

THE BALLAD IN BLUEGRASS MUSIC*

Thomas Adler
Folklore Institute
Indiana University
Bloomington, Indiana

PREFACE

This paper, a study of the ballad as found in bluegrass music, is intended not as a final statement but only as a beginning. I have been involved with bluegrass music in one way or another for the past thirteen years, yet I did not realize the full extent of the problems which would rise to plague me in the course of the research for this paper. The method seemed simple enough; my intention was (in effect) to fling all of my bluegrass records into the air, let the ballads drop out onto the ground, and take a look at them as they lay there.

Unfortunately, it is not easy to separate the ballads from a larger corpus of material--the paper reflects this. It is even more difficult to make general statements about thirty-two different ballad types. The statements which can be made may seem tautological and commonplace. The author must maintain that they are not, however, for the demonstration through actual examples of "commonplace" observations constitutes the only real proof acceptable to any science.

In the interests of science, then, I have reached conclusions in this paper. In the interests of the arts, however, this preface has been designed to warn the reader that fuller understanding demands closer examination of the texts themselves. They have been transcribed and provided; they deserve to be read. The ballad texts should be thought of as the true bearers of meaning here; the paper is lagniappe.

Bluegrass music presents the folklorist with a unique set of problems. It is unquestionably a significant aspect of American country music, yet it lies outside the mainstream of the commercial country-music phenomenon. The connections between bluegrass and traditional song exist on many levels, yet surprisingly little attention has been given to such relationships.¹ Historical, cultural, and musicological studies exist; still, they are all pioneer works, and many areas have not been systematically investigated at all. It would undoubtedly not be unfair to say that with all too few exceptions, the best work done on bluegrass music has been by dedicated amateurs.²

* This paper was originally written in the fall of 1971; it was to be included in a Bibliographic and Special Series issue of the Forum on country and western music planned at that time.

Any study in this area must begin with the recognition of bluegrass as a style. First performed in 1945 by Bill Monroe and his Blue Grass Boys (from which group the generic name derives), bluegrass is a sophisticated, commercial form of hillbilly music, characterized particularly by its instrumental aspect. It is most often performed by "from four to seven male musicians who play non-electrified stringed instruments and who also sing as many as four parts."³ The instruments involved are usually guitar, banjo, fiddle, mandolin, and bass, and the interaction of the instruments is complicated and jazzy, yet predictable within certain limits.

Although bluegrass is usually dated to no earlier than 1945, it is clear upon even cursory examination that most of its significant elements are much older. Vocal styles, instrumental styles, conventions of public performance, and of course the instruments themselves all have extensive historical antecedents. Repertoire is no exception; close attention to the items performed by bluegrass bands has led L. Mayne Smith to the conclusion that at least a fifth, and possibly a third of all performed pieces derive from oral tradition.⁴ Though Smith conjectures that traditional materials are stressed because they are often noncopyright (and therefore more easily and profitably employed in commercial performances or recordings), one must also bear in mind the historical and cultural importance of traditional song in the southern United States--for the audience as well as for the performers.⁵

A successful performer must please his audiences, and audiences, particularly of intimately-presented musical styles like bluegrass, demand not only innovation, but also the fulfillment of other expectations. In most articles or interviews with bluegrass musicians, the emphasis is on style; repertoire will be at best indicated by a discography of the artist's released records.⁶ Yet repertoire must surely be a major factor in the creation of audience expectations. Repertoire characterizes groups as much as does style, and it must therefore be concluded that deeper investigations of the traditional basis of bluegrass repertoire are in order, so that our understanding of bluegrass music, as well as our understanding of traditional song, may be enhanced.

Ballads are one obvious vehicle for such studies. They have generally been investigated far more thoroughly and methodically than lyric folksong. The nature of narrative (which will later be shown to be problematic in several ways) makes ballads more easily classifiable. Perhaps most important, the prior studies of ballads--particularly American ballads--help to make subsequent work less onerous and hopefully more productive.

The primary goal of this paper is to educe the ballads from a particular sample of bluegrass music and to explore their characteristics, especially their establishment in tradition. Since the area of study is delimited by a musical style (bluegrass) and to some extent by form (the recorded format imposes its own limitations), the assumption is that the ballad repertoire elicited will be reasonably representative of the entire field of bluegrass music.

Two major qualifications must be given: first, the definition of "ballad" used for selection was fairly intuitive. The songs which were singled out

for transcription were narrative songs which were felt to present a reasonably coherent story (rather than merely hinting at a story). It should be quite clear that what is "reasonably coherent" to the author may not be to another worker. Second, the sample of records involved consisted of the entire long-playing bluegrass record collection of the author: seventy-nine records in all, comprising approximately 850 songs. Since the records have been purchased over a span of nearly thirteen years, the collection may be seen to represent the author's changing tastes and chronic impecuniousness more objectively than it does the total range of bluegrass recordings. Nevertheless, it was felt that treating this collection as a typical cross-section of bluegrass repertoire is defensible on the grounds that (a) all major bluegrass groups are included and (b) even much larger samples would be open to the same criticisms of subjective selection. Since the collection was acquired to satisfy a craving for music of a particular style, one can only hope that the sample is reasonably random with respect to content, and therefore the author would assume the validity of the findings until that assumption can be proven false.

This collection, then, was examined one record at a time, and all ballads, i.e., narrative songs, were noted. In addition, all examples of instrumental arrangements of ballad tunes were noted. The ballad texts were then transcribed for inclusion in this presentation.

The process of picking the ballads out of a large body of song is not difficult to do, but it is difficult to explain. The problem (like the advantages mentioned earlier) seems to lie in the nature of narrative; it is hard to determine the point at which isolated emotions and incidents end and a story begins. In bluegrass and country music particularly, the range of lyric song seems almost to overlap with narrative song. Thus we often encounter such problematic items as the following:

Left New York this morning early
Packed with mail so wide and high
Sailing through the wild blue yonder
It's that Airmail Special on the fly.

Listen to the motors humming
See her streaking through the sky
Like a bird that's flying homeward
It's that Airmail Special on the fly.

Over plains and hightop mountains
Over rivers deep and wide
Like a mighty gallant warrior
It's that Airmail Special on the fly.

Over clouds so dark and stormy
Over rugged peaks so high
Carrying mail to California
It's that Airmail Special on the fly.

Watch her circle for a landing
 Hear her motor cough and sigh
 Now she's coming down the runway
 It's that Airmail Special on the fly⁸

The account of a flight from New York to California on the Airmail Special--- or rather, the relation of the scenes and emotions produced by flying (but not a particular flight)---leave one with the feeling that he has heard a narrative where none exists. It is possible that the existence of a large number of these impressionistic story-songs in bluegrass and country repertoires reflects Tristram Coffin's well-made point:

...Anglo-American ballads stress impact over action and retain, in the long run, only enough of the original action or plot unity to hold this core of emotion in some sort of focus. In our ballad, details are kept and discarded to fit the core, and little real attention is paid to plot consistency or structure. Plot is present, but in the background. The emotional core, a part of the musical as well as the textual meaning of the song, is emphasized and cherished.⁹

Possibly this emphasis on the "emotional core" rather than on plot explains the frequently-encountered statement that most bluegrass/hillbilly/country songs are narratives. Some such explanation seems necessary--for of the estimated 850-song sample used for this study, only thirty-nine performances (representing thirty-two ballad types) were found.

In addition to the vocal examples (the texts of which are given as an appendix in this paper) five ballad tunes were encountered strictly in their instrumental forms. This alone is indicative of an important aspect of bluegrass music, not unrelated to Coffin's observations above: there seems to be a widespread attitude among bluegrass musicians, professional and amateur alike, that the style really is what is important, and a given song--ballad, lyric, or instrumental--is merely a vehicle for the expression of that style. Even the audiences at bluegrass festivals, if questioned after the performance of a narrative song, will likely be found to have completely missed the meaning or even the thread of the plot. The action in narrative song is not felt to be important, or at least is considered much less important than other matters such as instrumental technique, stage presence, and the "emotional core." As a little-known but apt bluegrass lyric puts it:

Doin' it up right
 Playin' all night long
 Tryin' to think of something else
 To make a bluegrass song...¹⁰

is the important part. Hence, the instrumental versions of ballad tunes may be considered borrowings from tradition, but it should be kept in mind that these tunes are not thought of as being related to the stories told by their

lyrics. They are vehicles for the style, and it is highly likely that most musicians and audiences think of the instrumental version of "John Henry" as being no different from any other traditional tune. One doesn't even think of the words while playing the tune.

What of the vocal examples of the ballads found in bluegrass? As a general hint, one can begin with some of the statements made by Smith and Rosenberg:

Among the ballads, most are of broadside origin and almost all were first sung in the United States.¹¹

A successful bluegrass performance of a standard song or folksong not only maintains a traditional text and tune of the song; it contains a stylistic innovation attractive to the audience.¹²

The lack of English and Scottish ballads among borrowed items is an indication that the poetic style of many texts is closer to the broadside than to the Child ballad tradition; in most cases this preference seems to have been exercised in selecting rather than changing traditional texts, however.¹³

The most common subject of ballads is violent death, in which a love relationship is usually involved: one lover kills another or his rival, or commits suicide when rejected. The theme of impending execution or a lifetime in prison as punishment for murder is a common correlative.¹⁴

Negro tradition is only slightly represented in the borrowing of specific items.¹⁵

Clearly the five statements given here are supported by the evidence provided by the ballads from the sample collection. Only two of the thirty-two ballad types are Child ballads. Two "ballads of the Negro" (as Laws calls them) are given. Five of the ballads--"Knoxville Girl," "One Morning in May," "Polly Vaughn," "Pretty Fair Maiden in the Garden," and "Pretty Polly"--are "from British Broadside" if we are to believe Laws' classifications. The majority are patently American ballads, though each is colored by the "stylistic innovation" or characteristic sound of its respective performing group.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the ballads in bluegrass is their traditionality. Despite the aforementioned lack of emphasis on plot, the examples exhibit an astonishing degree of correspondence with variants known to have come directly from oral tradition. For example, "Come All You Tender-hearted," performed by the Stanley Brothers, is almost a word-for-word double of a song known only as "Fire Tragedy" and collected in the 1960s from a family where it had been passed through three generations.¹⁶ Another example, "The Drunken Driver," which by its very nature cannot be a terribly old song, and which was assumed by this author to have been written by the group that performs it, turns up as number 326 in Bruce Rosenberg's Checklist of folksongs from Virginia. Moreover, the Checklist entries under number 326 were collected in 1940--more than six years before the Stanley Brothers began their recording career.

Just as interesting as the similarities with variants collected from oral tradition are the differences manifested by the bluegrass ballads. The "Barbara Allen" text is notable for several reasons: first, at fifteen verses it is without doubt one of the longest songs ever recorded in bluegrass style. It should be kept in mind that most songs require from two to three minutes at the most; possibly this self-imposed time limitation is a legacy from the days of 78 rpm records, on which a song could last for a maximum of about three minutes. Parenthetically, it can be added that this three-minute limit is given by Smith as a possible explanation for the "capsulizing" of ballad plots in bluegrass,¹⁷ but even if that is so, "Barbara Allen" is certainly an exception. Another unusual aspect of this variant of the ballad is the disturbing reversal in the last line of the last stanza; the butchered rhyme of the commonplace ending draws the attention of even the sleepest listener to that ballad.

Another noteworthy point in the presentation of bluegrass ballads (and probably other traditional materials) is seen in the notes to the Bill Monroe version of "Roane County Prison." The song itself exists in oral tradition, as indicated by its presence in Virginia in 1940.¹⁸ However, on the Monroe version, credit is given to a "Joe Ahr." The same name is credited with "Out in the Cold World," another traditional song. It would appear that Mr. Ahr has copyrighted certain traditional songs in his own name, a practice which the author finds deplorable but not uncommon. However, there is also the strong possibility that "Joe Ahr" is a fictitious name, invented for the purpose of copyrighting traditional materials and yet not revealing the identity of the copyright holder (which may be the recording company) on the record jacket. This possibility is bolstered by the opinion of W.K. McNeil, who pointed out that the name "William York," used on Starday records, is known to be a creation of this type.¹⁹

The songs which are known to have been composed recently demand the attention of this study too. It is important to note that such songs as "The Flood," "The Picture of St. Helene," "Train Number 1262," and "That Beautiful Woman" contain elements which serve to relate them to the traditional ballads. Laying aside such necessary but mundane matters as stanzaic patterns, rhyme schemes, and ballad rhythm, one can see that these songs fulfill the traditional ballad role with respect to theme (disaster, inspiration, supernatural visitation, etc.), dramatic action, "leaping and lingering," and the aforementioned "emotional core." These similarities are important; they are the constants in the variable expression we call a ballad, and their particular arrangement is surely related to the culturally-determined expectations and standards of their authors, performers, and audiences.

In terms of structure, the bluegrass ballads do not present any bizarre or inexplicable trends. The most common rhyme scheme is abcb, though one also finds abab, aabb, and abcd patterns; in short, one finds what one finds for most American or broadside ballads. Fifty percent of the sample have refrains. Those with refrains are about equally divided between the "carol" (single line or repeated last line of stanza) and the "ballad burden" (refrain stanza) types. The singing of the "ballad burden" type of refrain is generally in question.

Due to the method of notation of many early ballads, it has not been clear whether or not the refrain is understood to be repeated after each stanza. A close look at the ballads in this sample which were of the "ballad burden" type revealed that (of nine types represented by eleven performances) five alternated the refrain with the narrative stanzas, three introduced the refrain somewhere in the course of the song and repeated it at the end, and only one placed the refrain stanza at both beginning and end ("Come All You Tenderhearted"). As can be seen, conclusions tend to become less than meaningful when one puts one's ballads into a statistical mortar and grinds them into nullities and nonentities, and no mortal can tell what other kinds of quiddities and quoddities.

Performance style varies widely, yet remains in accordance with the established patterns of the groups involved. The two pages preceding the transcribed ballad texts present in tabular form the ballad titles, some standard references, and the groups who perform them. In addition, the full names of the groups, where they are known to the author, are given immediately following the table. Investigation of these groups with respect to their usual performance styles reveals almost complete correspondence with the voicing in the ballad recordings; that is, groups whose usual voicing is the duet (e.g., Jim & Jesse) do not change this aspect of performance when they sing a ballad.

The conclusions of this paper may leave the reader unsatisfied. Those conclusions which can be overtly drawn appear to be either platitudinous, or (if a slight paraphrase will be permitted) must be taken with a ton of salt. Still, the conclusions deserve statement:

First, it must be granted that bluegrass music, though defined stylistically rather than in terms of its content, tends to utilize a repertoire which has its roots deep in the traditions of the rural South, and by extension, in the traditions of England, Scotland, and Ireland.

Second, an important part of the traditional aspect of bluegrass music is made manifest in the ballads which have been and continue to be used as an active part of bluegrass repertoires.

Third, bluegrass ballads are not always easily distinguished from other bluegrass songs. The difficulty seems to lie in the nature of the narrative-lyric dichotomy, which makes sense intuitively but which is difficult to apply analytically. Furthermore, it has been suggested that in bluegrass and country music (if not in a wider range of American music) the "emotional core" of a song is of primary importance to both audience and performer. As a result, the importance of the unified action is lessened, and with it the attention paid to the plot. Possibly this accounts for the lack of differentiation of ballad from lyric song among bluegrass musicians as well as for the statistical unimportance of narrative song which was revealed by this study.

Fifth, those ballads which come from traditional sources and survive in the bluegrass idiom retain an amazing correspondence with their oral counterparts.

Sixth, a number of ballads which appear to have been written recently were seen in the course of this study to be traditional, or at least to have documented traditional predecessors.

Seventh, those ballads which are truly of more recent origin, and whose composers are often well known, can be seen to mimic many of the most important aspects of the traditional ballads. It can be assumed that such mimicry is significant, and is perhaps due to the operation of cultural constants on the composers, performers, and audiences.

Eighth, refrains were noted to appear in almost precisely half the sample of ballad types. Both types of refrains, "carol" and "ballad burden," were represented, but their distribution and positioning within the song could not be seen as having any significance (though the problem may lie in the small sample size).

The ninth point which must be made here is actually a restatement of part of the preface: the most valuable conclusions which can be reached by both author and reader are those more intangible ones which stem from reading—or listening to—the ballads themselves.

APPENDIX I: SUMMARY OF BALLADS, REFERENCES, AND GROUPS

<u>Ballad</u>	<u>Reference</u>	<u>Group</u>
1. Barbara Allen	Child 84	Lilly Bros. & Don Stover
2. Charlie Lawson	Laws F 35	Country Gentlemen
3. Come All You Tenderhearted	<u>Kentucky Folklore Record</u> 9:3(1963):55	Stanley Bros.
4. Don't Make Me Go To Bed and I'll Be Good	written by Hugh Cross, 1943	Mac Wiseman
5. The Drunken Driver	Rosenberg, <u>Checklist</u> , no. 326	Stanley Bros.
6. Ellen Smith	Laws F 11	Country Gentlemen
7. The Flood	recorded at WYCB, Bristol, Tenn., in Feb., or March, 1957	Stanley Bros.
8. The Girl in the Blue Velvet Band (2)	Randolph, <u>Ozark Folk-</u> <u>songs</u> , no. 672	Doc Watson, Bill Monroe
9. Girl on the Green- briar Shore	Carter Family recording, Bluebird 8947 (1941)	The Greenbriar-Boys

<u>Ballad</u>	<u>Reference</u>	<u>Group</u>
10. Jesse James	Laws E 1	Country Gentlemen
11. John Hardy	Laws I 2	Lilly Bros. & Don Stover
12. Knoxville Girl	Laws P 35	Country Gentlemen
13. The Little Girl and the Dreadful Snake	written by Albert Price	Red Allen & Frank Wakefield
14. Little Glass of Wine	<u>Kentucky Folklore Record</u> 2:2(1956): 59	Lonesome Pine Fiddlers
15. Little Paper Boy	cf. Cox, <u>Folk Songs of the South</u> , no. 152	Jim & Jesse
16. Long Black Veil (2)	Marijohn Wilkin	Bill Monroe; Country Gentlemen
17. Miller's Cave	written by Clarence E. "Hank" Snow	Lilly Bros.
18. Molly and Tenbrooks	Laws H 27	Osborne Bros.
19. One Morning in May	Laws P 14	Bill Keith & Jim Rooney
20. On the Banks of the Ohio (2)	Laws F 5	Bill and Charlie Monroe; Lilly Bros. & Stover
21. The Picture at St. Helene	credit to "Driftwood"	Wayne Roney
22. Polly Vaughn	Laws O 36	The Dillards
23. Pretty Fair Maiden in the Garden	Laws N 42	Bill Monroe
24. Pretty Polly (3)	Laws P 36 B	Dillards; Bill Keith & Jim Rooney; Buzz Busby
25. Roane County (2)	Rosenberg, <u>Checklist</u> , no. 1204	Bill Monroe; Rod Moag & Rusty Marshall
26. Roving Gambler	Laws H 4	Country Gentlemen
27. Stagolee	Laws I 15	Bluegrass Alliance
28. That Beautiful Woman		Ralph Stanley
29. Silver Dagger (2)	Laws G 21	Stanley Bros.; Country Gentlemen

<u>Ballad</u>	<u>Reference</u>	<u>Group</u>
30. Tragic Romance	first recorded by Morris Bros., on Victor 58-0027	Mac Wiseman
31. Train Number 1262	written by Carson Robison, recorded by Vernon Dalhart	Flatt and Scruggs
32. The Waves on the Sea	Child 289	Lilly Bros. & Don Stover

Bill Keith and Jim Rooney: William B. Keith and James Rooney
 Bill Monroe: Bill Monroe and his Blue Grass Boys
 Charlie Monroe
 The Bluegrass Alliance
 Buzz Busby (no band name known to author)
 The Country Gentlemen
 The Dillards
 Doc Watson
 Flatt and Scruggs: Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs and the Foggy Mountain Boys
 The Greenbriar Boys
 Jim & Jesse: Jim and Jesse (McReynolds) and the Virginia Boys
 Lilly Bros.: The Lilly Brothers and Don Stover
 Lonesome Pine Fiddlers (also later known as the Goins Brothers)
 Mac Wiseman (no regular band)
 Osborne Brothers
 Ralph Stanley: Ralph Stanley and the Clinch Mountain Boys (after Carter
 Stanley's death in 1966)
 Red Allen and Frank Wakefield: Red Allen, Frank Wakefield, and the Kentuckians
 Rod Moag and Rusty Marshall
 Wayne Rayney

APPENDIX II: TEXTS1. Barbara Allen

Folkways FA 2433--"Folk Songs from the Southern Mountains"

The Lilly Brothers and Don Stover

Credit: "learned from Lilly grandparents"

Refrain: none

Rhyme: abcb

Voices: solo throughout

Reference: Child 84

In Scarlet town where I was born
There was a fair maid dwelling
Made every youth say "Well-a-day"
And her name was Barb'ry Allen.

It was in the merry month of June
When all things they were blooming
Sweet William on his death-bed lay
For the love of Barb'ry Allen.

He sent his servant to the town
Where Barbara was a-dwelling
"Sweet William's sick and he sent for you
If your name is Barb'ry Allen."

Slowly slowly she got up
And slowly she went nigh him
All she said when she got there
"Young man I think you're dying."

"Oh yes I'm sick, and I'm very sick
And Death is dwelling nigh me
No better, no better I never will be
If I can't have Barb'ry Allen."

"Oh yes you're sick, and you're very sick
And Death is dwelling nigh you
No better, no better you never will be
For you can't have Barb'ry Allen."

"Oh, do you remember in yonder's town
In yonder's town a-drinking
You gave your drink to the other girl
And you slighted Barbary Allen."

"Oh yes I remember in yonder's town
In yonder's town a-drinking
I gave my drink to the other girl
But my heart to Barb'ry Allen."

As she was on her pathway home
 The birds they kept a-singin'
 They sang so clear they seemed to sing
 "Hard-hearted Barb'ry Allen."

As she was a-walking across the field
 She heard the death-bells ringing
 They rang so clear they seemed to ring
 "Hard-hearted Barb'ry Allen."

She looked to the east, she looked to the west
 She spied a corpse a-comin'
 "Lay down, lay down that corpse of clay
 That I may look upon him."

The more she looked, the more she mourned
 'Til she fell to the ground a-cryin'
 Saying, "Pick me up and carry me home
 For I am now a-dying."

"O Father, O Father, go dig my grave
 Dig it long and narrow
 Sweet William died for me today
 I'll die for him tomorrow."

Sweet William was buried in the old churchyard
 And Barbara buried nigh him
 On William's grave grew a red red rose
 On Barbara's grew a green briar-rose.

They grew to the top of the old church tower
 'Til they couldn't grow any higher
 They twisted and tied in a true-lovers' knot
 The green briar grew around the red rose.

2. The Story of Charlie Lawson

Folkways FA 2409--"Country Songs Old and New"

The Country Gentlemen

Credit: none given

Refrain: none

Voices: trio throughout

Rhyme: abcb

Reference: Laws F 35

It was on last Christmas evening
 The snow was on the ground
 At his home in North Carolina
 The miner he was found.

His name was Charlie Lawson
 He had a loving wife
 But they never knew what caused him
 To take his family's life.

They say he killed his wife at first
 While the little ones did cry
 "Please Papa, won't you spare our lives
 For it is so hard to die."

But the ragin'man could not be stopped
 He would not heed their call
 He kept on firing fatal shots
 Until he killed them all.

They did not carry him to jail
 No lawyer would he pay;
 He'll have his trial in another land
 On a final judgment day.

They all were buried in a private grave
 While the angels watched all above;
 "Come home, come home, my little ones
 To the land of peace and love."

And now farewell, kind friends and home
 I'll see you here no more;
 But when we meet in another land
 Our troubles will be o'er.

3. Come All You Tenderhearted

Starday SLP 201---"The Mountain Music Sound of the Stanley Bros."

The Stanley Bros. and the Clinch Mtn. Boys

Credit: none given

Refrain: ballad burden

Rhyme: Refrain & 1st verse: abab
 other verses: abcb

Voices: Duet on refrain,
 solo on verses

References: Kentucky Folklore Record
 9:3 (1963):55

Refrain: Come all you tenderhearted
 Your attention I will call
 I'll tell you how it started
 Come listen one and all.

Last Wednesday night there was a light
 Seen shinin' away out upon the hill
 A mother she ran with all her might
 Wife everything was still.

She went into a neighbor's house
 Some few hundred yards away
 She set down and she talked with 'em
 But she didn't mean to stay.

"Now don't stay too long, dear Mother, there,
 For we'll be lonesome here."
 "Well, I'll give some liniment" she said
 "Then I'll return again."

But you know when she started home again
 Her house was in a flame
 She cried "O Lord! My babies!
 They're gone, and I'm the one that's to blame."

She cried "Alas, how sad they sleep
 Wrapped up in a red-hot flame."
 She bursted all asunder then
 And the flames, they rolled over her head.

Their little bones, they lay there on the ground
 They both lay face to face
 And each other they did entwine
 And each other they did embrace.

Refrain.

4. Don't Make Me Go to Bed and I'll Be Good

Dot DLP 25731--"Bluegrass"

Mac Wiseman

Credit: adapted by Mac Wiseman

Refrain: ballad burden

Voices: solo throughout

Rhyme: abcb

Reference: none

Our laughing baby boy, one evening in his play
 Disturbed the household with his noisy glee
 I warned him to be quiet, but soon he disobeyed
 For he would soon forget a word from me.

I called him to my side and said "Son, you must go to bed,
 Your conduct has been very very rude"
 With quivering lips and tear-filled eyes he pleaded then with me,
 "Don't make me go to bed and I'll be good."

Our lives had just been gladdened by his bright ascending beams
 Our boy now in our hearts was very dear;
 I hastened to his bed, found him talking in his sleep,
 He didn't seem to know that we were near.

I took him in my arms and found his body racked with pain
 To ease his pain we did the best we could
 It broke my heart to hear him crying loudly in his sleep
 "Don't make me go to bed and I'll be good."

Refrain: "Don't, Papa, and I'll be good,
 Don't, Papa, and I'll be good."
 That's what I heard him say
 And it haunts me night and day
 Don't make me go to bed and I'll be good."

How sorrow fills the heart, and how fears oppress the mind,
 When danger hovers 'round the one we love;
 He lingered but a day, then his spirit passed away
 To join the angel chorus up above.

All night and day we watched and prayed and never left his side,
 To give him up it seemed we never could
 It broke my heart to hear him saying just before he died,
 "Don't make me go to bed, and I'll be good."

Refrain.

5. The Drunken Driver

King 791--"Award Winners at the Folk Song Festival"

The Stanley Bros. and the Clinch Mountain Boys

Credit: Paul Westmoreland

Refrain: none

Rhyme: abcb

Voices: duet throughout

Reference: Rosenberg, Checklist, 326

Now listen you drunken drivers
 While here on Earth you dwell:
 You'll never know when the time will come,
 You'll have to say "farewell."

I saw an accident one day
 Should charm the heart of man,
 And teach him never to drink a drop
 While a steerin'-wheel's in his hand.

This awful accident occurred
 On the twentieth day of May
 It caused two lovin' children
 To sleep beneath the clay.

These two dear kids walked side by side
 Upon the state highway
 Their lovin' mother she had died
 Their father had run away.

They were talkin' of their lovin' parents
 How sad their hearts did feel
 When around the curve come a speedin' car
 With a drunk man at the wheel.

The driver saw these two dear kids
 And hooted a drunkard's sound:
 "Get out of the road, you little fools"
 And the car it knocked them down.

The driver staggered from his car
 To see what he had done
 His heart sank within him
 When he saw his dyin' son.

He then picked up his little ones
 And carried them to his car
 And kneelin' on the runnin'-board
 He prayed a drunkard's prayer.

Sayin' "Please, O Lord, forgive me
 For this awful crime I've done"
 His attention then was called away
 To the words of his dyin' son:

Sayin' "Take us to our mother, Dad,
 She sleeps beneath the ground;
 It was you and her we were talkin' about
 When the car it knocked us down."

"And please, dear Dad, don't drink no more
 While drivin' on your way,
 But meet us with our mother, Dad,
 In heaven some sweet day."

6. Ellen Smith

Folkways FA 2409---"Country Songs Old and New"

The Country Gentlemen

Credit: Peter de Graff

Refrain: none

Voices: solo throughout

Rhyme: aa

Reference: Laws F 11

Poor Ellen Smith, how was she found
 Shot through the heart, lyin' cold on the ground.

Her clothes were all scattered, and fallen on the ground
 The blood marks the spot where poor Ellen was found.

They picked up their rifles and hunted me down
They found me a-loafin' all around town.

I got a letter yesterday, I read it today,
The flowers on her grave have all faded away.

Someday I'll go home, and say, when I go,
On poor Ellen's grave pretty flowers I'll stow.

I've been in this prison for twenty long years
Each night I see Ellen through my bitter tears.

That warden just told me that soon I'll be free
To go to her grave 'neath that old willow tree.

My days in this prison are ending at last
I'll never be free from the sins of my past.

Poor Ellen Smith, how was she found
Shot through the heart, lyin' cold on the ground.

7. The Flood

Mercury MG 20349--"Country Pickin' and Singin'!"

The Stanley Bros. and the Clinch Mtn. Boys

Credit: none given

Refrain: none

Rhyme: aabb

Voices: Duet throughout

Reference: none

Now listen good people wherever you are
And hear a sad story you've been waiting for
About the flood of '57 as it happened to be
In Kentucky, Old Virginia, and east Tennessee.

How the rains came down and we often had seen
To swim a broad river or some little stream
But this one was different, and we soon realized
That the floods were raging, and we fought for our lives.

Many were praying as never before
As the high muddy water came in through their door
Some were left homeless, their life-savings gone
But their lives had been spared, and the cold rains came on.

Little babies were cryin', and others were sad
For in all our lives we'd seen nothing so bad
But the brave and the strong were there by the score
To help the sick and needy to safety on the shore.

How we all escaped it, I never will know
 It must have been God's will, it was not time to go;
 And by the help of His Mercy, some managed to smile,
 And face the disaster, while the waters run wild.

8.a. The Girl in the Blue Velvet Band

Vanguard VSD-79276--"Good Deal! (Doc Watson) in Nashville"

Doc Watson

Credit: Cliff Carlisle and Mel Foree

Refrain: none

Rhyme: abcb

Voices: solo throughout

Reference: Randolph, Ozark Folksongs no 672

One night while out for a ramble
 The hour was just about nine
 I met a young maiden in 'Fricso
 On the corner of Cherry and Pine.

On her face there was beauty of Nature
 And her eyelid it seemed to expand
 Her hair was so rich and so brilliant
 Entwined in a blue velvet band.

We strolled down the long street together
 In my pocket she placed her small hand
 Planted the evidence on me
 That girl in the blue velvet band.

Then I heard the wild scream of the siren
 And the girl in the blue velvet band
 She left me to face all the trouble
 With a diamond that was worth ten grand.

They sent me to San Quentin for stealin'
 And God knows I'm an innocent man
 For the guilty one now, she lies dying
 That girl in the blue velvet band.

I'll be out in a year then I'm leaving
 But I'll carry the name of a man
 Who spent ten years in this prison
 For the girl in the blue velvet band.

Last night, while bedtime was ringing
 I was standing close to the bars
 I fancied I could hear her voice calling
 From far out on the ocean of stars.

I'll be out in a year, then I'm leaving
 But I'll carry the name of the man
 Who spent ten years in this prison
 For the girl in the blue velvet band.

8.b. The Girl in the Blue Velvet Band

Harmony HL 7290---"The Great Bill Monroe"

Bill Monroe and his Blue Grass Boys

Credit: M. Foree and Cliff Carlisle

Refrain: none

Rhyme: abcb

Voices: solo throughout

Reference: Randolph, Ozark Folksongs, no 672

One night while out for a ramble
 The hour was just about nine
 I met a young maiden in 'Frisco
 On the corner of Cherry and Pine.

On her face there was beauty of nature
 And her eyelid it seemed to expand
 Her hair was so rich and so brilliant
 Entwined in a blue velvet band.

We strolled down the street together
 In my pocket she placed her small hand
 Planted the evidence on me
 That girl in the blue velvet band.

Then I heard the wild scream of the siren
 And the girl in the blue velvet band
 She left me to face all the trouble
 For a diamond that was worth ten grand.

At night when bedtime was ringin'
 Standin' close to the bars
 I fancied I heard a voice callin'
 Far out on the ocean of stars.

They sent me to San Quentin for stealin'
 And God knows I'm an innocent man
 For the guilty one now, she lies dyin'
 That girl in the blue velvet band.

I'll be out in a year then I'm leaving
 But I'll carry the name of the man
 Who spent ten years in this prison
 For the girl in the blue velvet band.

And when I get out I'll endeavor
 To live in some other land
 I'll bid farewell to old 'Frisco
 And the grave of my blue velvet band.

9. Girl on the Greenbriar Shore

Vanguard VRS-9104--"The Greenbriar Boys"

The Greenbriar Boys

Credit: A.P. Carter--Peer International Rhyme:

Refrain: none

Reference: Carter Family recording,
Bluebird 8947 (1941)

Voices: duet throughout

'Twas in the year of '92
In the merry month of June
I left my mother, and a home so dear
To court that girl on the Greenbriar shore.

My mother dear, she came to me
Said "Son, O Son, don't go
Don't leave your mother, and a home so dear
To court that girl on the Greenbriar shore."

When I was young and reckless too
And I craved a reckless life
I left my mother, and a home so dear
And I took that girl to be my wife.

Well, her hair was dark and curly too
And her eyes were lovin' blue
Her cheeks were like the red red rose
That girl I loved on the Greenbriar shore.

Well, the years rolled on, and the months rolled by
She left me all alone,
Now I remember, my mother said,
"Never trust that girl on the Greenbriar shore."

10. Jesse James

Folkways FA 2409--"Country Songs Old and New"

The Country Gentlemen

Credit: "arranged by John Duffy"

Refrain: ballad burden

Rhyme: abcb

Voices: solo on verses, trio on refrains Reference: Laws E 1

Jesse James was a lad who robbed many a man
He stopped the Glendale train
Took from the rich and he gave to the poor
He'd a heart, a hand, and a brain.

Refrain: Jesse had a wife, to mourn for his life
Three children they were brave
But that dirty little coward, who shot Mr. Howard
Has laid poor Jesse in his grave.

It was on a Wednesday night when the moon was shinin' bright
 He stopped the Glendale train
 People they did say for many miles away
 It was robbed by Frank and Jesse James.

Refrain.

It was Robert Ford, that dirty little coward
 I wonder how he feels
 For he ate of Jesse's bread and he slept in Jesse's bed
 And he laid poor Jesse in his grave.

Refrain.

It was on a Saturday night, when Jesse was at home
 Talkin' to his family brave
 Robert Ford came along like a thief in the night
 And he laid poor Jesse in his grave.

Refrain.

11. John Hardy

Folkways FA 2433--"Folk Songs from the Southern Mountains"

The Lilly Brothers and Don Stover

Credit: Carter Family, Victor 40190

Refrain: Carol Rhyme: abcb

Voices: solo throughout Reference: Laws I 2

John Hardy he was a desperate little man
 He carried two guns every day
 He shot a man on the West Virginia line
 And you ought to seen John Hardy getting away, Lord, Lord,
 You ought to seen John Hardy getting away.

John Hardy got down to the East Stone bridge
 He thought there he would go free
 But up stepped a man and took him by his arm
 Johnny walk along with me, poor boy,
 Johnny walk along with me.

They took John Hardy and they locked him in a cell
 They tried to go his bail
 But money won't go a murderer's bail
 So they locked John Hardy back in cell, Lord, Lord,
 They locked John Hardy back in cell.

John Hardy he had a pretty little girl
 The dress she wore was blue
 She came a-skip-pin' through the old jailhouse
 Saying, "Poppa, I've been true to you" Lord, Lord,
 "Poppa, I've been true to you."

John Hardy he had a pretty little girl
 The dress she wore was red
 She came a-skip-pin' through the old jailhouse
 Sayin' "Poppa, I would rather be dead," Lord, Lord,
 "Poppa, I would rather be dead."

I've been to the east and I've been to the west,
 I've been all around this world
 Been to the river and I've been baptized
 And now I'm on my hanging ground, Lord, Lord,
 Now I'm on my hanging ground.

12. Knoxville Girl

Design SDLP-613--"Hootenanny"

John Duffy and the Country Gentlemen

Credit: none given

Refrain: none

Voices: duet throughout

Rhyme: aabb

Reference: Laws P 35

I met a little girl in Knoxville, a town we all know well
 And every Sunday evening, out in her hall I'd dwell
 We went to take an evening walk, about a mile from town
 I picked a stick up off the ground, and knocked that fair girl down.

She fell down on her bended knees, for mercy she did cry
 "O Willie, dear, don't kill me here, I'm unprepared to die,"
 She never spoke another word, I only beat her more
 Until the ground around me, within her blood did flow.

I took her by her golden curls, and drug her 'round and 'round
 Throwing her into the river, that flows through Knoxville town
 "Go down, go down, you Knoxville girl, with the dark and the roving eye,
 Go down, go down, you Knoxville girl, you could never be my bride."

I started back to Knoxville, got there about midnight
 My mother she was worried, and woke up in a fright
 Saying "Dear Son, what have you done, to bloody your clothes so?"
 I told my anxious mother, I was bleeding at the nose.

I called for me a candle to light myself to bed
 I called for me a handkerchief to bind my achin' head
 Rolled and tumbled the whole night through, as troubles was for me,
 Like flames of Hell around my bed and in my eyes did see.

They carried me down to Knoxville, and put me in a jail
 My friends all tried to get me out, but none could go my bail,
 I'm here to waste my life away, down in this dirty old cell,
 Because I murdered that Knoxville girl, the girl I loved so well.

13. The Little Girl and the Dreadful Snake

Folkways FA 2408--"bluegrass"

Red Allen, Frank Wakefield, and the Kentuckians

Credit: Bill Monroe

Refrain: ballad burden

Rhyme: abcb plus some internal rhymes

Voices: trio throughout

Reference: none

Our darling wandered far away, while she was out at play
 Lost in the woods, she couldn't hear a sound
 She was our darling girl, the sweetest thing in all the world
 We searched for her, but she couldn't be found.

Refrain: I heard the scream of a little girl, far away,
 "Hurry, Daddy, there's an awful dreadful snake,"
 I ran as fast as I could, through the dark and weary woods
 But I reached our darling girl too late.

Oh, I began to sigh, I knew that soon she'd have to die
 For the snake was warning me close by
 I held her close to my face, she said "Daddy, kill that snake,
 It's getting dark, tell Mommy 'goodbye!'"

Refrain.

To all parents I must say, don't let your children stray away
 They need your love to guide them along
 O God, I pray we'll see our darling some day
 It seems I still can hear her voice around our home.

Refrain.

14. Little Glass of Wine

Starday SLP 201--"The Mountain Music Sound of the Stanley Bros."

The Lonesome Pine Fiddlers

Credit: none given

Refrain: none

Rhyme: abcb

Voices: duet throughout

Reference: Kentucky Folklore Record
 2:2 (1956):59

"Come little girl, let's go get married"
 My love's so great, how can she like me?
 "I'll work for you both late and early
 At my wedding my little wife you'll be."

"O Willie dear, let's both consider
 We're both too young to be married now
 When we're married we're bound together
 Let's stay single, just one more year."

He went to the ball where she was dancing
 A jealous thought came through his mind
 "I'll kill that girl, my own true lover
 Won't let another man beat my time."

He went to the bar, and he called her to him
 Said, "Willie dear, what d'you want with me?"
 "Come and drink wine with the one that loves you
 More than anyone else, you know" said he.

While they were at the bar a-drinkin'
 That same old thought came through his mind
 He killed that girl, his own true lover
 He gave her poison in a glass of wine.

She laid her head over on his shoulder
 Said, "Willie dear, please take me home,
 That glass of wine that I's just drinkin'
 Has gone to my head, and got me wrong."

He laid his head over on the pillow
 "Let me read you the law, let me tell you my mind
 Molly dear, I'm sorry to tell you
 We both drank poison in a glass of wine."

They folded their arms around each other
 They cast their eyes up to the sky
 O God, O God! Ain't this a pity
 That both true lovers are bound to die.

15. The Little Paper Boy

Epic LN 24074--"Bluegrass Classics"

Jim and Jesse (McReynolds) and the Virginia Boys

Credit: Public Domain

Refrain: none

Voices: duet throughout

Rhyme: aabb

Reference: none, but compare Cox,
Folk Songs of the South, no. 152.

Out on the corner, standing so bold
 Stood a little paper boy, so ragged and cold.
 And as the crowd came passing by
 These words he said, with tears in his eye:

"Please buy a paper from me
 So I can get me something to eat.
 I haven't eat since early this morn
 You see my clothes are ragged and torn."

"Out in this cold wide world alone
 I have no place to call my home
 I haven't had the chance that the other kids had
 I have no mother, or either a dad."

Early next morning as the crowd passed by
 The little boy was gone, and they all wondered why
 The search began, and they found him dead
 He died with the papers under his head.

He was lying on the ground, and he felt no pain
 Nobody there his body to claim
 Now he is gone to Heaven we know
 The little paper boy, who died in the snow.

16.a. Long Black Veil

Decca DL 75213---"Kentucky Blue Grass"
 Bill Monroe and his Blue Grass boys
 Credit: Marijohn Wilkin---Danny Dill
 Refrain: ballad burden Rhyme: aabb
 Voices: solo throughout Reference: none

Ten years ago on a cold dark night
 Someone was killed 'neath the town hall light
 There were few at the scene, but they all agreed
 That the slayer who ran looked a lot like me."

The judge said, "Son, what is your alibi?
 If you were somewhere else, then you won't have to die."
 I spoke not a word, although it meant my life,
 For I'd been in the arms of my best friend's wife.

Refrain: She walks these hills, in a long black veil
 She visits my grave when the night winds wail
 Nobody knows, nobody sees,
 Nobody knows but me.

The scaffold was high, and eternity near
 She stood in the crowd, and shed not a tear
 But sometimes at night, when the gold wind moans
 In a long black veil she cries o'er my bones.

Refrain.

16.b. Long Black Veil

Folkways FA 2409--"Country Songs Old and New"

The Country Gentlemen

Credit: Dill and Wilkin

Refrain: ballad burden

Voices: trio throughout

Rhyme: aabb

Reference: none

Ten years ago on a cold dark night
 Someone was killed 'neath the town hall light
 That people that saw, they all agreed
 That the slayer who ran looked a lot like me.

The judge said, "Son, what is your alibi?
 If you were somewhere else, then you won't have to die."
 I spoke not a word, 'though it meant my life
 For I'd been in the arms of my best friend's wife.

Refrain: She walks these hills, in a long black veil
 She visits my grave when the night winds wail
 Nobody knows, nobody sees,
 Nobody knows but me.

The scaffold was high, and eternity near
 She stood in the crowd and shed not a tear
 And sometimes at night when the cold winds moan
 In a long black veil she cries o'er my bones.

Refrain, and repeat last line.

17. Miller's Cave

Prestige Folklore 14010--"Bluegrass Breakdown"

The Lilly Brothers

Credit: "...from a Hank Snow recording..."

Refrain: none

Voices: solo throughout

Rhyme: abcb

Reference: none

'Way down in the state of Georgia
 Through the swamps and everglades
 There's a hole in Tiger Mountain
 God help the man who gets lost in Miller's Cave.

I had a girl in Waycross, Georgia
 But she had unfaithful ways
 She made me feel I was unwanted
 Like the bats and the bears in Miller's Cave.

I couldn't stand the way she did me
I couldn't take her low-down ways
Before I'll stay with a cheatin' woman
I'll go live with the bears in Miller's Cave.

I caught her out one Sunday morning
With a man they called Big Dave
The meanest man in Waycross, Georgia
I'd rather fight a mountain lion in Miller's Cave.

I said, "You'll pay, both you and Davy,
I'm gonna see you in your grave."
They laughed at me, and then I shot 'em
I took their cheatin', schemin' bones to Miller's Cave.

They're gonna make me feel unwanted
But I showed her I was brave
The most wanted man in the state of Georgia
They'll never find me 'cause I'm lost in Miller's Cave.

18. Molly and Tenbrooks

Decca 74993--"Yesterday, Today, and the Osborne Bros."

The Osborne Brothers

Credit: Bill Monroe

Refrain: carol

Voices: solo throughout

Rhyme: aa

Reference: Laws H 27

Run, old Molly, run, run, old Molly, run;
Tenbrooks gonna beat you to the bright shinin' sun.
To the bright shi in' sun, O Lord, to the bright shinin' sun.

Tenbrooks was a big bay horse, he rode that shaggy mare;
He run all around Memphis, he beat the Memphis train.
Beat the Memphis train, O lord, beat the Memphis train.

Tenbrooks said to Molly, "What made your head so red?"
"Runnin' in the hot sun put a fever in my head."
"Fever in my head," O Lord, "fever in my head."

Molly said to Tenbrooks, "You're lookin' mighty squirreled,"
Tenbrooks said, "Molly, I'm a-leavin' this old world."
"Leavin' this old world," O Lord, "leavin' this old world."

Out in California, where Molly did as she please,
Come back to old Kentucky, got beat with all ease.
Beat with all ease, O Lord, beat with all ease.

The women's all a-laughin', the children all a-cryin',
 Men all a-hollerin', Old Tenbrooks a-flyin'.
 Old Tenbrooks a-flying, O Lord, Old Tenbrooks a-flying.

"Kyper, Kyper, you're not a-ridin' right,"
 Molly's beating old Tenbrooks clear out of sight.
 Clear out of sight, O Lord, clear out of sight.

"Kyper, Kyper, Kyper, my son,
 Give ol' Tenbrooks the bridle, and let ol' Tenbrooks run."
 "Let ol' Tenbrooks run, O Lord, let old Tenbrooks run."

"Go and get your Tenbrooks, and hitch him in the shade
 We're gonna bury ol' Molly in a coffin ready-made,"
 "Coffin ready-made," O Lord, "coffin ready-made."

19. One Morning in May

Prestige Folklore 14002---"Bluegrass"

Bill Keith and Jim Rooney

Credit: "...very old, possibly Irish..."

Refrain: carol refrain (of sorts) Rhyme: sabb

Voices: solo throughout Reference: Laws P 14

One morning, one morning, one morning in May
 I spied a fair couple a-making their way
 And one was a maiden so bright and so fair
 The other was a soldier, and a brave volunteer.

"Good morning, good morning, good morning to thee
 Oh, where are you going, my pretty lady?"
 "Oh, I'm a-going to the banks of the sea,
 To see the waters gliding, hear the nightingales sing."

Well, they hadn't been a-standing but a minute or two
 When out from his knapsack a fiddle he drew
 And the tune he was playing made the valleys all ring
 "Oh, see the waters gliding, hear the nightingales sing."

"Pretty lady, pretty lady, it's time to give o'er."
 "Oh, no, pretty soldier, please play one tune more,
 For I'd rather hear your fiddle, or the touch of one string
 Than see the waters gliding, hear the nightingales sing."

"Pretty soldier, pretty soldier, will you marry me?"
 "Oh, no, pretty lady, that never can be
 I've a wife in old London and children twice three,
 Two wives in the army's too many for me."

"Well I'll go back to London, and I'll stay there one year,
 And often I'll think of you, my little dear,
 And when I return it will be in the spring
 To see the waters gliding, hear the nightingales sing."

20.a. On the Banks of the Ohio

RCA Camden CAL-774--"Early Blue Grass Music"	Rhyme:	Refrain:	abcc
Bill and Charlie Monroe	1st verse:		abab
Credit: Joe Harris	2nd verse:		aabb
Refrain: ballad burden	3rd verse:		aabc
Reference: Laws F 5	4th verse:		aabb

Voices: Duet throughout

I asked my love to take a walk
 Just to walk a little way
 And as we walked, oh may we talk
 All about our wedding day.

Refrain: Only say that you'll be mine
 In my home we'll happy be
 Down beside where the waters flow
 On the banks of the Ohio.

He taken her by the lily-white hand
 And he dragged her down to the river bank
 There he pushed her in to drown
 And he watched her as she floated down.

Refrain.

Was coming home 'tween twelve and one
 Thinkin' of what he had done
 He murdered the only girl I loved
 Because she would not marry me.

Refrain.

The very next morning, 'bout half past four
 The sheriff's men knocked at my door
 "Now, young man, come now let's go
 Down to the banks of the Ohio."

Refrain.

20.b. Down on the Banks of the Ohio

Folkways FA 2433--"Folk Songs from the Southern Mountains"

The Lilly Brothers and Don Stover

Credit: "...old time folk song..."

Refrain: ballad burden

Rhyme: abab and aabb and free

Voices: duet throughout

Reference: Laws F 5

Come my love, let's take a walk
 Just a little ways away
 While we walk away we'll talk
 We'll talk about our wedding day.

Refrain: Only say that you'll be mine
 In our home we'll happy be
 Down beside where the waters flow
 Down on the banks of the Ohio.

I drew my knife across her throat
 And to my breast she gently pressed
 She cried, "O Willie, don't take my life
 I'm unprepared to die, you see."

Refrain.

I taken her by her lily-white hand
 I led her down and I made her stand
 There I plunged her in to drown
 And I watched her while she floated down.

Refrain.

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

Refrain.

21. The Picture at St. Helene

Starday SLP 169--"More Banjo in the Hills"

Wayne Rayney

Credit: Driftwood (Jimmy Driftwood)

Rhyme: ababcdcd

Refrain: carol

Reference: none

Voices: four lines solo, four lines and refrain duet

I met a girl in a cheap hotel
 With features oh so fine
 I said, "Hello" and we set a spell
 As I painted her face divine

I took away all trace of her sins
 Put a babe in her arms, you see,
 I painted her like she should have been
 If the Devil had let her be
 I painted her like she should have been
 If the Devil had let her be.

She walked away with her cigarette
 And I thought it strangely odd
 When a gambler came and said, "I'll bet
 You've painted the Mother of God."
 So I added a halo to the scene
 And she brought ten thousand pounds
 She hangs on the wall of St. Helene,
 In the biggest church in town;
 She hangs on the wall at St. Helene,
 In the biggest church in town.

My model attracted a wealthy guy
 He offered her gold for a kiss
 But she turned him down and I wondered why
 She would miss a deal like this.
 Then I followed her to the marble hall,
 And I saw her stand serene
 Before the picture on the wall
 In the church at St. Helene,
 Before the picture on the wall
 In the church at St. Helene.

22. Polly Vaughn

Elektra EKL 232--"Back Porch Bluegrass"

The Dillards

Credit: "new lyrics by R. Dillard..."

Refrain: ballad burden

Rhyme: aabb

Voices: solo on verses, trio on refrain Reference: Laws 0 36

Now come, all ye hunters, who follow the gun
 Beware of your shooting at the setting of the sun
 For Polly's own true love, he shot in the dark
 But, oh, and alas! Polly Vaughn was his mark.

Refrain: For she'd her apron wrapped about her, and he took her for a swan,
 Oh, and alas! it was she, Polly Vaughn.

He ran up beside her, and saw that it was she,
 Crying, "Polly, O Polly, have I killed thee?"
 He lifted up her head, and saw that she was dead
 And a fountain of tears for his true love he shed.

Refrain.

In the middle of the night Polly Vaughn did appear
Crying, "Jimmy, O Jimmy, you must have no fear;
Just tell them you were hunting, when your trial day has come
And you won't be convicted for what you have done.

Refrain: For I'd my apron wrapped about me, and you took me for a swan.
(modified) Oh, and alas! it was me, Polly Vaughn."

In the middle of the trial, Polly Vaughn did appear
Crying "Uncle, O Uncle, Jimmy Ramden must go clear,"
The lawyers and the judges stood around in a row
In the middle Polly Vaughn like some fountain of snow.

Refrain, and final repeat of refrain's 2nd line.

23. Pretty Fair Maiden in the Garden

DL 74896 (Decca)---"Blue Grass Time"

Bill Monroe and his Blue Grass Boys

Credit: Bill Monroe

Refrain: none

Rhyme: abcb

Voices: solo throughout

Reference: Laws N 42

A pretty fair maiden in the garden
A cowboy he came a-ridin' by
He rode up to the fence beside her
Said, "Pretty fair maiden, won't you be my bride?"

"Oh, no, no, no, no sir" she answered,
"Would you impose on a girl like me?
I have a sweetheart among the cowboys
Who has for four years been gone from me."

"Perhaps your sweetheart he is drowned
Or perhaps he's on some battlefield slain
Or perhaps he's to some pretty girl married
Or perhaps he'll never return again."

"Well, if he's dead I know he's happy
And if he's alive I'll see him again
And if he's to some pretty girl married
I'll love the girl that married him."

Down on his knees he knelt beside her
And he asked of her to be his bride
And he told her that he was her cowboy
Who had returned to be by her side.

24.a. Pretty Polly

Elektra EKL-265--"Live! Almost!"

The Dillardards

Credit: Traditional

Refrain: carol

Voices: 1st, 3rd, 5th, 7th stanzas are trio, Rhyme: aa
2nd, 4th, 6th are solo Reference: Laws P 36 B

When I lived in London, a city belle in town;
When I lived in London, a city belle in town;
I met a beautiful lady, her beauty'd never been found.

They called her Pretty Polly, come go along with me,
(Repeat)
Before we get married some pleasure we'll see.

"Willie, O Willie, I'm afraid of your ways,
(Repeat)
The way you've been ramblin' you'll lead me astray."

They went upon the mountain, and what did they spy?
(Repeat)
A newly-dug grave and a spade lyin' by.

"Polly, Pretty Polly, your guess is about right,
(Repeat)
I dug on your grave in the heart of last night."

He stabbed her to her heart and her heart's blood did flow,
(Repeat)
And into the grave Pretty Polly did go.

He threw a little dirt over her, and turned to go home,
(Repeat)
Leaving nothing behind but the wild birds to moan.

Pretty Polly, Pretty Polly, Pretty Polly!

24.b. Pretty Polly

Prestige Folklore 14002--"Bluegrass"

Bill Keith and Jim Rooney

Credit: "...old murder ballad..."

Refrain: carol

Voices: solo throughout

Rhyme: aa

Reference: Laws P 36 B

"Polly, Pretty Polly, come go along with me,
(Repeat)
Before we get married some pleasure to see."

Well, she jumped up behind me, and away we did go
 (Repeat)
 Over the hills and dark valleys below.

Well, we rode over hills and dark valleys so deep
 (Repeat)
 Pretty Polly she mistrusted and then began to weep.

"O Willie, O Willie, I'm afraid of your ways
 (Repeat)
 The way you are rambling, gonna lead me astray."

Well, they went upon the mountain and what did they spy?
 (Repeat)
 A newly-dug grave with a spade lyin' by.

"Pretty Polly, Pretty Polly, your guess is about right
 (Repeat)
 I been workin' on your grave the long hours of last night."

Well, I opened her bosom as white as the snow
 (Repeat)
 I stuck to the heart, and her heart's blood did flow.

I threw on a little dirt, Lord, I started for home
 (Repeat)
 Leavin' only the trees and the wild birds to moan.

Polly, Pretty Polly, oh yonder she stands
 (Repeat)
 Cold rings on her fingers, her lily-white hands.

Oh, the rings on her fingers, they're shinin' like gold
 (Repeat)
 Gonna see Pretty Polly before she gets too old.

24.c. Pretty Polly

Diplomat D2601--"Banjo in the Bluegrass"

Buzz Busby

Credit: ----

Refrain: carol

Voices: solo throughout

Rhyme: aa

Reference: Laws P 36 B

"Polly, Pretty Polly, won't you take me in time?
 (Repeat)

Come sit here beside me, and I'll tell you my mind."

"My mind is to marry, and never to part
 (Repeat)
 The first time I saw you it wounded my heart."

"Willie, little Willie, I'm afraid of your ways
 (Repeat)
 Your ramblin' and gamblin' will lead me astray."

He led her over mountains and valleys so deep
 (Repeat)
 Polly then mistrusted him and then began to weep.

She looked around behind her and what did she spy
 (Repeat)
 A newly-dug grave with a spade lyin' by.

"Polly, Pretty Polly, your guess is about right
 (Repeat)
 I dug on your grave the biggest part of last night."

He went down to the jailhouse and what did he say
 (Repeat)
 "I killed Pretty Polly and I'm tryin' to get away."

25.a. Roane County Prison

Vocalion VL 73870--"Blue Grass Style"

Bill Monroe and his Blue Grass Boys

Credit: Joe Ahr

Refrain: none

Voices: solo throughout

Rhyme: abcb

Reference: Rosenberg, Checklist, no. 1204.

In the beautiful hills in the midst of Roane County
 There's where I have roamed for many a long year
 There's where my heart's been standing most ever
 There's where the first step of misfortune I made.

I's about thirty years when I courted and married
 Armanda Gilbert /Gilgood?/ was then called my wife
 Her brother he stabbed me for some unknown reason
 Just three months later I'd taken Tom's life.

I's captured and tried in the Village of Kingston
 Not a man in that county would speak one kind word;
 When the jury came in with the verdict next morning
 "A lifetime in prison" was the words that I heard.

When the train pulled out, poor Mother stood weeping
 And Sister she sat all alone with a sigh
 And the last words I heard was "Willie, God bless you"
 Was "Willie, God bless you, God bless you, goodbye."

In the scorching hot sand of the foundry I'm working
 Toilin' and working my poor life away
 They'll measure my grave on the banks of old Cumberland
 Just as soon as I finish the rest of my days.

Boys, when you write home from this prison in Nashville
 Place one of my songs in your letter for me.

25.b. Roane County Prison

Missouri Area Bluegrass Committee MABC-101--"Grass Cuttin Time in Missouri"

Rod. Moag and Rusty Marshall

Credit: Charles Monroe

Refrain: none

Voices: duet throughout

Rhyme: abcb

Reference: Rosenberg, Checklist, no. 1204

In the beautiful hills in the midst of Roane County
 There's where I have roamed for many a long year
 There's where my heart is standing most ever
 There's where the first step of misfortune I made.

I's about thirty years when I courted and married
 Armanda Gillgood was then called my wife
 For some unknown reason her Brother Tom stabbed me
 Just three months later I'd taken Tom's life.

I's captured and tried in the village of Spencer
 Not a man in that county would speak one kind word
 When the jury came in with verdict next morning
 "A lifetime in prison" was the words that I heard.

When the train pulled out, poor Mother stood weeping
 And Sister she sat alone with a sigh
 And the last words I heard was "Billy, God bless you,"
 Was "Billy, God bless you, God bless you, goodbye."

In the scorching hot sand of the foundry I'm working
 Just working and toiling my life all away
 They'll measure my grave on the banks of old Cumberland
 Just as soon as I finish the rest of my days.

No matter what happens to me in Roane County
 No matter how long my sentence may be
 Boys, when you write home from this dirty old prison
 Place one of my songs in your letter for me.

26. Roving Gambler

Folkways FA 2409--"Country Songs Old and New"

The Country Gentlemen

Credit: "arranged by John Duffy"

Refrain: carol

Rhyme: abcb

Voices: solo on verses; trio on refrain Reference: Laws H 4

I am a roving gambler
 Gambled all around
 Whenever I meet with a deck of cards
 I lay my money down.

Refrain: Lay my money down, I lay my money down.

I had not been in 'Frisco
 Many more weeks than three
 I met up with a pretty little girl
 She fell in love with me.

Refrain: Fell in love with me, fell in love with me.

She took me in her parlor
 She cooled me with her fan
 Whispered low in her mother's ear
 "Love this gamblin' man."

Refrain: "Love this gamblin' man, love this gamblin' man."

"O Daughter, O dear Daughter,
 How can you treat me so?
 Leave your dear old mother
 And with the gambler go."

Refrain: "With the gambler go, with the gambler go."

"O Mother, O dear Mother,
 I'll tell you if I can
 If you ever see me comin' back
 I'll be with the gamblin' man."

Refrain: "With the gamblin' man, with the gamblin' man."

I left her in 'Frisco
 I wound up in Maine
 I met up with a gamblin' man
 We got in a poker game.

Refrain: Got in a poker game, got in a poker game.

He put his money in the pot
 And dealt the cards around
 Saw him deal from the bottom of the deck
 So I shot the gambler down.

Refrain: Shot the gambler down, shot the gambler down.

Now I'm down in prison
 Got a number for my name
 The warden said as he locked the door,
 "You've gambled your last game."

Refrain: "Gambled your last game, gambled your last game."

27. Stagolee

American Heritage Music Corp. AM-10-30S---"Newgrass"

The Bluegrass Alliance

Credit: Travis Music Co.

Refrain: carol

Rhyme: aa

Voices: solo on verses, trio on refrain Reference: Laws I 15

I remember last September, on a Saturday night,
 Billy Lion and Stagolee had a great big fight.

Refrain: He was a bad man, O'cruel Stagolee.

Now talk about your gamblers, y'oughta see that Richard Lee,
 He shot a hundred dollars, and came out over three.

Refrain.

Now Billy Lion shot six then, but Stagolee thought he'd pass,
 Billy said, "O Stagolee, son, you done shot your last."

Refrain.

"O Mr. Stagolee, please don't take my life,
 I've got three children, and a darlin' lovin' wife."

Refrain.

"Now the law'll take care of your children, and I'll take care of your wife,
 You shot my Stetson hat, now I'm gonna take your life."

Refrain.

Now next Tuesday morning, on the gallows high,
 People come from miles around, just to see old Stagolee die.

Refrain (then instrumental break, and repeat refrain).

28. That Beautiful Woman

King 1028--"Brand New Country Songs"

Ralph Stanley and the Clinch Mountain Boys

Credit: R. Stanley--G. Duty

Refrain: ballad burden

Rhyme: abcb

Voices: solo on verses, duet on refrains Reference: none

I came home this evenin'
 To a home that's been broken so long
 Five years since Mary was buried
 She died the day Billy was born.

I found little Billy a-weepin'
 I wiped the tears from his eyes
 I asked him what was the matter
 With these words to me he replied:

Refrain: "Who was that beautiful woman
 That spent the day with me
 And held me close to her bosom
 And sang sweet songs to me?"

I asked him about this woman
 No one was expected that day
 With tears in his eyes he described her
 His thoughts seemed to be far away.

"On her cheek she had a dimple
 On her forehead she bore a scar
 She knew all about you and me, Dad,
 She's been gone away so far."

I stood there in silence
 I wondered how this could be
 This woman he saw was his mother
 A woman he never did see.

I had no pictures of Mary
 To show to Billy, you see,
 How can I explain this to Billy?
 Oh won't you explain it to me?

Refrain, repeat last line of refrain.

29.a. Tragic Love

Mercury MG 20349--"Country Pickin' and Singin'"

The Stanley Bros. and the Clinch Mtn. Boys

Credit: none given

Refrain: none Rhyme: abcb
 Voices: duet throughout Reference: Laws G 21

Come, pretty young girls, give me your attention
 To these few lines I've tried to write
 About a man who I won't mention
 Who courted off [oft? all? on?] this charming bride.

And when her parents came to know him
 They tried so hard both day and night
 To separate her and her own true lover
 Her and her own soul's heart's delight.

She turned her back upon the city
 She viewed the fields and meadows round
 She came upon a broad river
 And in the shade of a tree set down.

Her true lover being not far behind her
 He heard her make a mournful sound
 And looking on her lifeless body
 As she lay cold upon the ground.

He then took out his silver weapon
 He pierced it through his tender heart
 Sayin', "Let this be a dreadful warning
 For all true lovers that have to part."

29.b. Katy Dear

Design DSLP-613--"Hootenanny"
 John Duffy and the Country Gentlemen
 Credit: none given
 Refrain: none Rhyme: abcb
 Voices: trio throughout Reference: Laws G 21

"Oh, Katy Dear, go ask your mother
 If you can be a bride of mine
 If she says 'Yes' come back and tell me
 If she says 'No' we'll run away."

"Oh, Willie dear, I cannot ask her
 She's in her room a-takin' a rest
 And by her side is a silver dagger
 To slay the man that I love best."

"Oh, Katy Dear, go ask your father
 If you can be a bride of mine
 If he says 'Yes' come back and tell me
 If he says 'No' we'll run away."

"Oh, Willie dear, I cannot ask him
 For he's there too a-takin' a rest
 And by his side that silver dagger
 To slay the one that I love best."

Then he picked up that silver weapon
 And stove it through his weary heart
 Saying, "Goodbye, Katy, goodbye, darling,
 At last the time has come to part."

Then she picked up that bloody dagger
 And stove it through her lily-white breast
 Saying, "Goodbye, Willie, goodbye, Mother,
 I'll die with the one that I love best."

30. Tragic Romance

Dot DLP 25731--"Bluegrass"

Mac Wiseman

Credit: G. Jones

Refrain: none

Voices: solo throughout

Rhyme: aabb

Reference: Recorded by Morris Bros.
 on Victor 58-0027

Nestled in the heart of the Tennessee hills
 'Midst peaceful pines, 'midst the rocks and the rills
 There stands my old homestead of long, long ago
 It brings back fond memories of the girl I loved so.

I courted a maiden so sweet and so fair
 With heavenly eyes and chestnut brown hair
 She promised to love me and said she'd be mine
 But I went away leaving her far behind.

I'll tell you the reason why I left her there
 To roam this old world with its sorrow and care
 I saw her one night in the arms of a man
 Hugging and kissing as true lovers can.

I went to my home with a heart full of woe
 Packed my belongings, determined to go
 For many long years this old world I did roam
 With thoughts of my sweetheart, my darling, my own.

While dining one day in a small country town
 A stranger walked in and he chanced to sit down
 While talking of loved ones I happened to find
 That his sister was that old sweetheart of mine.

"Now, I am the man that you saw that fatal night
 Wrapped in the arms of my sister so tight
 She waited so long for the day you'd return
 Why you left her there she never could learn.

She waited and watched, for you loved her she said.
 The one you left there has a long time been dead.
 She loved you dearly, but you broke her heart
 Now, stranger, from her, nevermore you must part."

31. Train Number 1262

Columbia CL 2686--"Hear the Whistles Blow"

Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs and the Foggy Mtn. Boys

Credit: D. Watson

Refrain: none

Rhyme: abcb

Voices: solo throughout

Reference: none

She just left the point at Chicanna [sic; shikanna?]
 The brave number twelve sixty-two,
 And on down the mountain she travelled
 So brave were the men in her crew.

The engineer pulled at the whistle
 For the brakes didn't work when applied
 And a brakeman climbed out on the cartop
 For he knew what that whistle had cried.

With all of the strength that God gave him
 He tied in the brakes with a prayer
 But the train went right on down the mountains
 The whistle still piercing the air.

It's not the amount of the damage
 Or the value of what the wreck cost
 It's the sad scene they found in the cabin
 Where the lives of two brave men were lost.

They found them at their post in the wreckage
 Where they died when the engine had fell
 The engineer still held to the whistle
 And the fireman still clung to the bell.

Now, this story is told of a freight train
 It should be a warning to all
 We need to be prepared every moment
 For we can never tell when He'll call.

32. The Waves on the Sea

Folkways FA 2433--"Folksongs from the Southern Mountains"

The Lilly Brothers and Don Stover

Credit: Carter Family

Refrain: ballad burden

Rhyme: abcb

Voices: solo throughout

Reference: Child 289

Refrain: Oh, the waves on the sea, how they roll
And the chilly winds how they do blow
My own true love got drowned in the deep
And the ship never got to the shore.

Oh, the next on the deck was the captain of the ship
A rough looking fellow was he
Said, "I care no more for my wife and my child
Than I do for the fish in the sea."

Refrain.

Oh, I left my darling a-grieving
I left my darling a-grieving
I left my darling grieving after me
For I never expect to see her anymore.

Refrain.

NOTES

1. Three of the most important academic studies which explore historical, cultural, and musicological connections in bluegrass are:

Bill C. Malone, Country Music, U.S.A. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), particularly chapter ten, "Bluegrass and the Urban Folk Revival."

L. Mayne Smith, Bluegrass Music and Musicians: An Introductory Study of a Musical Style in its Cultural Context (unpublished M.A. thesis, Indiana University, 1964.)

Neil V. Rosenberg, "From Sound to Style: The Emergence of Bluegrass," Journal of American Folklore 80, no. 316 (April-June-1967): 143-150.

2. The single most salient example of such work is the magazine Bluegrass Unlimited, a monthly fanzine of exceptional depth. (Bluegrass Unlimited, Inc., Box 111, Burke, Virginia 22015)

3. L. Mayne Smith, "An Introduction to Bluegrass," Journal of American Folklore 78, no. 309 (July-Sept. 1965): 245.
4. Smith, Bluegrass Music and Musicians, p. 65.
5. Ibid.
6. See Bluegrass Unlimited for many examples (e.g., "Don Reno Interview" in vol. 6, no. 1 (July 1971): 11).
7. For this work especially, two of the chief references have been:
 - G. Malcolm Laws, Native American Balladry (Philadelphia: American Folklore Society, 1964), and American Balladry from British Broad-sides (Philadelphia: American Folklore Society, 1957).
8. "Airmail Special" by Leon Rusk and Ossie Godson, recorded by Jim & Jesse and the Virginia Boys, Capitol 2476.
9. Tristram P. Coffin, "Mary Hamilton and the Anglo-American Ballad as an Art Form," in The Critics and the Ballad, ed. MacEdward Leach and Tristram Coffin, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1961), p. 246.
10. Excerpt from "Bluegrass Style," by Vern and Ray, on Starday SLP-201, "The Mountain Music Sound of the Stanley Bros."
11. Smith, Bluegrass Music and Musicians, p. 65.
12. Rosenberg, p. 148.
13. Smith, Bluegrass Music and Musicians, p. 66.
14. Smith, "Introduction," p. 249.
15. Ibid., p. 250.
16. Kentucky Folklore Record 9, no. 3 (July-Sept. 1963): 55.
17. Smith, Bluegrass Music and Musicians, p. 66.
18. Bruce A. Rosenberg, The Folksongs of Virginia: A Checklist (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1969), no. 1204.
19. Conversation with W.K. McNeil, 3 December 1971.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bluegrass Unlimited. A Monthly. Bluegrass Unlimited Inc., Box 111, Burke, Virginia 22015.
- Coffin, Tristram P. The British Traditional Ballad in North America. Philadelphia: American Folklore Society, 1950.
- Cohen, John, and Mike Seeger, eds. The New Lost City Ramblers Song Book. New York: Oak Publications, 1964.
- Cox, John Harrington, ed. Folk Songs of the South. New York: Dover, 1967.
- Green, Archie. "Hillbilly Music: Source and Symbol," Journal of American Folklore 78, no. 309 (July-Sept. 1965): 204-228.
- Laws, G. Malcolm. American Balladry from British Broadsides. Philadelphia: American Folklore Society, 1957.
- _____. Native American Balladry. Philadelphia: American Folklore Society, 1964.
- Leach, MacEdward and Tristram P. Coffin, eds. The Critics and the Ballad. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1961.
- Malone, Bill C. Country Music, U.S.A.: A Fifty-Year History. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968.
- Randolph, Vance, ed. Ozark Folksongs. 4 vols. Columbia, Missouri: State Historical Society of Missouri, 1950.
- Rosenberg, Neil V. "From Sound to Style: The Emergence of Bluegrass," Journal of American Folklore 80, no. 316 (April-June 1967): 143-150.
- Rosenberg, Bruce A. The Folksongs of Virginia: A Checklist. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1969.
- Smith, L. Mayne. Bluegrass Music and Musicians: An Introductory Study of a Musical Style in its Cultural Context. Unpublished M.A. thesis. Indiana University, 1964.
- _____. "An Introduction to Bluegrass," Journal of American Folklore 78, no. 309 (July-Sept. 1965): 245-256.
- Wilgus, Donald Knight. Anglo-American Folksong Scholarship Since 1898. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1959.