by the Newfoundland government in the late 1960s to mainland communities such as Placentia, which had been designated "growth centres."

The singers West interviewed lived in and around the communities of Ferndale, Freshwater, and Placentia on the Avalon Peninsula side of Placentia Bay. After resettlement, singers from the Placentia Bay islands became part of a community of singers which also included people not originally from these islands. The cohesive nature of this community is apparent in the fact that West found all of his informants through leads provided by singers themselves. In addition, he was often told which songs he would be able to collect from particular singers.

Some of the more than twenty singers interviewed met on a regular, though informal, basis along with instrumental musicians. These were men from about forty to sixty years of age who had been greatly influenced by country and western styles and more recently by folk revival groups such as Ryan's Fancy and the Sons of Erin. These singers have eclectic repertoires, comprised of British broadside-derived ballads, lumbercamp ballads, local and original compositions, and songs learned from the mass media. From this group, West was able to make contact with other singers.

In the course of the summer, West collected 190 songs and partial songs which were later deposited in the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA) under the accession number 78-236. For this paper I will concentrate on two songs, referring to others in the collection when relevant. The two songs, "Carolan Anderson" and "McCanning's Hanging," are both native North American murder ballads. The West collection includes twelve murder ballads, about 10 per cent of the total complete texts, making this one of the largest categories of songs

collected. The high proportion of murder ballads would tend to indicate that such songs are significant in this tradition.

These twelve songs present an interesting mix. Half can be positively identified as having originated as British broadsides: "Young Edmund" (Laws M34), "The Village Bride" (Laws 037), "The Mill Boy" (Laws P35), "The Ghost on the Ship" (Laws P36), "Pat O'Brien" (Laws P39), and "The Babes in the Woods" (Laws Q34). Three other songs defy annotation. In "Down By a Riverside" a man kills the new wife that his parents forced him to marry. He is caught and is to be hanged. In "John Delaney" a man murders his lover and attempts to escape, but confesses in his sleep and is to be hanged. Both are similar to British broadside-derived ballads in plot, wording, and structure. In "Those Wedding Bells Shall Not Ring Out" a man murders the woman he claims is his wife just as she is about to wed another, then kills himself. This song displays many features of commercial sentimental balladry of the late nineteenth century. Finally, the two ballads to be discussed, "Carolan Anderson" and "McCanning's Hanging," are native North American songs.

In her discussion of the Pearl Bryan murder complex, Anne B. Cohen defines two important types of traditional ballads dealing with crime: the "murdered-girl" and the "criminal-brought-to-justice." She states:

The events of the murdered-girl formula are the following: wooing of trusting girl by artful man; luring of girl to lonely spot; murder of girl, who offers little resistance; abandonment of girl's body. Occasionally a fifth element — regret — is added, in which the murderer is sorry for his deed. The elements of the criminal-brought-to-justice formula are the following: youth, upbringing or past deeds of the criminal; crucial crime and events leading up to it; pursuit, capture and trial; execution.¹

Cohen notes that these two formulae are not mutually exclusive and elements of both may be found in a single ballad. Of the songs noted above, seven combine elements of the murdered-girl and criminal-brought-to-justice formulae: "The Mill Boy," "The Ghost on the Ship," "Pat O'Brien," "Down By a Riverside," "John Delaney," and the two ballads under discussion, "Carolan Anderson" and "McCanning's Hanging." Of the two, "Carolan Anderson" is most clearly modeled on traditional balladry.

"Carolan (or Carl or Carol) Anderson (or Nelson)" is of undetermined origin, but in all versions the events take place in Sydney, Nova Scotia. This song had not apparently been collected outside the Placentia Bay area, but is well known there.² Existing texts of this ballad are all quite similar. All have nine verses that maintain the same narrative features, and even share the unlikely rhyme of "foe" with "more." They follow a double-stanza pattern, with four seven-foot lines per verse and an aabb rhyming pattern.

Edward Ives has noted that this stanza form "is unquestionably the most common one for the confessional ballad," and goes on to state that this is in fact the single most popular form for any kind of traditional ballad in Maine and the maritime provinces.³

The action in this ballad is highly compressed, and most verses contain two narrative units. The structure of the narrative may be described as follows:

- I There's many a young man leaves his home, his mother to him dear,
"Oh Carolan, dear son, please stay home and do not go away."
- II Her boy so true to her breast she drew which tore her heart with
grief,
It was on that day he sailed away to the land of maple leaf.
- III He sailed out to the eastward from the westward of the shore,
He sailed out to Cape Breton's isle where Atlantic seas do roar;
- IV 'Twas little did he ever think when he left his home that day,
That the murdering of young Osborne would take his life away.
- V His money had not long been gone when his friends were but a few.
For three long days and three long nights he knew not what to do,
- VI He called young Osborne to his room and struck him on the head,
He rustled through his pockets as he lay there on the bed.
- VII 'Twas early the next morning he made his escape from town,
Being hired to work in a lumbering camp he said his name was
Brown,
- VIII The police were quickly notified, to find him without bail,
It was less than three weeks after he was locked in Sydney jail.
- IX He called this young man to his room and this to him did say:
"Young man you're a stranger in this land and what brought you
this way?"
"I am a British young man, I'm known by one and all,
Carolan Anderson is my name, I belong to Montreal."
- X The judge they tried to save him and very hard did try,
The jury found him guilty which meant that he must die,
- XI He called this young man to his room and this to him did say:
"Young man for the murdering you must die on the twenty-fourth
of May."
- XII The day of his execution, 'twas little did he fear,
He talked and joked with friends he knew who happend to be there,
- XIII He wrote a farewell message and this is what it read:
"Oh mother I've broken your poor old heart, and tomorrow I'll be
dead."
"If only we could meet again, how happy I would be,
For once I was a little boy who'd sit upon your knee,
But God he willed it not be and I had to face my foe,
Here's adieu unto you mother dear, I'm afraid we'll meet no more."
- XIV Come all young men take my advice before it is too late,
Don't be like Carolan Anderson who met with his sad fate.
- XV Outside the city of Sydney where his mouldering bones they lay,
May the Lord have mercy on his soul on the great judgement day.

These units may be characterized as:

I	mother's advice	IX	conversation with judge
II	departure	X	trial
III	voyage	XI	sentence
IV	foreshadowing	XII	day of execution
V	motive	XIII	farewell to mother
VI	murder	XIV	warning
VII	escape	XV	plea.
VIII	arrest		

Many of these narrative units are styled on the criminal-brought-to-justice formula. In unit V and VI we see what Cohen calls the "crucial crime and events leading up to it."⁵ Units VII, VIII, X and XI describe the pursuit (in this case escape), capture, and trial. The execution itself is not described, but the actions of the protagonist on the day of execution are.

The initial narrative unit, the mother's advice to her son, is not commonly found in the criminal-brought-to-justice formula, though it occurs frequently in other types of native North American balladry. In "Carolán Anderson" the mother's advice replaces details of the criminal's early life, a unit which often begins with the commonplace "My parents raised me tenderly..." The substitution of the mother's advice here can be explained in part by the fact that the criminal-brought-to-justice formula is usually narrated in the first person. The maker of "Carolán Anderson" chose to depart from this tradition, and the ballad is narrated in the third person. Because of this, the criminal cannot tell us directly about his early life and family.

In *Joe Scott: The Woodsman Songmaker*, Edward Ives shows how the narrative unit of the mother's advice was used by Joe Scott in his song "Howard Carey," in which a young man leaves home against his mother's advice and eventually hangs himself. Ives notes that "parental, usually maternal, advice is common in balladry."⁶ It is surprising, though perhaps not coincidental, that the two ballads Ives then uses to illustrate this theme are both in the West collection: "Harry Dunn" (Laws C14), and "The Western Ranger" (Laws A8). Ives notes that

the advice is always unheeded. Structurally it could be said to be the interdiction that has to be violated or there is no story; but that may be a little heavy-handed, since the violation is always implicitly obvious without any direct statement.⁷

These four ballads end tragically: Carolán Anderson is hanged; Howard Carey hangs himself; Harry Dunn dies when he is crushed by a tree; and the western ranger is killed by Indians. The mother's advice not only gives information about the good home that the protagonist left behind but also serves to heighten a sense of pathos,

as we are led to believe that these young men would not have died if they had taken their mothers' advice. This narrative device can be seen as a North American innovation in traditional balladry. In "Carolan Anderson" the replacement of the older, British broadside-derived form with this North American innovation reflects the special emphasis that is placed on the relationship between mothers and children in both commercial and traditional balladry on this continent. In his article "'The Blind Girl' and the Rhetoric of Sentimental Heroism," Bill Ellis states that "sentimental ballads from this (late nineteenth century) period and later stress that mother-child bonds are far more painful to break than any other."⁸ This theme is reflected in Placentia Bay singing tradition, not only in the ballads noted above, but in songs such as "The Baggage Coach Ahead," and "My Mother's Last Goodbye."

"Carolan Anderson" expands this theme in unit XIII, the farewell to mother. This unit takes a verse and a half of the song, making it three times longer than the average narrative unit, and the longest single unit in the ballad. It seems reasonable to state that the theme of the mother's unheeded advice with tragic consequences, and the underlying theme of the bond between mother and son made explicit in the farewell to mother, was of great importance to the maker of "Carolan Anderson."

As noted above, many of the elements of "Carolan Anderson" correspond to the usual criminal-brought-to-justice formula as described by Anne Cohen. However, this ballad maintains other narrative features common to British broadside-derived ballads such as foreshadowing, warning, and plea, and several of the ballads in Placentia Bay tradition contain these narrative units.

The device of foreshadowing is common in the murdered-girl formula. In Eric West's collection it also occurs in "Pat O'Brien" and "The Mill Boy," both typical murdered-girl songs. In "Carolan Anderson" foreshadowing occurs as follows:

'Twas little did he ever think when he left his home that day

That the murdering of young Osborne would take his life away.

While the form of this device has been preserved quite faithfully, a crucial change has been made. In the murdered-girl formula, the sad fate of the innocent victim is being foreshadowed and the function is apparently to create sympathy for the unsuspecting girl. In "Carolan Anderson" this device is used to foreshadow the fate of the criminal, and thus serves to focus sympathy on the criminal rather than the victim of the crime. In fact, the victim is given remarkably short shrift here as compared with most murder ballads of both British and North American origin. Nowhere is our attention called to the plight of young Osborne.

The other two narrative units, warning and plea, conform more closely to tradition. The lines:

Come all young men take my advice before it is too late,
Don't be like Carolan Anderson who met with his sad fate,

are very similar to those found in "The Ghost on the Ship" as collected by Eric West:

And here's to young fellows a warning to take,
Don't ever have young innocent life and betray.⁹

The plea in "Carolan Anderson," "...may the Lord have mercy on his soul on the great judgement day," closely resembles the plea in "Pat O'Brien":

And when I'm on the trap-hatch let every Christian pray,
That the Lord will have mercy on my poor soul all on the
judgement day.¹⁰

In "Carolan Anderson," as in these British broadside-derived ballads, the warning serves to provide a moral, as well as the proper moral tone. The plea, usually the last lines of the song, allows the narrator to carry the story to its logical end: the execution and beyond. This overcomes a problem in the criminal-brought-to-justice formula, for the criminal cannot narrate his own death and burial. Both the warning and plea function in "Carolan Anderson," as they do in older ballads, to create sympathy for the criminal.

One final feature of "Carolan Anderson" which is noteworthy is the way in which the ballad-maker chose to advance the narrative by using the phrase "he called...to his room" three times: to begin the murder, the conversation between the judge and Carolan Anderson, and the pronouncement of the death sentence. This device of advancing the plot through three parallel sequences of events is similar to the incremental repetition found in many ballads. The first and last units which begin in this way are clearly essential to the plot. The central unit, the conversation between the judge and the criminal, is neither central to the plot, nor commonly found in the criminal-brought-to-justice formula. Perhaps this innovation is based on an event which actually took place. It is also interesting that this is the only narrative unit, aside from the farewell to mother, which is longer than two lines. The next narrative unit, the trial, tells us:

The judge he tried to save his life, and very hard did try,
But the jury found him guilty which meant that he must die.¹¹

So it would seem that the conversation between judge and criminal is significant because it caused the judge to decide that the young man should not be executed.

On the basis of the above analysis, it is possible to state that the maker of "Carolan Anderson" maintained many of the features of the traditional criminal-brought-to-justice formula, but also made some significant innovations. Features of the orthodox criminal ballad are the stanza pattern, and the narrative units of motive, crime, escape, capture and trial, warning, and plea. The maker of this ballad also used a feature normally found in the murdered-girl formula, foreshadowing of the crime. The murder is down-played,

but the warning and plea, elements which help to create sympathy for the criminal, are well developed. The device of foreshadowing has been adapted so that our sympathies are not directed towards the victim, as in the murdered-girl formula, but towards the criminal.

The most striking innovation in "Carolan Anderson" is the development of the link between mother and son, a feature not usually found in the criminal-brought-to-justice formula. The ballad-maker developed this theme by introducing the device of the mother's advice, which was apparently borrowed from other native North American ballads which end tragically, but do not feature crime. The bond between mother and son was further expanded in the criminal's final farewell to his mother, so that this becomes one of the dominant themes of the song. The other main innovation, the conversation between the judge and the criminal, may have originated in the historical facts of the case. Both innovations serve to create sympathy for the criminal.

In the course of Newfoundland's history there have been a number of murders and murder trials which were widely publicized,¹² but there have apparently been only two ballads written about murders committed in Newfoundland. Kenneth Peacock collected "The Murder of Alfreda Pike," based on the unsolved murder of a young girl in 1869.¹³ It follows the murdered-girl formula, except that there is no foreshadowing and, as in real life, the murderer remains unknown.

The other known ballad based on a local murder is "McCanning's Hanging." It is said to have been written by Garfield Barry of South East Bight, Placentia Bay, and is based on events that occurred in St. John's in 1899. It is uncertain when "McCanning's Hanging" was composed, but the accuracy of detail would tend to indicate that it was made soon after the events that inspired it. Unlike "Carolan Anderson," "McCanning's Hanging" seems to feature in the repertoire of only one singer. Eric West collected it from Fergus Leonard.

In contrast to "Carolan Anderson" the historical events that inspired "McCanning's Hanging" are known, so it is possible to compare contemporary newspaper accounts with the ballad based on them. There is little doubt that Garfield Barry drew upon newspaper reports when making the ballad. The St. John's *Evening Telegram* is mentioned in the last verse.

In her study of the Pearl Bryan murder ballad complex, Anne Cohen found such similarity between newspaper accounts of this murder and trial and the ballads about these events that she concluded that newspapers were the greatest source of information for those who composed ballads on this subject. She also made the interesting observation that

both media tell the story from the same moral stance, express the same interpretation of character, and are interested in the same details. Both tend to distort fact to accommodate a shared pattern

of story telling that has an attendant company of other formulae, such as stereotyped scenes, stereotyped actors, and stereotyped phrases.¹⁴

It is possible to test Cohen's observations by comparing newspaper accounts of the 1899 events with the ballad produced by Garfield Barry. As both newspaper accounts and "McCanning's Hanging" take liberties with facts, it is necessary to provide a brief historical account of the case.

Francis Canning owned a tavern at the corner of New Gower and Springdale Streets in St. John's at the time of the murder. He lived with his wife and five children a short distance from his tavern and was a well-liked member of the community, devoted to his family and a practicing Roman Catholic. In his tavern, Canning employed a barmaid, Mary Nugent, for about a year prior to the murder. The two had always appeared to work well together.

Canning had suffered violent headaches periodically after experiencing sunstroke on a voyage to Brazil as a young man. In an effort to relieve the pain of these headaches he began to drink heavily and was known to be violent while drunk. By the spring of 1899, Canning began to show signs of severe personality disorder.

In May of 1899, Mary Nugent became engaged to a mate on an English ship. At the same time, Canning's behavior became increasingly strange. For two weeks he was never without a headache. During this time he slept very little, staying up all night, "walking back and forth in his room talking to himself."¹⁵ On the night of May 11, he was treated by his family doctor. His oldest son later testified at the murder trial that Canning was incoherent, stating "I thought he was either very drunk or he had lost his mind."¹⁶

On the afternoon of May 12, Canning and Mary Nugent quarrelled in the upstairs of the tavern, and the girl was shot in the head. When arrested in his home a few hours later, Canning stated that Nugent brought a revolver upstairs in the course of their quarrel, that he had struggled with her, and she had been shot accidentally. However, police found in Canning's possession a handwritten, signed confession. This document, which was printed in the St. John's newspapers at the time of the trial, contradicted everything else that was known about the relation between the murderer and his victim. Canning stated:

I confess that I shot Mary Nugent and that she was the cause of it all. She has been one of the worst girls that I ever met in my life. She bled me with her flattering tongue to give her money to sport dress with that mate of hers. But if he only knew all, he ought to think himself lucky to be rid of her and thank God he is clear of a dirty flamer.¹⁷

Canning then cursed Mary Nugent, and also blamed his wife, saying "if my wife had been a little more discreet this would never

have happened. The best part is through her uncalled-for jealousy...and she will suffer for it yet.”¹⁸ He also claimed that Mary Nugent had robbed him of money. Later, Canning stated that he had no memory of writing this confession.

Mary Nugent lived for eleven days after the shooting. Before she died she was able to give police a statement that named Canning as her assailant. However she also stated: “Perhaps he didn’t know what he was doing. I don’t believe he did for he was always kind to me before...I like Canning. He was considerate to all under him.”¹⁹

After Nugent’s death, Francis Canning was brought to trial for murder. His defense tried to prove that he was insane at the time of the shooting, but after a two-week trial, the jury deliberated for less than four hours before bringing down a verdict of guilty, and Canning was sentenced to die. His friends and some Catholic clergy circulated a petition to have the death sentence commuted, but this was ignored, and he was hanged on July 29, about two months after Mary Nugent died.

Although Mary Nugent was a young woman, and apparently an innocent victim, her murder does not quite conform to the classic murdered-girl formula, in which the murderer is always the girl’s lover. However, newspaper accounts are clearly closer to the murdered-girl formula than were the historical facts. Less than a week after the shooting, a story appeared in the St. John’s *Daily News* and *Herald* stating that Mate Richards had asked Mary Nugent to send a flask of whisky to the ship he was working on because he had a toothache. This much seems to have been true, but the story went on to state that Canning had sent a flask of poisoned whisky, with the intent to kill his barmaid’s fiancé. This story was later denied by men who were working with Richards and drank some of the allegedly poisoned whisky, and Canning’s lawyer threatened to sue these papers for libel. The underlying implication of this rumour is that Canning was jealous of Richards’ attentions to Mary Nugent. The popular imagination, it seems, was intent on establishing a love relationship where none existed and, in doing so, making the story conform more closely to the murdered-girl formula.

While Mary Nugent was alive, newspaper accounts continued to report this case in terms of the murdered-girl formula. Vivid description of the murder such as is found in “The Murder of Alfreda Pike” is an important feature of this narrative form. St. John’s newspapers gave detailed and somewhat gory accounts of the discovery of Mary Nugent after the shooting. However, after Nugent died, sympathy shifted to Canning and his family. For example, on June 1, about a week and a half after Nugent’s death, the St. John’s *Evening Telegram* reported that three of the younger Canning children came to the pre-trial hearing to see their father and “more than one stern officer of the law shed tears at the pathetic and affecting sight of the meeting between father and children.”²⁰ This is hardly the picture usually drawn of the killer in the murdered-girl

formula, but it does adhere to the more sympathetic portrayal of the protagonist in the criminal-brought-to-justice type.

From the time of Nugent's death through the trial and execution, newspaper accounts concentrated on details common to this formula. Efforts of Canning's friends to prevent his execution, his last meeting with family, his last request that people refrain from mentioning his crime to his wife and children, and his prayer on the gallows are all recorded in local newspapers.

Anne Cohen notes the tendency of newspapers to deal with the Pearl Bryan murder in terms of these two formulae. She concludes: "The newspapers offered to ballad makers ready-made material for two different types of ballads, the murdered-girl type and the criminal-brought-to-justice type."²¹ In the case of Pearl Bryan, the crime of murdering and beheading a pregnant sweetheart was so odious that the murdered-girl formula easily gained the upper hand. However, in "McCanning's Hanging" we find a more even balance of the two traditional formulae. Structurally the ballad can be broken into two almost equal parts. The first follows the murdered-girl formula, while the second adheres to the criminal-brought-to-justice:

Part 1

- I Now young and old I'd pray take warning,
 Listen a while, now lend an ear,
 It's of a murderer who of late transported
 Here in this city on this last New Year.
- IIa Francis McCanning commit this murder,
 Listen a while and you'll understand.
 He being a native of another country,
 And took situation in Newfoundland.
- IIIa He shipped this girl here to be his servant,
 He always had her at his call.
- IV But little she knew that she stood in danger,
 For to lose her life by a pistol ball.
- IIb Now he kept a saloon all in the city,
 And he been well-liked by rich and poor.
- IIIb There was none as welcome as Mary Nugent,
 That's why she served on McCanning's floor.
- Va Until she told him of her marriage,
 It would take place in three weeks time.
 Sure that enraged McCanning's anger,
 And he swore he'd baulk her from her design.
- VI 'Twas a case of pistols he then got ready,
 And the devil pumped him at his own command,
- Vb But the oath he swore I'd vile to mention,
 She'd never wed no other man.

- VII Now they went out for to pay a visit,
But a short while after he turned home.
The first to enter being Mrs. Theresa,
She heard two shots and a deadly moan.
- VIII For to import it sure she did hurry,
'Twas to police force she did run.
Now for the death of Mary Nugent,
Francis McCanning, sure you'll be hung.

Part 2

- I Francis McCanning being a man of honour,
With a loving wife and children three,
- II 'Twas little she thought he would disgrace her,
For to see him hang in the gallows tree.
- III But he was a heathen or a Presbyterian,
He'd brought his trial may go farther on.
Because he being a poor Roman Catholic,
Winter sentenced him to be hung.
- IV No but instead of a mournful hanging,
He was like a school boy going to a fair.
The small birds sang as they sang melodious,
And they flew around him in the air.
Now the night before McCanning's hanging,
Almighty God did all confound.
With lightning flashing and thunder roaring,
And the wrath of God made a dismal sound.
Now he had two clergies just to attend him,
Both night and morning for to pray.
- V To have him tried amongst the angels,
And to have him tried on the judgement day.
Almighty God, he was ready to meet him,
To save his soul and hear what he'd say,
To have him resist amongst the angels,
And to have him judged on the judgement day.
- VI Now the *Evening Telegram* is getting ready,
And soon the news will spread around.
About the death of Francis McCanning,
Hung in the city of St. John's town.²²

These units may be characterized as:

Part 1

- | | | | |
|------|------------------------|------|------------------------|
| I | come-all-ye | VI | preparation for murder |
| IIa | information on Canning | Vb | motive |
| IIIa | information about Mary | VII | murder and discovery |
| IV | foreshadowing | VIII | arrest |
| Va | motive | | |

Part 2

I	information on Canning	IV	details of execution
II	foreshadowing	V	pardon in heaven
III	political statement	VI	closing statement.

“McCanning’s Hanging” presents a complex structure. In spite of the definite split between the first part which follows the murdered-girl formula, and the second part which follows the criminal-brought-to-justice formula, the ballad-maker preserved integrity by using parallel structural units in the two parts, and by maintaining a dominant, unifying theme. I will first examine how each part is representative of or differs from the prototypical traditional formulae, and finally examine how the two units are related as parts of a single ballad.

The opening stanza is a come-all-ye, a standard method of opening a traditional ballad in which the listeners’ attention is requested. The phrase “I’d pray take warning” suggests that this unit is also related to the warning narrative unit commonly found in the criminal-brought-to-justice formula. However, as we saw in “Carolán Anderson,” the warning is usually at the end, rather than the beginning of the ballad. Further, in the criminal ballads, we are clearly being warned against a life of crime. In “McCanning’s Hanging” it is not clear just what we are being warned about.

In “McCanning’s Hanging,” a good deal of space is devoted to giving us information about the dramatis personae. We are told that Canning is the murderer, that he came from another country and “took situation” in Newfoundland, all historically correct. However, when Mary Nugent is introduced, the ballad-maker begins to take liberties with historical fact:

He shipped this girl here to be his servant,
He always had her at his call.

This is not true. Mary Nugent came from Kelligrews to seek employment in St. John’s by herself, and worked as a domestic servant for several years before becoming a barmaid in Canning’s tavern, according to information in the St. John’s *Evening Telegram*. This alteration of historical fact begins to bring the story closer to the murdered-girl formula, as do the narrative units which give Canning’s motive. Although it was never clearly established why Canning and Nugent quarrelled, the ballad-maker confidently states that Canning shot the girl to prevent her from marrying another man. Like the rumour of Canning’s attempt to poison Mate Richards, this is an attempt to move the story closer to the conventions of the murdered-girl formula.

The first foreshadowing unit is the conventional type found in the murdered-girl formula. As usual, it functions to create sympathy for the unsuspecting victim.

The fourth verse contains the interesting statement:

There was none as welcome as Mary Nugent,
That's why she served on McCanning's floor.

Again this implies a deep bond between murderer and victim. The phrasing "there was none as welcome" is reminiscent of the wording in another ballad, "Lord Thomas" (Child 73):

There was none so ready as fair Elender herself,
To let Lord Thomas in...

and again:

There was none so ready as Lord Thomas himself,
To let fair Elender in."²³

In "Lord Thomas" murder is committed because of a love triangle. In part one of "McCanning's Hanging" the same theme is developed in spite of the lack of evidence to suggest that this was the case. We cannot know if Garfield Barry was familiar with "Lord Thomas," but it is possible that he was, and that he used this rhetorical device because he saw thematic similarities between this older ballad and "McCanning's Hanging."

The description of events leading up to the murder presents us with an entirely different picture of Canning than does the rest of the ballad. This "man of honour" becomes enraged and, we are told, swears a vile oath. The explanation offered for this transformation is that "the devil pumped him at his own command," a common concept in the murdered-girl formula. For example, in "The Mill Boy," the protagonist states:

"...the devil drove it into my mind,
For to take her life away."

Canning's bizarre confession was printed in St. John's newspapers in the course of his trial. It is not difficult to understand why the ballad-maker introduced this traditional device to explain Canning's behavior. Before the advent of modern psychology, it would be hard to understand the extreme alteration of the murderer's personality.

Until the murder, this ballad adheres closely to the murdered-girl formula. However, at that point the ballad-maker departs from the conventions of this tradition. As noted above, the murder scene is usually one of the most important features of such ballads, but the actual murder is given only one line in "McCanning's Hanging": "she heard two shots and a deadly moan," and the action occurs off stage, from the point of view of a woman who happened to enter the tavern just as the shots were fired on the second floor. In this the ballad-maker has borrowed directly from newspaper accounts of the shooting.

In the murdered-girl formula, the detailed description of the cruel murder helps to create sympathy for the innocent victim. If Garfield Barry wished to create a picture of Mary Nugent's suffering, newspapers certainly provided him with material. The description of

the girl's discovery was complete with blood, moaning, and incoherent pleas. The engagement gifts bought by Mate Richards, details of the life they planned, and the visit Richards made to Mary Nugent's bedside were all described. The ballad-maker chose to ignore these details.

The first part of "McCanning's Hanging," which follows the murdered-girl formula, ends with the lines:

Now for the death of Mary Nugent,
Francis McCanning, sure you'll be hung.

This is Canning's arrest, a reasonable place to end the murdered-girl ballad. But the song does not end there: it switches instead to the criminal-brought-to-justice formula. The first lines of verse nine read like the opening lines of a typical ballad of this type:

Francis McCanning being a man of honour,
With a loving wife and children three.

This is reasonably close to the "my parents raised me tenderly" convention of older criminal ballads. While maintaining historical fact, Barry tells us that Canning came from a good home. This is followed by the second foreshadowing device, which refers to Canning's wife:

'Twas little she thought he would disgrace her,
For to see him hang in the gallows tree.

This device in the second half of the ballad, like comments about Canning and his family which precede it, shifts our attention from the plight of Mary Nugent to that of Canning and his family. As in "Carolan Anderson," the ballad-maker used a device normally featured in the murdered-girl formula to suit the needs of the criminal-brought-to-justice type.

The reason that the ballad-maker has sympathy for this man who had obviously committed the crime is given in the next verse:

But he was a heathen or a Presbyterian,
He'd brought his trial may go farther on.
Because he being a poor Roman Catholic,
Winter sentenced him to be hung.

This verse expresses a popular feeling that surrounded the Canning case. Canning was brought to trial with amazing haste after Mary Nugent died. In fact, Sir William Whiteway resigned as Canning's defence lawyer just two weeks before the trial on the grounds that he had not been given time to prepare a defence. It was not usual to bring murder trials to court so quickly in Newfoundland.²⁴ Francis Canning's trial and execution were over just slightly more than two months from the day Mary Nugent died.

The author of the ballad chose to explain this unusual swiftness of justice in terms of religious conflict. In this the song is probably an accurate reflection of popular attitudes when we consider the petition circulated by Catholic clergy and Canning's friends, and the

twenty-four hour vigil kept for Canning prior to his execution. Later in the song it says:

Now he had two clergies just to attend him
Both night and morning for to pray.

In fact, three priests celebrated mass in Canning's cell just before his execution.

Religious conflict is an important theme in Newfoundland culture, though it is a subject that people often hesitate to discuss directly. Once, while collecting from a Catholic singer from St. Mary's Bay, my informant made me turn off the tape recorder while he made what seem to me very mild and unbiased comments on religious conflict in this province. Apparently, he considered *any* discussion of this type to be inappropriate.

Seen in the light of Newfoundland's history, the reticence shown by informants to discuss this aspect of their culture becomes understandable. In the early 1860s there were religious riots in Harbour Grace, Conception Bay. In St. John's in May of 1861 a riot broke out over a disputed election, and government troops clashed with Catholic Liberal supporters. Three people were killed and others were wounded. This event gave rise to the ballad "In Lonely Belevedere."²⁵ When he expressed his feelings about religious conflict in a ballad, Garfield Barry was adding to an existing tradition of both native Newfoundland and imported songs on this topic.

It is usual in the criminal-brought-to-justice formula to devote a good deal of attention to the events surrounding the execution. In "Carolan Anderson," two whole stanzas are used to describe the actions of the criminal prior to execution. Similarly, Barry devotes two and one half stanzas to events that occurred before Canning was hanged.

The idea that Canning should not have been executed is strongly reinforced by the pardon-in-heaven sequence which follows the execution:

Almighty God was there to meet him,
To save his soul and hear what he'd say.

Neither Barry nor Canning's defence denied that Canning had shot Mary Nugent. Instead, both tried to explain that he was not guilty due to extenuating circumstances. Canning's defence took a modern approach, pleading that he was insane at the time of the crime. In contrast, the ballad-maker drew upon a traditional device: Canning was commanded by the devil. Further, Barry contended that earthly justice was biased by religious prejudice, and Canning would receive true justice in heaven.

This analysis shows that, like the newspaper accounts, the ballad "McCanning's Hanging" reflects the influence of two traditional formulaic approaches to murder: the first half corresponds to the murdered-girl formula, while the second half is modeled on the

criminal-brought-to-justice type. In spite of the split between these distinct halves, there are unifying elements. Canning's fundamental blamelessness was of great importance to Garfield Barry. His one significant departure from the murdered-girl formula was the omission of a detailed description of the victim's suffering. Concern for Canning seems to have caused this departure, as a too strict adherence to the murdered-girl formula would make it difficult to create sympathy for Canning. Barry's basic sympathy for Canning is also shown in the many positive statements about the murder. Such statements are not common in murdered-girl ballads.

The two parts are also unified by parallel narrative units. The two foreshadowing units, which refer to Mary Nugent and Canning's wife, are given early in their respective halves. In both cases, our attention is drawn to the plight of an innocent woman who will suffer because of the actions of this man. However, in both the ballad-maker chose to modify this device with positive statements about Canning. Again, we see that Barry's essential concern for Canning dominates his use of this traditional device. Although the ballad is made of two separate halves, it is unified through the use of a dominant theme and parallel narrative devices into a single artistic unit.

This study has shown how the makers of two ballads were influenced by existing traditions and how they chose to innovate in their work. Traditional formulaic approaches were taken by both the ballad-makers and, in the case of "McCanning's Hanging," by those who wrote newspaper accounts as well. These findings confirm Anne Cohen's assertion that certain situations, such as the murder of young women, and crime in more general terms, tend to be perceived in light of pre-existing formulae, which remain stable in tradition. But stability does not imply rigidity and, as we have seen, ballad-makers introduced a number of innovations to create new variations within these stable formulae.

These innovations are of two types. The ballad-maker could choose to adapt an existing form from other formulae to suit the purposes of a new ballad, as in "Carolan Anderson," where the bond between mother and son and the device of foreshadowing were introduced into the criminal-brought-to-justice formula. Garfield Barry also used this type of innovation in his adaptation of foreshadowing. Change of this type may be seen as conservative innovation; the song-maker created variation in tradition while conserving an older form.

The other type of innovation is more inventive. The ballad-maker either drew upon historical fact not part of the prototype formula, or gave free rein to imagination. This is evident in "Carolan Anderson" in the innovative conversation between the criminal and judge. In "McCanning's Hanging" Garfield Barry created an execution scene to suit his own fancy, and the pardon of the criminal after death by God himself. This type of change may be called creative innovation.

It is obvious that both conservative and creative innovation play important roles in the development of new variations upon stable formulae in the tradition examined here. The degree to which a given ballad-maker chooses to utilize either, and factors that govern the type of innovation used, would make interesting topics for field investigation.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Anne B. Cohen, *Poor Pearl, Poor Girl! The Murdered Girl Stereotype in Ballad and Newspaper* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1973), pp. 102-3.
2. "Carol Anderson" is printed in William J. Wilson and Loyola Pomroy, *Merasheen Reunion*, (n.p.: n.p., 1981), p. 49. Collected versions in MUNFLA are accessioned under number 71-1, 78-236, and 79-1.
3. Edward D. Ives, *Joe Scott: The Woodsman-Songmaker* (Chicago, Univ. of Illinois Press, 1978), p. 249.
4. "Carol Anderson," as sung by Mrs. Bride Rose for Kenneth S. Goldstein, Eric West, and Marilyn Willcott, MUNFLA 79-1, ms p. 23, tape C3842.
5. Cohen, p. 103.
6. Ives, p. 121.
7. Ives, p. 121.
8. Bill Ellis, "'The Blind Girl,' and the Rhetoric of Sentimental Heroism," *Journal of American Folklore*, 91(1978), 663-64.
9. "The Ghost on the Ship," as sung by Joachim Bennet, MUNFLA 78-236, ms. p. 77.
10. "Pat O'Brien," as sung by C. Parsons, 78-236, ms. p. 13.
11. "Carol Nelson," as sung by Fergus Leonard, 78-236, ms. pp. 146-47.
12. See Jack Fitzgerald, *Ten Steps to the Gallows* (St. John's: Jespersen Press, 1981) for details of some of these murders.
13. Kenneth Peacock, *Songs of the Newfoundland Outports* (Ottawa: National Museum, Bulletin No. 197, 1965), p. 821.
14. Cohen, p. 4.
15. Fitzgerald, p. 79.
16. Fitzgerald, p. 78.
17. Fitzgerald, pp. 74-75.
18. Fitzgerald, p. 75.
19. Fitzgerald, p. 76.
20. "The Canning Case," *The Evening Telegram* (St. John's) 1 July 1899, n.p.
21. Cohen, p. 113.
22. "McCanning's Hanging," as sung by Fergus Leonard, 78-236, m. p. 146.
23. Elisabeth B. Greenleaf and Grace Y. Mansfield, *Ballads and Sea Songs of Newfoundland* (1933; rpt. Hatboro. PA.: Folklore Associates, 1968), p. 18.
24. See Fitzgerald, "Double Murder at Harbour Grace," pp. 50-58 and "Murder of the Scrooge of Water Street," pp. 59-70 for examples of more typical Newfoundland murder trials of the same time.
25. Neil V. Rosenberg, "Maritime Folk Songs," review of *Maritime Folk Songs* by Helen Creighton, *Newfoundland Quarterly*, 77(1981), 55.

Resumé: *Janet McNaughton examine deux plaintes de meurtres qui furent recueillies à Placentia Bay à Terre-Neuve. Elle trace le contour de deux types traditionnels de plaintes de meurtres: celles où l'accent est mis sur le meurtre d'une jeune fille et celles traitant de l'appréhension d'un criminel par la justice. Elle montre comment les chansons terreneuviennes utilisent ces patrons et les modifient.*