

Fictional Landscapes And Social Relations In Nineteenth-Century Broadside Ballads

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Article abstract

The broadside ballad constitutes one of the oldest forms of popular culture in Europe and America. Even though our understanding of the genre, especially in North America, has been shaped by texts drawn from oral tradition, many of its thematic and stylistic traits reveal its origins in the modern popular press. The article examines the fictional landscapes of “whiteletter” ballads as represented in G. Malcom Laws catalog, especially categories “M” through “P.” These ballads all have love relationships as their central theme, and yet the spaces occupied by the principal characters and the manner in which the relationships unfold show a marked concern for larger social issues, such as separation through emigration, interclass tensions, and the influence of bureaucratic institutions.

FICTIONAL LANDSCAPES AND SOCIAL RELATIONS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BROADSIDE BALLADS

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The interaction between popular and folk culture has been a focal theme in Peter Narváez's writing, from his early exploration of the syncretic merger of country and Irish music hall influences in Newfoundland (1977), to the seminal collection of essays exploring the "Folklore-Popular Culture Continuum" (Narváez and Laba 1986), his work on Newfoundland media legends (1986), and his essay highlighting the relevance of Cultural Studies for Canadian folkloristics (1992). The present essay surveys a genre of folksong that has spanned the folk-popular continuum perhaps longer than any other in Anglo-American tradition: the broadside ballad. On both sides of the Atlantic, folksong collections of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries revealed the extent to which rural singing traditions were influenced by the broadside press. Even collectors who gave priority to putatively older classical ballads, adhering to a "Child-and-other" approach (Wilgus 1959: 145), tended nonetheless to record and publish a larger number of broadside texts. Yet in order to conform to then-current understandings of folklore, broadsides had to be represented in ways that played down, if not erased, their origins in the urban-based popular press. From a theoretical standpoint, this reorientation was not difficult to sustain. Texts existed in multiple variants, showing the effects of oral transmission; their subject matter was often historical, albeit from relatively recent history; the songs were collected in rural or coastal (i.e. stereotypically "folk") communities; and from a performance standpoint, they had merged with longstanding singing traditions within those communities. Ballads that were, by origin, modern, literate, and

urban could be made traditional, oral, and rural.¹ This expanded understanding of traditional narrative song, however, was accompanied by a tendency to discount the stylistic distinction between classical (or Child) ballads and their broadside counterparts. Arguing that traditional singers rarely distinguished between the two genres (though some did), later ballad critics, especially in North America, favoured a more unified view of tradition. The approach corrected the tendency to privilege “analytic genres” over “ethnic” or “native genres” (Ben-Amos 1976), but in the process it tended to gloss over differences in poetic function that went along with thematic and stylistic differences between the oral and print genres. It is true that broadsides and classical ballads share common ground: both feature single-stranded, plotted narratives with emphasis on the dramatic interaction of principal characters. And as Rollins (1967 [1924]) and others have demonstrated, there is some overlap of individual types. Yet the differences are hard to ignore. Notably, the two genres are characterized by markedly different fictional landscapes. The abstract, pseudo-medieval landscape of the classical ballad, populated by members of the aristocracy, gives way in broadsides to everyday settings inhabited by quite ordinary people. Castles, halls, and bowers tend to disappear and are replaced by ordinary homes, shops, factories, places of employment, courts of law, garrisons, docksides, vessels, jails, asylums, pleasure gardens, taverns, inns, fairs, and other venues of everyday life. The world itself expands to include foreign cities, towns, and colonial outposts. Even natural spaces shift noticeably in their dramaturgical function. Overall, the landscape of the broadside is characteristically modern. Rather than insisting that broadsides “became folk,” the present essay argues that rural singers were attracted to broadsides because they and their audiences increasingly felt the influence of the modern world depicted in broadside narratives. David Buchan has shown the effects of education and the agrarian revolution on the oral ballad tradition of Northeast Scotland.

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1. The legitimation of broadsides as “traditional” was central to the theoretical challenge to the Child collection as a defining canon of Anglo-American balladry. Where Francis Gummere had insisted upon “definition by origin” over “definition by destination” to advance his theory of “communal creation” (1959 [1907]: 1-28), critics like Cecil Sharp and Phillips Barry pointed to the shaping of songs that occurred in transmission and argued that origins were less important than the “communal re-creation” of texts by communities of singers (Sharp 1907: 1-41; Barry 1933). Similar debates arose during the International Folk Music Council’s attempts to define “folk music” in the 1950s (Karpeles 1951 and 1955).

Following Buchan's lead, W. H. A. Williams discusses print ballads in relation to systemic social changes in Britain, arguing that village and agrarian cultures came to embody a mixture of "old rural habits and new urban circumstances." He sees this as "the cultural response of people from a rural, essentially traditional, environment who came into contact with urban industrial society either directly, through migration ... or indirectly through the impact of industrialism upon rural social and economic life" (1976-81: 52). Similar conditions existed in North America. Indeed, the largely immigrant population could not have existed except as a consequence of modern developments in transportation and navigation. Even in areas like New England, which by the early twentieth century had a three-hundred year history of rural settlement, many so-called "traditional" features of the landscape, such as connected farm buildings, were fairly recent innovations directly influenced by modern notions of efficiency and progress (Hubka 1984: 12-18). Its populations also reacted to the same economic and social opportunities that affected rural-urban migration in Britain. In some areas, as members of founding culture groups joined the rural exodus, their farms were resettled by families from more recent immigrant groups, resulting in small communities that were nonetheless marked by ethnic, occupational, religious, and linguistic diversity (Hoberman 2000: 37-44, 67-91). Discussing a slightly later period, Pocius's study of Calvert, Newfoundland, stresses the impact of occupational migrations, foreign trade, government programs, education, and the like on this small outport community (1991).

Even those who continued to live and work in rural and, to all appearances, traditional communities felt the effects of a range of modern influences: the rise of literacy; scientific and technological advances in rural industries, including resource-based industries; shifting demographics; advances in transportation technology which enabled among other things the mass migration of rural populations; economic and political conditions that encouraged or demanded such migrations; and the bureaucratization of government, business, and public record keeping. While such conditions have a lengthy history in Europe and America, what arises in recent history, as Williams states, is the normalization of the exchange, the institutionalization in small communities of modern economic, political, and cultural structures through the workings of the state, education, the church, mass culture, migration, and industrial and capitalist interests (see also James 1963,

1976; Vicinus 1975; and Vincent 1989). Broadside ballads were received into these contexts not simply because they were new or different. Rather, rural audiences were drawn to them because the narratives addressed modern situations, processes, concerns, tensions, and relationships that were informing life in small communities. The broadside landscape can be described as “ordinary” only in relation to the more abstract classical ballad. All fictional worlds, according to Thomas Pavel, are brought to life by making certain features of the real world “salient” through various systems of correspondence, while leaving others submerged (1985: 43–72). Lacking developed description, broadside narratives do not construct a scene or “capture” a setting as a literary text might. To the contrary, they are selective in the kinds of backdrops they employ, and as such the genre as a whole is characterized by highly typified settings. In effect, the salient features of the broadside ballad world are most strongly realised through convention and commonplace, and those areas that attract repeated attention do so for a reason. Just as formulas and commonplaces play a semiotic function in ballads,² setting, too, constitutes an essential layer of meaning at the generic level.

The interpretive approach adopted below extends from David Buchan’s “talerole” analysis (Nicolaisen and Moreira 2007, Section 2), in that it places greater weight on character relationships than on plot details. At the same time, it holds that relationships are informed by the spaces that the characters occupy and by the relative degree of control that the characters exercise over a given space. After identifying the spaces that recur repeatedly in song texts, I shall lay out a conceptual framework for appraising the generalities of the broadside’s fictional landscape. At this broad, generic level, setting is seen to have two basic functions: it may establish actual or implied tensions between central characters, or it may represent a threat to the freedom or safety of the hero or heroine. By extension, these narrative functions often highlight social tensions that constitute essential themes in the ballads. This analysis is based on a survey of ballads of love relationships in G. Malcolm Laws’s *American Balladry from British Broadside Ballads*, which includes his categories “M” to “P”: “Family Opposition to Lovers,” “Lovers Disguises and Tricks,” “Faithful Lovers,” and “Unfaithful Lovers.” The texts are virtually all North American, and I have concentrated on versions from the northeastern United States and Atlantic Canada.³

2. Key works include Renwick 1980, Andersen 1984, and Toelken 1986, 1989, and 1995.
3. The conventionality of the broadside genre is such that the current sample may well typify patterns found in other regional and national traditions.

Though the sample is limited when compared with the full extent of broadside tradition (Roud 1994-2006), there is sufficient redundancy in the material selected to put the model forward as representative.

The table below gives an overview of the characteristic spaces found in the sample. With virtually no exceptions, they can be grouped into three broad categories: domestic space, institutional space, and external space. Setting is not always an easy matter to sort out in broadsides, for texts rarely provide many details as to where the action takes place and some texts make almost no direct reference to locale.⁴ Yet where description is lacking, setting can usually be inferred from action. The broadside's modern landscape is immediately apparent from the expansive range of "External Space," which includes towns, cities, and foreign settings. The centrality of "Institutional Space" is also significant, and even the arrangement of "Domestic Space" speaks to issues of class and institutional power. Institutional setting can be a physical location (a jail or place of employment) or a social situation or status (indentured as an apprentice or in military service; the latter "places" are put in parentheses in the table because they depart from the usual dramaturgical meaning of setting). General kinds of space tend to suggest, either through conventional meaning or by the conventions of the genre, certain innate qualities based on the relative degree of freedom with which the central character can move in and out of such places or on the relative degree of threat that they represent.

Community margins and other boundary areas tend to be both non-threatening and permeable, whereas jails or military service, obviously, have quite different associations. Given these qualitative differences, the general spatial categories can be subdivided according to the relative degree of openness or accessibility that the individual spaces represent for the central characters. Each strand of space thus consists of relatively open areas, a second layer of somewhat more restricted or enveloped space, and a third layer of spaces that either are inaccessible or from which the central characters are unable or unwilling to break free. From a narrative perspective, the first layer establishes a social centre, an area of stasis or neutrality, from which characters venture off toward more threatening, uncertain, or restricted space.

4. Belden's version of "The Prince of Morocco" (Laws N18; Roud 554) is an interesting example, because even though setting is non-explicit, a social sense of "place," in terms of both class and foreignness, is an essential element in the song.

<i>External Space</i>	<i>Domestic Space</i>	<i>Institutional Space</i>
<p>Community Margin “out” Flowering fields</p> <p>Meadow River bank Shore Strand “the land” Quay Street/Highway</p> <p>Outland (Exposed) At sea Lonesome valley Woods / forest “The wild moor” / moorland Hills / braes</p> <p>Battlefield Foreign shore “wander distracted” The wide world</p> <p>Outland (Social) Inn / tavern Towns / cities America and colonies Foreign homes & institutions</p>	<p>Boundary Garden Grove / Arbour / Bower Fields Door/Gate to home Stables</p> <p>Interior (Public) Generalized interior Cottage/cot house/home “Her father’s hall” Mansion Drawing room Wine-cellar</p> <p>Interior (private: Threshold) Bedroom window</p> <p>Interior(private) Bedroom Chamber Dungeon (in SF home) Tower</p>	<p>Boundary ChurchYard (as for domestic boundaries)</p> <p>Interior Place of unemployment Church Court</p> <p>Confined Jail Transportation Insane asylum (Apprenticed) (Military Service)</p> <p>Abbreviations S= She, heroine H= He, hero SF= Heroine’s father</p>

A rough graphic presentation of this spatial arrangement (which like all cartography abstracts and distorts to some degree) is given in figure 1. The concentric rings indicate different levels of restriction that define particular spaces, and thus the freedom of movement that a character enjoys. At the centre are relatively benign “transitional” spaces, which for lack of a better term can be thought of as “community” space. Beyond the boundary areas are intermediate spaces: semi-private domestic space; the more public arenas of principal institutions; and the world just beyond the community margins. Here protagonists find themselves under the direct control of opposing characters, or, in the case of “exposed” areas, beyond the normal protections of a community. Lastly, there are spaces that, in some sense, are cut off from the neutral social centre, either by distance, confinement, social or occupational duty, or by death. Some social conditions, such as indenture or military service by impressment, restrict a character’s freedom of movement, and so they too are considered “confined” situations. In broadside narratives, it is often a function of — or at least a motivating factor for — the hero or heroine to break free of space controlled by another character. Conversely, a successful resolution requires a place that offers a measure of security.

External space presents the landscape of the modern ballad in broad stroke and provides a general picture of the world and worldview under consideration. It begins in the community margins, which include areas where characters “rove out” and where they are likely to participate in extraordinary encounters (Renwick 1980: 19). As can be seen in the initial list of settings, the community margins exhibit the greatest degree of diversity in terms of the actual number of types of space, which is a direct reflection of their frequency in the genre as a whole. Dramaturgically, they form a no-man’s-land between the community proper and the larger world beyond; they are areas from which characters may proceed in almost any direction and the range of possible experiences is broad.

Many ballads open in marginal areas, and typically the subsequent action deals with exchanges between community life and the larger social world. In the sub-genre known as the “pastourelle,”⁵ a wealthy or aristocratic male “wanders out” to enjoy the beauties of nature and

5. See Laws O5 to O11 (Roud 359, 292, 986, 959, 1437, 407, and 985) for examples.

meets a young woman herding flocks. She initially refuses his advances, saying she is not worthy of a gentleman, whereupon he persists and finally proposes marriage. The transitions played out in the “pastourelle” are not, of course, inherently concerned with space; rather they deal with tensions between levels of culture, between classes. Yet class is often structured in a way that juxtaposes an agrarian working class with an urbane — if not urban — mercantile or aristocratic over class. There is even one instance in the sample of an inverse “pastourelle,” in which a gypsy wanders from the country into the city streets to tell fortunes: there she meets a lawyer and the scenario unfolds as usual (Laws O4; Roud 229). Not surprisingly, scenes of departure often occur in community margins. Ten ballads in the “Faithful Lovers” category — comprising twenty-five percent of the group⁶ — consist of dialogues between lovers who meet on the shore, on a quay, by a riverside, or in “flowering fields,” and vow to be true until they are reunited. Promises, coupled with protests of devotion to duty, are usually enough, but some couples marry before the hero sails, and in other cases the heroine, unable to bear parting, disguises herself and follows her love to sea.⁷ Margins are also the focal setting in ballads about heroes returning after extended absences. The most common examples are the so-called “Broken Ring” ballads. There are over twenty ballad types belonging to the group, most of which are catalogued under Laws’s category “Ballads of Lover’s Disguises and Tricks” (group “N”). Further analogues can be noted in “The Bold Fisherman” (Laws O24; Roud 291), “The Apprentice Boy” (Laws M12; Roud 903), in the native American ballads “The Banks of Brandywine” (Laws H28; Roud 1970) and “The Bright Blooming Star of Belle Isle” (Laws H29; Roud 2191), and in such classical types as “The Kitchie Boy” (Child 252; Roud 105) and “The New Slain Knight” (Child 263; Roud 3887). The narratives, as Laws points out (1957: 18), are highly stereotyped and involve a young man’s encounter with a woman upon his return from sea. Coming upon her in a garden (Laws N42; Roud 264), a field (Laws N35 and N39; Roud

6. Laws numbers O19, O22, O23, and O27 to O33; Roud 1916, 991, 345, 913, 560, 999, 958, 1917, 1000, and 401.

7. For the most part, the songs in this group are dialogue ballads that rarely exploit the narrative potential of female sailors to the degree that one finds in more action-based songs, such as “Mary Ambrose” and the later incarnations of “Willy Taylor” (Laws N11; Roud 158) or “Caroline and Her Young Sailor Bold” (Laws N17; Roud 553).

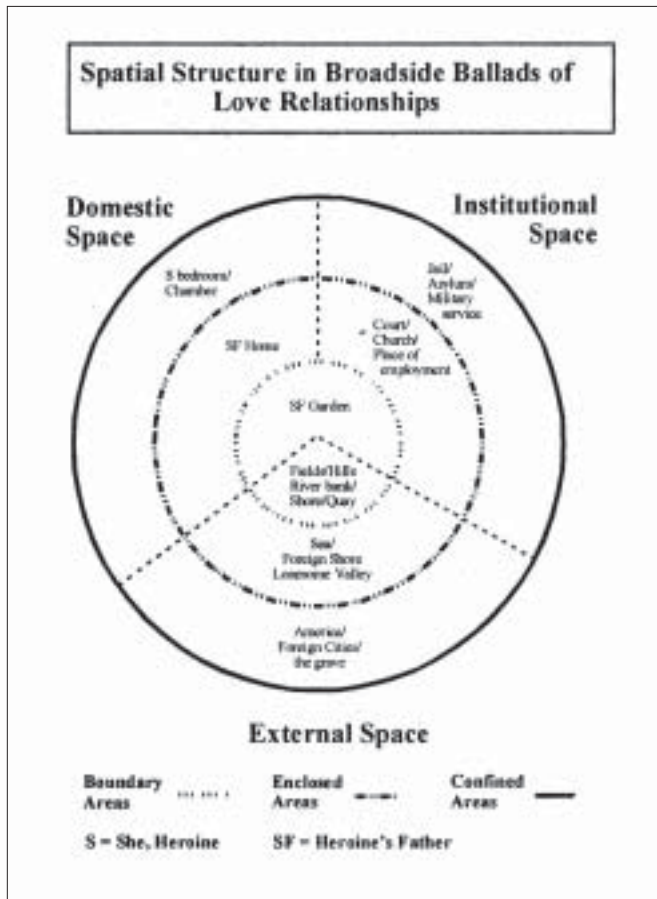


Figure 1.

714 and 515), or more commonly by the shore or a riverbank, he attempts to seduce her but is rebuked. Even when he intimates that her absent lover has died, she vows to remain loyal. Convinced of her faithfulness, he produces a token of recognition and reveals himself to be the returned traveller. On one level, the test of fidelity is cruel and chauvinistic, but as I have argued elsewhere (Moreira 1991) it is also a negotiation of the hero's re-entry into community life following a long absence. The marginal setting reinforces the liminal status of the couple's relationship during the period of separation.

In idealized form, each of these classes of ballads gives voice to two prevalent concerns of the modern period, concerns that find expression

many other broadsides: distance and separation. On the one hand, there is the social distance of class; on the other there is the physical distance of enforced absences. By extension, an underlying theme of the broadside as a genre is a concern for a paradox of modern society: that is, the political and economic structures necessary for the maintenance and protection of family life also represent the strongest barriers to a settled and cohesive domestic existence.

The two areas labelled “outlands” are marked by a clear separation from a local community. Characters in such space are beyond the reach of local authority, but they are also unable to participate in local affairs. Such areas, at different times and for different reasons, are both sought and feared. The intermediary layer consists of spaces that offer no potential for a settled existence, such as natural settings or dangerous situations like sea-travel and military campaigns. The broadside view of nature tends toward extremes: flowery vales and sweetly singing birds are often described, but characters who venture into the natural world beyond their community borders inevitably put themselves at risk. From the character’s point of view, natural settings represent undefined and uncertain space where one is exposed and undergoes a trial of some sort, occasionally with a tragic outcome. Seductions that end in abandonment, suicides, or murders are often set in such spaces or to a lesser extent in more nondescript community margins, such as shores or riverbanks, as, for example, in Laws P14 to P16; P19 to P21; P27; P34A; and P35 to P39 (Roud 140, 397, 370, 1003, 175, 155, 398, 568, 263, 15, 569, 1412, and 1919). Ballads that conclude with a character entering an outland are generally tragic. “Early, Early in the Spring” (Laws M1; Roud 152) and most versions of “Drowsy Sleeper” (Laws M4; Roud 402) end with a defeated hero returning to sea or wandering hill and wood. Similar fates are suffered by the partners of murder victims, who roam the world (Laws M35; Roud 1913), lonesome valleys (Laws M37; Roud 1093), or simply “wander distracted” (Laws O37; Roud 561). By contrast, only three ballads in the sample conclude positively in transitional space. All are departure ballads in which hero and heroine decide to sail away together (Laws O19, O27, and O41; Roud 1916, 913, and 993).

In contrast to the transitional settings, towns and cities beyond the home community are not inherently threatening, although they do present problems for some characters. “The Lovely Banks of Boyne” (Laws P22; Roud 995), “My Bonny Young Irish Boy” (Laws P26; Roud

565), and “Caroline of Edinburgh Town” (Laws P27; Roud 398) deal with love tragedies that befall heroines who have resettled in a city. Nor are women alone at risk; the hero of “The Girl I Left Behind” (Laws P1A; Roud 262) comes to regret the transition that led him away from his family.

*Says she, “If you will marry me and say no more you’ll rove,
The gold that I possess is yours and I will constant prove;
But your parents dear and other friends that you have left behind,
Don’t ever, if you marry me, bear them again in mind.”*

*To this I soon consented, and I own it is my shame,
For what man can be happy when he knows he is to blame?
It’s true I’ve gold in plenty and my wife is very kind,
But my pillow oft is haunted by the girl I left behind
(Doerflinger 1951: 306, st. 7-8).*

More often, adopted communities offer forgiving space for characters who can survive the disruptions of transition. After eloping and making their way to Belfast, the couple in Laws M11 (Roud 1910) emigrate to America, where they are assisted by “a true Irish friend” who helps them get established. At the ballad’s close, the narrator states:

*They wrote me a letter to Philadelphia town:
If I would go home again I would get five hundred pound.
This news I sent to them from Philadelphia town:
Where they are worth a shilling there, here I am worth one pound
(Mackenzie 1928: 119).*

Greater hardships are faced by “Mary Neal” and her lover (Laws M17; Roud 142), who flee to Quebec on a vessel that founders on the Nova Scotia coastline. Mary is washed overboard, but the hero rescues her. Once settled on shore, the couple receives a similar request to return, which they too reject. Likewise, the hero and heroine of “The Bonny Laboring Boy” (Laws M14; Roud 1162) head for Belfast and then to America once they have broken free of parental restraint.

The economic implications of external areas are very much on the surface: they are places where one measures one’s present and former statuses in a ratio of pounds to shillings, and the number of instances where wealth proves to be a shallow achievement, as in “The Girl I Left Behind” (Laws P1A; Roud 262), are very few indeed. Characters face

oppressions and challenges, but for most the urban world beyond the confines of the home community is both open and accommodating. Such space is both secure and free from the direct control of an opposing character. In the broadsides, escape is possible. But if the outer reaches of the broadside world offer the possibility of escape, the internal areas reveal a structure that appears to provide the motivations for leaving. In the ballads examined, characters respond primarily to romantic and economic influences, but there are often legal or political entanglements that need to be overcome. The dominant figure of interior space is superficially a symbol of parental authority, usually the heroine's father or both her parents acting in concert, and in rare instances the hero's mother. At the same time, the space controlled by the heroine's father tends also to be the hero's place of employment, and class difference — which itself represents a notion of “place” — rarely goes unnoticed. Boundary areas in this part of the model, the father's fields and other property, therefore have a dual function. From the heroine's perspective, they represent the boundary of the domestic world; from the perspective of the hero/employee, they are the boundary of the economic and political world.

The connection between domestic and institutional space is solidified by a father's ability to bring political and judicial forces to bear in his attempts to interfere in his children's affairs. Such areas as courts, jails, and asylums, or conditions like indenture, transportation, and impressment represent spheres of institutional control, and their respective landscapes are ubiquitous in the broadside ballads, often serving a narrative function equivalent to the liminal, transitional outland; that is, they constitute places of testing, of turmoil, and of temporary or permanent separation. Essentially, the broadside world has dual wildernesses: one is literal and external, while the other consists of the arcane entrapments of the political, economic, and judicial power structures *within* society.

Instances where institutional service or confinement occurs without the deliberate intervention of a parental figure are surprisingly rare. In “Early, Early in the Spring” (Laws M1; Roud 152) and “Charming Beauty Bright” (Laws M3; Roud 405), the hero is simply called away to war and his true love either marries another or dies during his absence. More commonly, the father or a substitute conspires with the military authorities to have the hero pressed, which leads to various reactions. When “The Jolly Ploughboy” (Laws M24; Roud 186) is pressed, his

lover dresses as a sailor and goes to secure his release; in some versions of "The Banks of Dundee" (Laws M25; Roud 148), the hero is killed in a struggle with the press gang sent by the heroine's uncle (see for example Broadwood 1893: 117), while in others he survives to return at the ballad's close (see for example Creighton and Senior 1950: 129); in "The American Woods" (Laws M36; Roud 1809), in which both sets of parents have a hand in the hero's impressment, the hero subsequently dies in battle.

In addition to the military, the judiciary can also be called upon by parents to dispose of an unwanted suitor: a false accusation of theft is the most common motif, made by a father who plants goods in the hero's possession, or who insists that a purported gift from the heroine to the hero is actually stolen property. "Henry Connors" (Laws M5; Roud 1909), "Erin's Lovely Home" (Laws M6; Roud 1427), "William Riley's Courtship" (Laws M9; Roud 537), and its sequel "William Riley" (Laws M10; Roud 538), and "The Sheffield Prentice" (Laws O39; Roud 399), all employ some variant of this motif, though in the last instance it is a female employer who levels the accusation out of jealousy. In all but the last ballad, in which the hero hangs, the penalty is jail or transportation, which may be regarded, along with military service, as areas or situations of institutional confinement.

The operational areas of institutional space, especially courts of law,⁸ constitute the interior middle-ground for this particular strand of space. Churches in romantic broadsides serve primarily as places for weddings, and are normally referenced in a cursory and perfunctory manner. The portrayal of a wedding in most versions of "The Bold Soldier" (Laws M27; Roud 321) is typical: "They had just been to church and returning home again" (Gardiner and Chickering 1939: 380, st. 3). The narrative function of the church is more bureaucratic than spiritual: it simply legitimizes and institutes relationships.

Although court proceedings can be executed just as rapidly, especially when it is a matter of dispatching a villain with a hasty

8. Though not included among the ballads examined for this study, the broadside sub-genre commonly known as "gallows literature" (Shepard 1978 [1962]: 80-81; Neuburg 1973: 194 & 198-199, and 1977:137-139), features many "legal" settings: court, jail, and the scaffold itself. The stereotypical "good night" ballad builds a spatial tension between the condemned character's present situation and a former idealized domestic life.

judgement, a trial becomes the narrative focal point of many ballads. As with other facets of modern life — the city, emigration, etc. — the courtroom is not an inherently negative place, for the legal system is as likely to uphold a hero or heroine's cause as to undermine it. "The Courtship of William Riley" (Laws M10; Roud 538) is of interest not only for its representation of a trial, but also for its detailed use of bureaucracy as a catalyst at many points of the narrative. Although the ballad is of atypical length for a broadside — it is actually three ballads that tell a sequential story — it did enter oral tradition and a version of seventy-eight stanzas was collected by Creighton in Nova Scotia (1932: 152-162). The narrative runs as follows: when Riley's courtship with his employer's daughter is opposed, the couple decides to elope. They take flight "O'er lofty hills and mountains," but the father follows and arrests the hero, who is sent to jail on a trumped-up charge of robbery. The trial scene is related point by point, giving the lawyer's speech to the jury, a rebuttal by the plaintiff, and the testimony of the heroine. The hero is spared hanging but still faces transportation for the crime, and so once more he is sent to jail pending deportation while the distracted heroine is confined first in a "lonesome chamber," then a "dark chamber," and finally "a private madhouse." All, however, is not lost. While awaiting transport, the hero devises a plan for release, but one that relies on his ability to access the bureaucratic hierarchy.

*A petition from the prison
Unto the parson sent
Unto the Lord Lieutenant
Whose heart it did relent.
The noble Lord Lieutenant
Unto the prison haste,
And here young Willie Riley
He speedily released
With him unto Bedlam
Straightway he went anon
Likewise released his jewel,
His fair colleen bawn.*

Nor is this the end of Riley's dealings with officialdom:

*A license from the Primate
Was got immediately
And constant William Riley
Was mated to his lady.*

Despite its unusually complicated narrative, which apparently is based on actual events (Creighton 1932: 162), the ballad nonetheless presents a moral tale of its time. Riley succeeds because he is able to beat the squire on his own terms. The first attempt to elope and escape the community confines — the “traditional” means — ends in failure. But through his ability to access and persuade local authority, to invoke the power of the pen on his own behalf, he is able to achieve success in the modern social arena. As with the outlands, the threat represented by areas of institutional control is potential only.

Lastly, there is domestic space. The boundary and internal areas, as already noted, are characterized by the high degree of control that fathers can exert over them. Class differences again emerge as a dominant theme through frequent references to the home as a “hall” or “mansion,” and through less common allusions to interior areas that would not normally be found in rural working-class homes: drawing rooms and in one instance a wine cellar (Laws N25; Roud 556). Although parents normally exercise tight control over domestic space, their influence is not always necessary. There are a number of ballads in the “Unfaithful Lovers” category in which daughters act independently, making their own choices over which suitors to admit or reject (see Laws P9 to P12; Roud 180, 412, 1002, and 563). In these narratives, it is the wilful, superior, or inconstant character of the heroine which takes centre stage, and so the domination of domestic space by a parent is not an issue. The setting tends to be vague in these texts. To a marked degree, the function of space in broadsides is contingent on narrative, coming to the fore when it aids character exposition or dramatic tension, but receding in importance at other times.

Private domestic areas, which consist almost exclusively of the bedrooms and chambers of unmarried children, particularly daughters, reveal the extent of parental control more dramatically. Comparable areas in classical ballads, the bowers⁹ where maidens sit “sewing a silken seam,” are associated with erotic longing (Andersen 1984: 108-16; Moreira 2001: 341-45). In broadsides, however, there is nothing subliminal about this space as an area of confinement. Frequently, it is a place of literal detention, where parents forcibly conceal their

9. In classical ballads, “bower” almost always refers to a dwelling or bed chamber; in broadsides, by contrast, the term means an arbour or grove.

daughters from undesirable relationships: “Johnny Doyle” (Laws M2; Roud 455), “Charming Beauty Bright” (Laws M3; Roud 405), “William Riley” (Laws M10; Roud 538), “Locks and Bolts” (Laws M13; Roud 406), “Bonny Laboring Boy” (Laws M14; Roud 1162), “Iron Door” (Laws M15; Roud 539), “Mary Acklin” (Laws M16; Roud 540), and “Pretty Betsey” (Laws M18; Roud 1911), all feature heroines locked away by their parents, and normally by the father. In “Iron Door,” the father goes so far as to build a dungeon in the house, which the hero, through an extraordinary test of love, breaks open.

Whether or not confinement is this explicit, the generic norm is such that an excessive degree of parental control can almost be assumed for this space, a feature that produces a number of effects. At a basic level, the tight control over this space helps to build tension in “night-visit” ballads, in which a hero comes secretly to his partner’s room for a night of lovemaking and leaves without the parents being any the wiser. Surprisingly, this class of ballad is not well represented in the Laws syllabus, occurring only half a dozen times, two of them with comical results (Laws O3 and O18; Roud 558 and 989), and another two in which parental authority is upheld by *the heroine*, who refuses the hero entry (Laws M4 and O21; Roud 402 and 992): in the latter ballad, the heroine leaves her lover standing out in a snow storm, rather than risk her reputation by letting him in. Two more ballads from the “Unfaithful Lovers” group conclude with an unwanted pregnancy and a moral warning about the consequences of such behaviour (“Blow the Candle Out,” Laws P17 / Roud 368, and “Pretty Little Miss,” Laws P18 / Roud 564). A need for tight parental control over the domestic space appears to be upheld by broadsides recorded from oral tradition, at least as represented by Laws.

Although the motif of a dungeon in a private residence may initially strike one as an example of broadside excess, on a generic level it can also be viewed as a structural balance to the social forces that govern the actions of broadside heroes. Just as there are economic or political factors that compel the hero to leave the community, the broadside institutes a balancing power that forces the woman to remain behind. The father imposes obstacles for the heroine that are every bit as real and oppressive as those faced by the hero. Her imprisonment at home — her enforced loyalty to class and kin — is the structural opposite of the hero’s impressment or imprisonment under institutional authority. Both are trapped by their respective social obligations — hers to class and family; his to the crown and legal authority.

Interior domestic space and outland areas are also linked through one of the few supernatural motifs that recurs with any regularity in the broadsides, namely, a revenant who returns from a wilderness to visit the heroine, usually to carry news of the hero's death. Despite the reputation of the broadside as a rationalised genre, the revenant is a surprisingly common motif, appearing in over a dozen ballads (Laws M29, M34, M36 to M38, P32 to P34B, P36A and B, and P39; Roud 1022, 182, 1809, 1093, 187, 997, 998, 568, 15, and 1919), while dreams fulfil a comparable function in at least four others (Laws M32, M33, O37, and P28; Roud 18, 675, 561 and 566). The broadside ghost, however, has a different function from the classical ballad revenants, who generally return to offer solace and admonitions against excessive grieving (Buchan 1986). Occasionally, broadside ghosts are vengeful. In "Nancy of Yarmouth" (Laws M38; Roud 187), the revenant insists the woman has been promised to him and he therefore intends to take her to the grave with him. He lures her to the edge of a cliff where she plunges to her death (see also the revenant ballads in the "Unfaithful Lovers" group). In a greater number of ballads, the revenant establishes an empathic link between domestic and outland areas, such that one of its functions in the modern context is to create a link with "the beyond," so to speak, that is physical as well as spiritual. Revenants are able to collapse real-world distance and establish lines of communication that nineteenth and early twentieth-century technology had few means of providing. They thus speak to a concern for contact, or lack of it, between those separated by emigration or occupational absence, often in industries that were innately hazardous and that precluded regular contact between the worker and the home community. It is not surprising, therefore, that all but two of the above types have been collected in Atlantic Canada,¹⁰ where workers in marine occupations have been the most prolific sources for collectors of ballads. Quigley and Doucette note that "The revenant motif in particular is common in Newfoundland ballads, as is the dream motif in which contact is made with the 'other world' in less corporeal form" (1981: 8). A connection between revenants and land-based occupational concerns is made explicitly through the pairing of "James Whalen" (Laws C7; Roud 638), a ballad of a fatality in the lumber woods, and the revenant ballad "Lost Jimmy Whalen" (Laws C8; Roud 2220).

10. "Beautiful Susan" (Laws M29; Roud 1022) is known only in a single version from North Carolina; "The Bramble Briar" (Laws M32; Roud 18) has been collected mainly in England and the southern United States.

The preceding survey suggests that, in strictly poetic terms, the spatial dynamics of the broadside world are not overly complex, but they do reveal an expansive world, a mobile world, and a world in which place constitutes a social standing as well as a physical position. On the one hand, they reveal separation and distance to be a dominant theme in the broadside ballads that survived in oral tradition, at least in northeastern North America. On the other, they show a further concern for ordering one's personal life within an increasingly institutionalized and bureaucratic world. But like traditional culture, it is a world of mixed blessings, and while it has its oppressions and obstacles, it offers avenues to new experience and new situations, which through forbearance, education, and moral observance are accessible to all.

For those in rural districts, broadsides gave voice to concerns about social relations that were developing in the modern era through such processes as emigration, the influence of technology and capitalism on rural industry, the bureaucratization of local government and law enforcement, and the class structure that was assumed in many of these processes. Broadside tales of romance and tragedy were undoubtedly alluring in their own way, but they engaged a world that lay beyond the immediate cultural boundaries of many regional audiences. It was a landscape of options where borders were increasingly transgressed by choice and with immunity. The broadside's ability to engage the world outside the small community helped in part to establish its relevance in modern rural tradition

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