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Sailors in British Broadside Ballads, 1800-1850

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SAILORS IN BRITISH BROADSIDE BALLADS, 1800-1850

By
Georgina Prineppi

A THESIS

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of the University of Miami
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SAILORS IN BRITISH BROADSIDE BALLADS, 1800-1850

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The broadside ballad was an important form of popular street music that flourished from the 16th to the 19th centuries in the British Isles, Continental Europe and North America. During the Napoleonic Wars, Britain’s fighting sailor—commonly known as “Jack Tar”—became a prominent subject of the country’s broadside ballad tradition, thanks to songwriters like Charles Dibdin, who forged a new and compelling image for the sailor, depicting him as Britain’s brave, patriotic, and loyal defender. In the early years of the nineteenth century, hundreds of broadside ballads about the noble Jack Tar were written and circulated in Britain, extolling his virtues and highlighting his importance for national defense.

Based on extensive primary research into broadside ballad archives, this thesis will holistically and comprehensively examine nineteenth-century broadside ballads about Britain’s fighting sailor. It will elucidate the complex image of Jack Tar in these popular songs, exploring his evolving and multi-faceted characterization, his profound cultural implications, and his intriguing iconography as both protector of Britain’s monarchy and republican hero. In addition, this thesis will carefully examine the music,
history, forms, conventions, writers, printers, and performance practices of the
nineteenth-century popular songs that brought Jack Tar to the forefront of wartime
Britain’s imagination.
To my parents, who continue to foster my love of music and naval history, and who have joyfully made sacrifices for the sake of my education. 
Also to my sister, and to Poppet, who provided invaluable help throughout. 
And most importantly, I dedicate this to my Savior. *Soli Deo gloria.*
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I most humbly acknowledge the guidance, patience, kindness, and mentorship of Dr. Melissa de Graaf, without whom this project would not have been possible. Thank you for going above and beyond the call of duty for me. I also wish to thank my committee members and the musicology faculty, who have helped and inspired me during my years at the University of Miami. Additionally, I owe a wealth of gratitude to the Bodleian Library, Oxford, the National Library of Scotland, and the University of California, Santa Barbara. Thank you for digitizing your remarkable broadside ballad collections and giving scholars access to them anywhere in the world—from Hong Kong to the Bahamas.
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In October 1799, the audacious French general Napoleon Bonaparte returned home to France from Egypt. He had embarked upon the bloody and arduous Egyptian campaign as the first step in his long-term plan of forging an eastern empire comparable to that of Alexander the Great; however, after a string of decisive set-backs, he realized that conquering Egypt would take more resources and time than he was willing—at that moment—to give. Having heard news that the French Directoire was politically unstable, Napoleon decided to leave his army of more than 30,000 men in Egypt, returning home to cement his political position. In the subsequent coup d’etat, known as the coup of 18 Brumaire, Napoleon seized control of the French government, abolishing the Directoire and establishing himself as the First Consul of France. Five years later, he would be emperor.

The Great French War had begun in 1792, as monarchical Europe scrambled to quash the terrifying, anti-monarchist idealism that revolutionary France had fomented. But before long, the menace of France’s republicanism was joined by the threat of its young, insuperable general who harbored schemes for an empire. Seven European coalitions were launched against France during this war, but Napoleon’s tactical prowess and legendary charisma led his well-trained army from victory to victory. However, there was one thorn in his side, Britain’s Navy. The Egyptian campaign had proven to Napoleon that the Royal Navy was a formidable enemy: not only had he suffered his first major naval defeat by Admiral Lord Nelson at the Battle of the Nile in 1798, he had also
lost a more obscure—though perhaps more meaningful—engagement in the east. While attempting to take the city of Acre by siege, Napoleon’s land army had been successfully repelled by the direction and crew of Captain William Sidney Smith, a naval officer, political tactician and British intelligence agent of whom Napoleon later said: “That man made me miss my destiny.”¹ Though overshadowed by the many more dramatic battles of the war, the Siege of Acre was in fact Napoleon’s first land defeat, paradoxically at the hands of an officer of the Royal Navy.

This set the stage for the remaining Napoleonic conflict: though Napoleon ruled by land, he found the British to be indomitable by sea. The supremacy of the Royal Navy not only allowed Britain to maintain a healthy economy via trade with the colonies—thereby establishing the nation as the seat of its own empire after the wars concluded—it also curbed Napoleon’s dreams of expansion. The strength of the Royal Navy, combined with Britain’s fortuitous geographical placement across an effective moat, created a stalemate between the two countries. As John Jervis the 1st Lord St. Vincent once wrote to the Admiralty, “I do not say, my Lords, that the French will not come. I say only they will not come by sea.”² The conflict would drag on until Britain finally scored a decisive army victory against the French at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815.

At the dawn of the nineteenth century, Britain—like Napoleon—realized that the Royal Navy was all that was holding France at bay: the navy—once the underdog of the British military forces—was now lauded as Napoleon’s tamer. Naval commanders such

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as Admiral Lord Nelson and Lord Cochrane were praised in painting, prose and poetry for their heroic deeds, but there was another character—a much more humble and unlikely character—who saturated popular literature and art: the unassuming Jack Tar.

Jack Tar was the archetypical British sailor of the Great Age of Sail, a lower-class seaman who materialized in British popular culture in the seventeenth century, wearing his signature white pants, cropped jacket and tarpaulin hat (from which he ostensibly earned his name). Though Jack Tar had many attributes of a folk hero, historians have avoided categorizing him as such. Jack was more than just a sea-going cultural figure; he came to be the unofficial—yet nationally-recognized—embodiment of Royal Navy sailors. In earlier years, the sailor had an insalubrious image in popular culture, marked by drunkenness, philandering, promiscuity, disloyalty and violence; he was an outsider who disturbed the social fabric of the country and did not participate in or contribute to society in meaningful ways. However, come the turn of the nineteenth century, Jack Tar shed, to a great extent, his identity as a diseased and parasitic vagrant. As the war against revolutionary France morphed into the Napoleonic Wars—twelve years during which the British people were threatened repeatedly with invasion—Jack Tar became less the villain and more the hero. There is a strange irony in this: Europe started the Great French War to impede the dissemination of France’s “pernicious” republicanism, and yet the monarchy’s most powerful defender was an un-educated, common sailor with a checkered past.

Images of the transformed Jack Tar proliferated in the popular sphere, not least of all in broadside ballads—strophic songs with folkloric or trending subjects, composed to common tunes and printed on cheap, single-sided sheets that were often embellished with
woodcut illustrations. Broadsides were first produced in the sixteenth century and soon became popular throughout the British Isles, North America, and parts of Continental Europe. These sheets were pedaled by singers and performers on street corners, effectively forming an intermediary link between minstrelsy and affordable newspapers. In the first half of the nineteenth century, broadside ballads saw a last resurgence of popularity in the hands of printers such as the colorful James Catnach and John Pitts, before finally being overtaken by the burgeoning newspaper trade. The broadside ballad genre offers modern scholars a unique insight into Britain’s history, as ballads were written and printed by the common man, for the common man, encompassing the cultural, social and political trends of their day, all within the seemingly-innocuous fabric of verse and song. Through this dynamic and complicated medium, Jack Tar came to represent not only the common British sailor, but also British military superiority, Britannia’s defender, and a controlled expression of republican sentiment within a culture defined by monarchy.

Up till this point, there has been very little research done on sailors in British popular song. Only one work attempts to specifically address the subject, and that is The British Tar in Fact and Fiction: The Poetry, Pathos, and Humour of the Sailor’s Life, published in 1901 by Charles Napier Robinson and John Leyland. In this colossal book, the authors set out to describe and explore the figure of the sailor in British culture up to their day. Robinson, a commander in the Royal Navy, was a collector of visual art depicting Jack Tar, and originally started writing the book to reproduce and discuss his collection of prints and engravings. However, he later decided to expand his scope,

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producing additional chapters on Jack Tar in song, on stage, and in fiction. He also
secured the help of the naval historian John Leyland to write some historical background
on the sailor. Robinson and Leyland’s book is entertaining and it offers a perspective
somewhat closer to the subject—temporally, culturally, and professionally—than most
modern scholars may boast; however, Robinson wrote as an enthusiast, not a scholar. His
historical and musicological understanding of British popular song was not deep. The
book is structured around a one-dimensional conception of the British sailor as a plain-
speaking, patriotic, loyal Briton, and it leaves little room for a meaningful exploration of
Jack Tar’s complex and nuanced characterization in nineteenth-century British broadside
ballads. In *The Sailor in English Fiction and Drama, 1550-1800*, Harold Francis Watson
captures the essence of this book when he says, “In short, the general impression made by
Robinson and Leyland is that the mariner must always be a noble fellow because, if he is
not a noble fellow, he is not a mariner.”

With a more refined scope, this thesis aims to re-address the topic of Jack Tar in
nineteenth-century British popular song, drawing on extensive primary research and
applying musicological methodologies to the topic. In doing so, it will contribute to the
musicological research in the field of broadside balladry, building upon the scholarship of
Leslie Shepard and other broadside ballad historians. Additionally, it will add to ongoing
discussions in the field of historical anthropology concerning Britain’s sailor in

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nineteenth-century popular culture, paying particular attention to Isaac Land’s recently-published book on the subject, *War, Nationalism, and the British Sailor, 1750-1850*.\(^5\)

The foundation of this project is archival research that was conducted in three sizeable databases of digitized broadside ballad facsimiles. The first and largest database consists of the broadside holdings of the Bodleian Library, Oxford, which includes over 30,000 items.\(^6\) The second database is managed by the English Broadside Ballad Archive of the Early-Modern Center at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and it includes over 4,300 broadsides, including the complete Pepys Collection, the Roxburghe Collection and the Euing Collection.\(^7\) The third database contains 2,300 digitized ballads from the National Library of Scotland’s English Ballads Collection.\(^8\) Together, these three databases provide the facsimiles of more than 36,000 ballads. Of course, even a collection of this magnitude will not comprehensively or exhaustively represent nineteenth-century broadside balladry about Jack Tar. However, I am convinced that these digitized resources are more than sufficient to meaningfully explore the place of British sailors in these popular songs.

After conducting a preliminary examination of these collections, I identified nearly 900 broadside ballads relating to sailors and dating from approximately 1800-1850. From the initial 900, I catalogued 202 broadsides that are particularly relevant to this topic (these are listed in Appendices A, B and C). There were two principle

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\(^7\) *English Broadside Ballad Archive*, University of California, Santa Barbara, accessed January 30, 2015, http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/.

parameters used in compiling this catalogue: firstly, duplicate and reprinted ballads found within and between the digitized collections were consolidated, and secondly, those ballads that were not specifically concerned with the sailor of the Royal Navy—focusing instead on the sailors of merchantman, slavers, pirate ships, fishing boats or whalers—were eliminated.

This project’s temporal scope of 1800-1850 was determined by a number of factors. The Napoleonic Wars began in earnest in the first years of the nineteenth century, causing a tidal wave of Jack Tar depictions in popular culture, and therefore the beginning of the century made an appropriate starting date. The ending date of 1850 also seemed logical, as the broadside ballad as a significant source of popular media was in decline by mid-century, and the Great Age of Sail reached its twilight years in the 1850s and 1860s—consigning the real Jack Tar to history, memory and the whims of popular imagination. That said, the publication dates of broadside ballads can rarely be determined with absolute precision, and therefore the temporal parameters for this project will have to remain slightly flexible.

At this point, I need to make a distinction between the real sailor of British history and the character represented in the sailor ballads. The history of the nineteenth-century British sailor is an extremely complicated topic that is inextricably tied to many important societal issues—notably impressment, colonization, and slavery. For a discussion of the real sailor of nineteenth-century Britain, I refer the reader to the remarkable book by Isaac Land. Unfortunately, the scope of this project must be limited to the Jack Tar of popular culture and broadside balladry, a figure that is as much a result of British culture’s imagination as historical fact.
While this thesis relies heavily on primary research into ballad archives, its topic could not be properly addressed without a wide examination of secondary sources, informing my understanding, interpretations and conclusions. This project will contextualize the Jack Tar ballads within their cultural and historical frameworks, considering the evolution of the broadside ballad, the social and political history of the Great French War and the Napoleonic Wars in particular, as well as the influence of the Royal Navy and domestic politics on the production of these ballads.

Following this introduction, the second chapter of the thesis will provide an overview of the broadside ballad’s history in Great Britain up through the nineteenth century, summarizing all that is currently known about the tradition’s origins, evolution, printers, writers, audiences, purposes and conventions. It will also introduce the character of Jack Tar, exploring his history in popular culture and examining the events surrounding his re-characterization and rise in popularity at the turn of the nineteenth century.

The third chapter will focus on the musical aspects of the sailor ballads, exploring the rich variety of musical sources associated with these popular songs. This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first examines those ballads that include old-fashioned tune references, analyzing the extant tunes and discussing their provenance. The second section focuses on sailor ballads that were written with dedicated—and sometimes arranged—musical accompaniments, examining the powerful influence of the theatre on the broadside tradition, as well as the importance of star performers in nineteenth-century popular song. The third and last section will consider the many Jack
Tar ballads that appear to have no concrete musical connections at all, engaging with the largely-unsolved mystery regarding the widespread disappearance of music in nineteenth-century broadside balladry.

The fourth chapter will analyze the complex, multi-layered characterization of Jack Tar in nineteenth-century broadside ballads, focusing particularly on the role of Charles Dibdin in forging Jack Tar’s new popular image, and examining the importance of this icon in British society. It will also explore the influence of political propaganda on broadside ballad production, considering Jack Tar’s intriguing dual characterization as defender of the monarchy and republican hero.
CHAPTER 2
THE SAILOR BALLAD BEFORE THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Considering its long and vibrant history, the broadside ballad has received remarkably little attention from musicological scholars. The tradition is an unusual one, and it poses certain challenges that have discouraged music researchers from undertaking it. Without doubt, the most intractable of these challenges relates to its generic classification. What is broadside balladry? How is one to label it, and who should be studying it? As these fundamental questions have never been satisfactorily answered, broadside balladry remains somewhat forgotten in the cracks of Britain’s musical past. It falls well outside of classical music, with its aristocratic associations and aura of cultured subtleties, but somehow it has never qualified as a form of folk music, either.

Historically, “traditional” or “folk” music has been defined by crucial assumptions regarding authenticity—a concept as enduring as it is chimerical. Francis James Child, the renowned collector of British folk music, considered the broadside ballad to be entirely distinct from Britain’s “authentic” or native folk music, and he therefore condemned it as unworthy of scholarly attention. According to Child, the Pepys and Roxburghe broadside ballad collections were “veritable dung-hills, in which, only after a great deal of sickening grubbing, one finds a very moderate jewel.”9 It is from Child that musicologists have inherited a tripartite conception of British balladry, which divides the field into “oral, scribal or print culture.”10 His work was built on the

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10 Adam Fox, Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500-1700, 5, as quoted in Paula McDowell, “‘The Art of printing was Fatal’: Print Commerce and the Idea of Oral Tradition in Long Eighteenth-
assumption that folk (orally-transmitted) ballads maintained a purity and authenticity that was found lacking in the “vulgar ballads of our day, the ‘broadsides’…[which] belong to a different genus.” In his mind, the younger, commerce-driven broadside ballad tradition corrupted the true folk music of Britain, both defiling and displacing it. The broadside was an imposter in Britain’s musical landscape and had no place in folk music research.

Though Child zealously guarded the border between folk balladry and the broadside tradition, modern scholars have questioned—and have largely disproven—the legitimacy of his distinction. The “traditional” and “non-traditional” ballad types are in fact very closely connected, and it appears the divide between them is mostly hypothetical: the two song forms coexisted in Britain’s popular soundscape for over four centuries, sung by the same audiences and drawing from similar musical sources. It is not surprising then to find that the traditions mixed very readily—even eagerly—throughout their history. From the earliest days of the broadside ballad, printers were notating and publishing “folk” songs; meanwhile, tunes from the oral tradition were routinely stripped of their associated lyrics in order to be used for newly-written broadside ballads. The active interchange between oral and printed balladry created an inextricable, byzantine web of musical and lyrical connections that Child himself could not disentangle: recent scholarship has shown that some of the ballads he touted as “authentic” or “traditional”

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were—unbeknownst to him—rooted in the broadside tradition. As is often the case, the concept of authenticity cannot be easily defined in British popular music. Child’s conception of balladry ultimately proved to be too simplistic for the subject matter, but it was influential. Modern scholars do not unquestioningly accept and perpetuate Child’s views; however his segregation and valuation of British popular song have had long-term effects on the scholarship of this rich musicological field. Today, folk music has a hallowed position in musicological and ethnomusicological scholarship, retaining an aura of purity, national authenticity, and mystery; yet the broadside ballad has failed to rouse much scholarly interest.

Child’s views have not been the only hindrance to broadside ballad scholarship. Diachronically, the lengthy history of the broadside has been sliced into definitive, disconnected periods. Scholars that focus on one segment very often know little about its predecessor or successor, creating a “delimited” academic field. Additionally, as broadside balladry is both a literary and musical form, its scholarship is divided between several disparate academic disciplines; as a consequence, an active, vital discussion of the subject does not exist. To its credit, the field of English literature has taken an interest in broadside balladry, producing several fine books and collections of essays on the topic. That being said, a purely literary approach to the subject proves inadequate, as it inevitably denies the ballads’ musical nature, divorcing them from their cultural contexts.

On the whole, musicologists have been reticent to enter the field, most likely as a result of Child’s far-reaching influence, but other factors may have compounded the situation.

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12 See Mary Ellen Brown, “Child’s Ballads and the Broadsides Conundrum” in Ballads and Broadsides in Britain, 13-34.
The relationship between music and verse in broadside balladry is tortuous and convoluted: musicologists may judge that elucidating this complicated connection is more trouble than the genre is worth. Fortunately, there have been a small handful of scholars who have made a study of the broadside ballad, and it is to them that we owe our current understanding of the tradition.

Like most great inventions, the broadside ballad was borne out of necessity—and enterprise. With the dawn of the printing press in the fifteenth century, there was an increased demand for literature in Europe. Though the average man could not buy a prayer book or a Bible, he still wanted access to printed materials, and astute printers responded by producing single-sided sheets that were affordable to the working classes.

Broadsides were available in many continental European countries, including Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands and Spain, as well as the British Isles and eventually the American colonies. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, broadsides were made of rough, cheap paper, often tinted and of varying sizes.

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14 The topic of music in broadside balladry will be discussed extensively in Chapter 2.
In Britain, these sheets included a variety of materials intended to entertain consumers. They might incorporate illustrations, political advertisements (they were often called “libels” because they were used to attack people through the press), religious tracts, and of course ballads. In the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, strophic songs were printed on the sheets in four long columns, in what is now called the black letter style, a term that indicates the use of an elaborate, gothic-style font for printing (see Example 2.1). These broadside ballads were often accompanied by a woodcut illustration, which was stamped between the ballad’s title (usually extremely wordy and descriptive),

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and the body of the verses. By the eighteenth century, the format of broadside ballads was transitioning: the standard black letter ballad was overtaken by a white letter type, which used a simple, Roman-style font (see Example 2.2). The rough, unbleached or tinted paper of prior years was replaced with a better-quality white paper, woodcut illustrations shrank or sometimes vanished entirely, and ballads were printed in a single column, as what is known as a *slip ballad*, usually measuring 4½ by 16 inches, often with more than one song printed per sheet.¹⁹ Significantly, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries also saw a decline in explicit tune references in broadside ballads, a trend which will be discussed in the next chapter.

¹⁹ Some printers of the late eighteenth century, like John Evans, tinted their broadside paper green or blue. See Shepard, *The Broadside Ballad*, 69, and John Pitts, 43.
Example 2.2: A white letter ballad, dating from 1800-1520

Broadside ballads were regulated by the Stationer’s Company, instituted in 1556. Due to trade classifications, early broadside printers were only licensed to print sheets on one side of a broadside (the technical definition for the paper used to print them)—and publishers could be fined if they did not closely adhere to their licenses. Technically, printers of broadsides were not even allowed to print broadsheets—papers of the same dimensions, but printed on both sides. With some exceptions, broadside printers constituted the poorest members of their profession.21 Printers were required to register

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their presses as well as their songs with the Stationer’s Company, but regulation of the industry was spotty; the ownership of printed materials was vague and poorly-protected throughout the broadside’s history.

Scholar Leslie Shepard states that the rise of the broadside ballad was linked to the decline of Britain’s minstrel tradition, which occurred primarily during the reign of Elizabeth I. The broadside ballad took on the mantle of minstrelsy by providing both entertainment and news for the working classes. From its earliest years, broadsides featured ballads with folkloric subjects, but news ballads became increasingly popular—particularly after the introduction of the Stamp Act of 1712, which made newspapers unaffordable to the common Briton. News ballads, unaffected by the stamp tax, provided a cheap alternative, providing an important (though not necessarily accurate) news source for the British populace well into the nineteenth century.

Typically, the seventeenth century is considered the height of the broadside ballad tradition. The industry tapered-out a bit in the 1700s, but the next century saw its resurgence in both Britain and Ireland. In the nineteenth century, broadside printers could be found in most major British cities, but the undisputed capital of the country’s broadside trade was Seven Dials, London—a curious junction in the West End where seven streets converge. As the center of broadside printing, the Seven Dials was home

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22 Elizabeth I apparently perceived traveling musicians as political threats, and outlawed both minstrels and Irish bards. For a discussion on the decline of minstrelsy in Britain, see Shepard, *The Broadside Ballad*, 51-2.
23 Shepard, *The Broadside Ballad*, 86.
to the two giants of the nineteenth-century broadside industry: John Pitts of the Toy and Marble Warehouse, No. 6 Great St. Andrews Street, and James Catnach of No. 2 Monmouth Court.

John Pitts was the son of a baker who entered the broadside trade through an apprenticeship with the printer John Evans of Long Lane, London. Pitts began publishing his own sheets in 1787, though his printing press remained unregistered throughout his long career.25 By the end of the eighteenth century, the dwindling broadside industry had become saturated with religious and moral tracts—neither of which were proving popular with buyers. After he inherited Evans’ press and stock, Pitts decided to start producing broadsides in the old style, featuring entertaining ballads.26 His gambit proved successful, and other printers soon followed his lead, effectively reviving the dying broadside trade. Among these was James Catnach, who would become Pitts’ great rival. The son of a printer, Catnach was a colorful character known for drinking and walking about with a folded paper hat on his head.27 He commenced printing under his own name in 1813, and though he came on the scene later than Pitts, his business acumen established him as—arguably—the most successful broadside ballad printer of all time. In some cases, he sold millions of copies of a single ballad—usually detailing a murder, hanging, or some other news stories of the more gruesome variety.28 Catnach is credited with introducing several broadside innovations, including the long song-sheet, a yard-long sheet divided into three columns and hawked as “three yards a penny!” He was the first to use finer, white paper

25 Shepard, John Pitts, 35-45. This demonstrates how poorly the Stationer’s Company regulated the broadside industry.
26 Ibid., 39.
27 Ibid., 53.
28 Shepard, The Broadside Ballad, 80-83.
for his broadside prints, as opposed to the usual rough, colored stock (Pitts followed suit), and he also created the catchpenny ballad, a term that denotes a broadside sporting a deceptive or misleading title, which is used to increase readership.29

Pitts was an older man, and blind for much of his career. He was not a great innovator, and Leslie Shepard posits that his inability to keep abreast of the times allowed James Catnach to take the lead in the nineteenth-century broadside industry.30 Catnach was somewhat of a sensationalist, and he realized that there was a great deal of money in scandalous news ballads—next to which, some of Pitts’ traditional fare proved rather bland. The differences in each man’s business style accounts for their unbalanced output of sailor ballads: though Catnach was more successful than Pitts in absolute terms, the genre of sailor ballads was dominated by Pitts.31 He did trade in news ballads, but Pitts was fundamentally a traditionalist, and preferred publishing his old-style ballads and entertaining songs. The vast majority of sailor ballads were what I term character ballads—that is, ballads that concern themselves primarily with constructing and describing characters rather than recounting events. They did not entirely lack action and scenario, but their plots were usually fictional and tended to be means rather than ends: they assisted in conveying to listeners the character of the British sailor. This format of entertaining song was one of Pitts’ specialties. Catnach chose to pursue his lucrative news ballads, but the older Mr. Pitts—resistant as he was to change—found himself the beneficiary of nineteenth-century Britain’s erupting naval craze.32

29 Ibid., 81.
30 Shepard, John Pitts, 60.
31 Fifty-two of the 201 sailor ballads (1800-1850) that I surveyed for this project were published by Pitts; only eight were published by Catnach.
32 Land, 7.
The writers of broadside ballads were as colorful as their printers. Apart from a handful of well-known popular composers such as Charles Dibdin (who will be discussed in later chapters), the majority of ballad writers during the last age of the broadside ballad were tavern poets, anonymous drunks or beggars from around the Seven Dials who made a living by selling their verses to printers like Pitts and Catnach. Often, these writers would write a poem and then hawk it to the various printers of the Seven Dials, but there is evidence that printers like Catnach and Pitts would also commission verses from specific poets on a given event or subject. Most of these verses were of middling or inferior quality, but they formed the backbone of the ballad industry, providing news, literature, music, and entertainment for the increasingly-literate populace.

Balladmongers were a fascinating breed, and it seems there were as many types of peddlers as there were ballads. There were chanters, who stood on streets and lured-in customers by singing their wares, and also standing patterers, who stood in one place and blurted out shocking hooks—much as newsboys would holler newspaper headlines in the decades to come. These, however, are not to be confused with the running patterers, who yelled similar hooks, but adopted a fly-by approach, dashing up and down streets in a flurry, relying on drama to produce sales. Long-song sellers and pinners-up would display their wares visually, affixing them to a wall or a post or some other stationary object for customers to peruse. Some of these, such as the long-song seller, specialized in only one of the several print formats that are now grouped under the general term “broadside ballad”. Other variants include broadsheet ballads (printed on both sides),

33 Shepard, The Broadsie Ballad, 57.
34 Ibid., 80, and also see the article “Literature on the Streets,” J.&R.M. Wood’s Typographic Advertiser, vol. I (March 1, 1863) as quoted in Shepard, John Pitts, 48-9.
garlands (sheets printed with multiple songs), and chapbooks (larger papers intended to be folded and sewn into little books by the end consumer). The nineteenth-century broadside trade had a literal cast of thousands, a network as broad as it was diverse. And it was in this vibrant industry that the sailor ballad rose to prominence, propelling the character Jack Tar into the nineteenth-century popular sphere.

During the Great Age of Sail, the term “tars” was routinely used to refer to sailors—given their habit of tarring clothing, hats and even pigtails to ward against the fierce elements encountered on ships. Similarly, the name “Jack,” as a variant or diminutive of “John,” has long been used in British culture to denote “an average man” (another example would be John Bull). The compound term “Jack Tar” has been used in British (and now American) culture for so long that dating it is rather difficult. Not even Isaac Land, an expert in the history of the British sailor, attempts to do so. As a matter of fact, there appears to be only one source that suggests a date of origin: the U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command states that “‘Tar, a slang term for a Sailor, has been in use since at least 1676. The term "Jack tar" was used by the 1780s.’” Unfortunately, this resource does not provide any references to corroborate its statements, and historical evidence indicates that the term “Jack Tar” was in common usage at least a decade before the date cited. In 1770, Samuel Adams employed it during the Boston Massacre trials, saying that “The plain English is, gentlemen, most probably a motley rabble of saucy boys, negroes and mulattoes, Irish teagues and outlandish jack tars.—And why we should

35 Ballads about British sailors appeared in all of these printed forms, and in this project, I will not delineate between them.
36 “Jack Tar” was a term usually reserved for non-commissioned sailors (i.e. not officers). Other terms for these men included “ratings” or “foremast Jacks” (both used primarily within the service).
scruple to call such a set of people a mob, I can’t conceive, unless the name is too respectable for them.” Additionally, the terms “tar” or “Jack Tar” may be found in broadside ballads as early as the 1770s.

The British sailor had been present in popular culture long before the nineteenth century, appearing in dramatic and literary works as far back as the 1500s. Land argues that prior to the mid-eighteenth century, these depictions were almost entirely negative. He points to Charles Shadwell’s play *The Fair Quaker of Deal* (1710) as an example of sailors’ popular image in Britain during the first half of the eighteenth century. This play features some particularly repulsive seamen with a proclivity for rape, murder, and theft. However, further research reveals that the “despicable” sailor was not necessarily the norm in British drama. As Harold Watson noted in his book on the subject, there were a number of “stock” sailor characters that appeared in staged productions from the seventeenth century onwards. A good many of these were nefarious, but not all were bad. In fact, at least one (the “heart of oak” character) could boast of an exceptionally high moral character, and would—arguably—provide a model for the nineteenth-century Jack Tar figure later expounded upon in the songs of Charles Dibdin and other

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38 See *The Trial of the British Soldiers, of the 29th Regiment of Foot, for the Murder of Crispus Attucks, Samuel Gray, Samuel Maverick, James Caldwell, and Patrick Carr* (Boston: Emmons, 1824), 114.
40 Land, 21.
nineteenth-century ballad writers. The characterization of sailors in pre-nineteenth century British song was equally varied: while some broadside ballads featured morally-reprehensible characters, others presented sailors in a much more favorable light.  

Though the image of the sailor in pre-nineteenth century British culture may have been a bit more complicated than Land suggested, there was a definite shift in the depiction of sailors in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. During this time, the sailor not only gained society’s esteem, he also—perhaps more meaningfully—garnered its interest. In terms of popular music, the sailor appeared in a number of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century ballads, but for the most part, the tradition showed only a lukewarm interest in him as a song subject. Heading into the 1800s, however, this all changed.

Britain’s Royal Navy was formed in the sixteenth century under Henry VII and Henry VIII, but it was not until the eighteenth century that it became a significant military force, growing by necessity during its long-term conflicts with the Dutch, the Spanish, and of course the French. Not coincidentally, it was during this century that the moniker “Jack Tar” became prevalent in British culture. Prior to this, a sailor was described in the popular sphere merely by his profession (“the seaman” or “the sailor”).

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However, as the navy evolved into an institution as well as a profession, Britain’s fighting sailor earned a title that was more personal, and even endearing: he had a name—Jack Tar—and he was now perfectly poised to gain a character as well.

This would occur in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries during the escalating conflict with Napoleonic France, when the sailor’s importance in British culture reached its apex. Through their popular songs, Charles Dibdin and other ballad writers forged a new, tangible character for Jack Tar—influenced by the patriotic theatrical works of Henry Carey and other playwrights earlier in the century, as well as the positive nautical figures found in British drama. With a name and a compelling, multi-faceted character, the sailor born of the humble broadside ballad infiltrated all forms of popular culture in the early years of the nineteenth century—forever changing Britain’s relationship with her sailors.
Like all song forms, broadside ballads lie at the crossroads of music and poetry. Because of their poetic natures, ballads of the “traditional” and broadside varieties have typically been studied by scholars of English and Literature (Francis James Child, for example, was a professor of Rhetoric at Harvard). But broadside ballads are not solely literary in nature, and treating them as a form of street poetry effectively divorces them from their social and cultural contexts: these ballads were poems, but they were also songs. To be holistically considered, broadside ballads must be approached musicologically: that is, as both musical and literary works. But this introduces a difficult question: where is the music?

The relationship between verse and music in broadside balladry remains somewhat of a mystery—it is almost always obscure, and very often irretrievable. Broadsides were never printed with music, but as discussed in the previous chapter, early ballads customarily included tune references (usually printed under the title), which gave purchasers clear directions as to the verse’s intended musical setting. Even with explicit tune references, ballad verses and melodies were fundamentally disconnected. As tunes were borrowed and reused freely, the setting of ballads was a “mix and match” affair, lacking unified artistic or compositional intent; the marriage between verse and melody was, by its nature, polygamous. Nevertheless, tune references allow modern scholars to make definite connections between broadside ballads and specific melodies.
However, after the seventeenth century, the relationship between verses and music became even more problematic when tune references disappeared from broadside ballads almost entirely. Out of the 202 nineteenth-century sailor ballads I have studied, only seven give explicit tune references, and most have no discernable connection to music at all. In order to tackle the confusing and troubling relationship between verse and song in nineteenth-century sailor ballads, this chapter will consist of three sections. The first of these will discuss the ballads that include tune references, exploring the relationship between their verses and melodies, and briefly examining those tunes that still exist in notated form. The second section of the chapter will discuss nineteenth-century sailor ballads that were written with purposely-composed tunes, examining the sources of these songs, their modes of dissemination, and their connections with other popular entertainment traditions. Lastly, the third section of the chapter will consider the conundrum posed by the 176 sailor ballads in this collection that have no clear musical associations at all.

The ballad “The Sailor’s Dialogue,” as featured on a broadside dated from 1770-1800, refers to the tune “Gossip Joan.” This melody originally accompanied “The Woman’s Complaint to Her Neighbour,” a ballad consisting of quintains with the unusual syllable-count of 6-7-6-7-3 (the poetic meter is mostly iambic). This song first appeared in volume six of Thomas D’Urfey’s *Wit and Mirth: Or, Pills to Purge Melancholy,* an influential collection of old songs and new compositions printed in six volumes.

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published by Henry Playford from 1698-1720, and then by J. Tonson. The words were written by the author, but the melody is harder to attribute; D’Urfey wrote some of the settings for his poetry but used preexisting tunes for many of them. The melody is notated in C, composed of nine bars broken into four two-bar phrases, followed by a one-bar tagline that is sung to the words “gossip Joan” in the original. The tune begins with an eighth-note anacrusis and moves mostly by stepwise motion; however the melody leaps unexpectedly from a G up a sixth to end on a high E in the tagline, adding an element of surprise and asymmetry (see Example 3.1 for the notated melody). The tune employs a fairly small range, spanning a seventh from G4 to F5. I have found only one other ballad that refers to this tune, entitled “The Political Pair; or the State-gossip, a Song,” which is an undated political parody of D’Urfey’s original.

Example 3.1: “Gossip Joan”

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46 This transcription was made from D’Urfey’s original.
The ballad “Sweet William” has a syllable-count of 11-12-11-11 and appears on three broadsides in the Bodleian Library’s collection, the earliest of which dates from 1802 and refers to the tune “Green Bushes.”47 I have only found one transcription of this melody, collected by Clive Carey in 1912 and currently available in a digitized form in the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library database.48 The original ballad entitled “Green Bushes” was very well-received, if the number of surviving copies can be considered evidence of its popularity.49 The tune was also used in the ballad “Down by the Dark Arches,” dating from mid-century.50 Carey’s transcription of the melody consists of two eight-bar phrases in E Dorian (see Example 3.2); though I have been unable to trace this melody earlier than the nineteenth century, its modality would suggest that it derived from a folk source.

47 See “Sweet William” (Great St. Andrew Street, Seven Dials, London: J. Pitts, 1802-1819), accessed December 9, 2014, Bodleian Library Edition – Bod8531
http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/static/images/sheets/20000/17800.gif and “Sweet William” (Great St. Andrew-Street, Seven Dials, London: T. Birt, 1827-8), Bodleian Library Edition – Bod17221
http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/static/images/sheets/20000/17799.gif.

48 “Green Bushes” (Clive Carey, 1912), Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, accessed January 3, 2015,
http://www.vwml.org/search?qtext=green%20bushes&ts=1417709150871&collectionfilter=HHA;SBG;JHB;LEB;GB;CC;COL;GG;AGG;PG;HAM;MK;FK;EML;TFO;CJS1;CJS2;FSBW;RVW1;RVW2;AW.

49 The broadside editions of “Green Bushes” were printed by Pitts between 1819 and 1844, and also by Catnatch from 1813 to 1838. See ballad holdings for “Roud 1040” (Green Bushes), Bodleian Library, accessed December 9, 2014, http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/search/roud/1040.

Example 3.2: “Green Bushes”\textsuperscript{51}

The ballad “Jack Mainmast” refers to “Giles Scroggin’s Ghost,” a (non-sailor) song credited to Charles Dibdin and dating from the late-eighteenth century. The song’s melody survives in published form, but it was also transcribed by folk collectors Frank Kidson and George Gardiner in the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{52} The poetic meters of “Giles Scroggin’s Ghost” and “Jack Mainmast” bear a passing resemblance to each other, but as with most British folk songs, considerable license must be taken in fitting both of these verses with the melody. I am aware of only one other ballad that borrowed Dibdin’s music from “Giles Scroggin’s Ghost”— a parody of the original.\textsuperscript{53}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{51} This transcription was made from Clive Carey’s original dictation.
\item \textsuperscript{52} “Jack Mainmast” (Water-lane, Fleet-street, London: Jennings, 1790-1840), Bodleian Library Edition – Bod8551, accessed December 22, 2014, http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/static/images/sheets/10000/09735.gif and “Giles Scroggin’s Ghost” (G.B. Gardiner and H. Balfour, 1906), Vaughan Williams Memorial Library http://www.vwwm.org/search?qtext=giles%20scroggins&ts=1417707363809&collectionfilter=HHA;SBG;HB;LEB;GB;CC;COL;GG;AGG;PG;HAM;MK;FK;EML;TFO;CJS1;CJS2;FSBW;RVW1;RVW2;AW#record=5.
\end{itemize}
Example 3.3: Excerpt from “Giles Scroggins’ Ghost,” with vocal and piano parts.54

As seen in Example 3.3, the music from “Giles Scroggins’ Ghost” is quite unlike the tunes associated with the previous two ballads. The modal melody of “Green Bushes” probably derived from a folk song, and exists only in manuscript transcriptions. “Gossip Joan” was composed and published, but it mimics the style of folk melodies and popular broadside tunes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, consisting of a simple, short,
unelaborated tune with a narrow range, intended for non-professional singing. Dibdin’s music, on the other hand, was clearly written for an accomplished singer, and was not only composed, but also arranged with an accompaniment.

The extant sheet music for this song features a melody with words printed beneath, accompanied by a piano and either violin, flute or clarinet. The melody is in 2/4 time and it is broken into four symmetrical four-bar phrases, with parallel first, second and fourth phrases, the third phrase providing rhythmic and melodic contrast. The melody line would prove challenging for amateur singers, featuring a relatively wide vocal range (C4-E5), sequences, and a lively dotted-eighth figure. The song’s chamber-ensemble instrumentation cements its classical character: the piano employs a walking or Alberti bass accompaniment in the left hand with the melody in the right, while the treble instrument plays a harmonizing line. The song is set firmly in an A minor tonality (with a raised seventh scale degree), and uses a conventional harmonic vocabulary—diatonic except for two secondary dominants (tonicizing E). Dibdin’s melodic line shows some influence from opera and classical vocal music, indicating that the boundaries between Britain’s upper- and lower-class musical traditions were becoming quite porous.

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56 As Example 3.3 shows, the surviving sheet-music for this song was actually printed in Philadelphia, advertised “As Sung by Mr. Jefferson.” Dibdin usually arranged his own works, regularly performing them as well as selling them, but other performers often rearranged his material to suit their own purposes. As I could find no other sheet music with which to compare this version, I cannot determine how faithful this arrangement was to Dibdin’s original.

57 Broadside balladry’s connection with opera and other staged entertainments will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.
The ballad “The Rigs and Sprees of Ratcliffe Highway and Wapping” refers to the tune from “Billy O’Rooke,” a nineteenth-century ballad with several name variants.\textsuperscript{58} I have found that the tune was associated with at least seven other broadsides, and though transcriptions are relatively scarce, a digitized version is available through the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, collected by John Newton in 1904 (see Example 3.4).\textsuperscript{59} Like “Giles Scroggin’s Ghost,” this song is tonal (set in the key of G major) and features five regularized four-bar phrases in a lilting 6/8. Curiously, the lyrics of the original ballad and “Rigs and Sprees” are in verse-chorus form, though the same music is used for both sections.

Example 3.4: “Billy O’Rooke”\textsuperscript{60}

\footnotesize
\begin{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{59} See entries for “Billy o’Rook,” “Billy O’Rooke,” “Billy O’Rouke,” “Billy O’Rouke &c,” “Billy O. Rourke,” and “Billy O’Rourke” in the Bodleian Library “Browse by Tune,” accessed December 23, 2014, http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/browse/tunes/b/3 and “Billy O’Rooke” (John Newton, 1904), Vaughan Williams Memorial Library http://www.vwml.org/search?qtext=billy%20o%27rooke&ts=1419359143900&collectionfilter=HHA;SBG;JHB;LEB;GB;CC;COL;GG;AGG;PG;HAM;MK;FK;EML;TFO;CJS1;CJS2;FSBW;RVW1;RVW2;AW#record=4.

\textsuperscript{60} This transcription was made from John Newton’s original dictation.
\end{verbatim}
The next three tune references were harder to locate. The ballad entitled “When First Went to Sea” refers to a tune simply called “Admiral,” which I have been unable to definitively identify, as there were many tunes entitled some variant of “Admiral” in the nineteenth century.61 Similarly, the tune for “Jack Ratlin”—simply referred to as “Valiant Soldier”—was difficult to absolutely pinpoint.62 It most likely refers to the tune from “Patrick Flemmen He was a Valiant Soldier,” dating from at least 1684. This melody was also used for “The Downfal [sic] of the Whiggs: or Their Lamentation for Few of a Loyal Parliament,” but unfortunately I have been unable to find it in notated form.63 This is a particularly interesting reference, because the song lyric is credited to Charles Dibdin, who—supposedly—always wrote music to go with his verses. Alternate broadside printings of this song do not include the same tune reference, and so it appears that the relationship between broadside ballads’ music and verse—even when simultaneously conceived—remained flexible.64

Perhaps the most intriguing tune to be found among the sailor ballads is in “Christian Soldier’s Dream,” a broadside that refers to “Hymn-165.” The religious associations of this tune reference are appropriate—given the ballad’s theme and subject—but they are remarkable because in broadside balladry, a tune’s prior uses or associations rarely had any bearing on its application to new ballads. This is the most

meaningful tune reference I have found in the nineteenth-century sailor ballads, as the writer’s choice of melody informs, reflects and highlights the meaning of the song’s words.

In the early eighteenth century, there was a rebirth of hymn-singing in British churches, thanks to the influence of John and Charles Wesley, who sought to emphasize this form of musical worship in their Methodist church services. The demand for moving congregational hymns spread, influencing many British Christian denominations, including the Church of England. Due to the segmentation of British Christianity and the proliferation of hymnals in almost all British Christian denominations, I have been unable to identify the tune to which this ballad refers. However, as a fascinating marriage of sailor ballad and religious tract, this broadside evidences the increased Christianization of the sailor in society. As Jack became an icon of nineteenth-century British culture, he attracted the attention of Christian missionary organizations and revivalists like George Charles Smith. These missionaries reached their audiences by printing broadside tracts (sometimes in ballad form, as is the case here) that featured engaging plots, nautical characters, and dialecticisms.

In the nineteenth century, hundreds of ballads—like those discussed above—were written for broadside publication by common street-poets, set to preexistent tunes and sold to ballad printers for a shilling per verse. However, many songs were borrowed from other traditions, and they very often brought tune associations with them. The

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65 There were scores of hymnals published for Church of England services during this period, but the choice of hymnbook was effectively left up to the clergy of individual parishes. Even today, there is no official Church of England hymnal.

66 Land, 115-117. Smith’s use of broadside ballads to communicate with sailors also implies that ballads about Jack Tar were readily consumed by sailors themselves.

broadside ballad industry had long gleaned material from the folk tradition, but there was another extremely important source for broadside songs in the nineteenth century: the theatre.

Almost from its inception, broadside balladry had enjoyed an active exchange with British theatre. The broadside industry was headquartered only a stone’s throw from London’s West End, and the traditions had a mildly-antagonistic, squabbling, sibling-like relationship: as a form of popular entertainment, the broadside ballad was thoroughly mocked on stage—particularly in the plays of Shakespeare—but broadside printers stole the theatre’s most popular songs in return.68 In 1728, broadside balladry and the theatre intersected with *The Beggar’s Opera*, an extremely successful comedic work by John Gay and John Christopher Pepusch that parodied the popular operatic entertainments imported from the Continent by substituting beggars and prostitutes for heroes and heroines. The work ushered in the short-lived but popular genre of ballad opera, which consists of about eighty works in total. Like the broadside itself, this uniquely British theatrical genre relied on music from many sources, including old ballad tunes, popular songs and works by classical composers like G.F. Handel, Henry Purcell and Arcangelo Corelli, along with many others. Though referred to as operas, these entertainments may more properly be considered comedic plays, as they are not sung throughout.69

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68 Shepard, *The Broadside Ballad*, 57.
The fad for ballad opera did not last long. Its popularity tapered-off in the 1730s, but the close connection between broadside balladry and the theatre remained. Leading up to the turn of the nineteenth century, the broadside ballad was drawn into the theatre once again, as professional performers incorporated ballads into their musical entertainments. According to Shepard, “concerts, operas and plays dignified popular song by removing it from the amateur field of the streets to the refined setting of the professional performance, with special harmonies and instrumental parts.” Ballads that had a first blush of popularity on the street were notated and arranged for staged entertainments that took place in theatres, and subsequent broadside printings often referred to the performer with which they had become associated. These arranged street songs then appeared in pleasure garden performances of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century London, again showing that Britain’s musical traditions were anything but segregated. Operatic airs were borrowed for plays about prostitutes and beggars; street ballads were elevated to refined entertainments. Classical forms, street-poet verses, folk music, and popular tunes slipped seamlessly from one venue to the next.

As popular songs entered the world of professional performance, music that was originally composed for staged entertainments migrated back to the streets. Theatre songs enjoyed a vibrant second life in broadside publication (legally or illegally), and the two traditions seemed to enjoy a positive symbiosis: theatre-goers would seek out broadside prints of their favorite songs from staged entertainments, and the performer references that appeared on broadside ballads acted as advertisements for stage entertainers. One of the most famous performers of popular songs was Charles Dibdin, a thespian who wrote

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70 Price, "Ballad opera."
71 Shepard, The Broadside Ballad, 73.
a considerable minority of the broadside ballads studied in this project. According to George Hogarth, who compiled a two-volume collection of the songwriter’s popular works, Dibdin wrote most of his songs for theatrical entertainments (at the Sans Souci Theatre, for the most part), and he composed music for all of them. Hogarth’s collection provides the tunes to some of Dibdin’s more popular songs, published with new accompaniments. Of the thirty-one Dibdin songs that have survived in broadside ballad form, eleven appear with notated music in Hogarth’s collection (a twelfth, “Tom Bowling,” may be found in another publication that will be discussed later).

British popular music scholar Jeremy Barlow warns against underestimating the popularity and ubiquity of Dibdin’s music in nineteenth-century British life, and Hogarth’s edition supports his argument. Charles Dibdin died in 1814, and the fact that his songs (both words and music) survived to mid-century implies that their popularity had remarkable endurance in British culture (Hogarth published his volumes in 1842 and 1848). The popularity of these songs implies that people could buy a broadside ballad (by Dibdin or another popular entertainer) and be able to sing the verses to their intended tune.

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73 The accompaniments in the volume were arranged by G. Hogarth, H. West, C.F. Purday and F. Lancelott. See “Contents of Vol. II” in Dibdin, The Songs of Charles Dibdin, Volume II, ed. Hogarth. As this volume advertises “New Accompaniments” to the songs, one may assume that arrangements for these songs already existed at the time of publication. Therefore, one may ask: was Dibdin’s music readily available in sheet music form? See the third section of this chapter, in which single-sheet songs are discussed.
75 An email from Jeremy Barlow to the author dated November 10, 2014.
Dibdin had a very recognizable songwriting style that proved to be both popular and easily reproducible. His songs are quite technically demanding, and as previously noted, they often feature large vocal ranges (usually a tenth or eleventh, but sometimes as much as a thirteenth, as in “Tom Tackle”). They frequently include octave leaps and long, arching, arpeggiated contours, some of which require dramatic changes in vocal register (again, see “Tom Tackle,” mm 29-33 in Example 3.5). Rapid passagework—which may border on the melismatic—is also common in Dibdin’s melodies (see “Shipwreck’d Tar, mm 3-8 in Example 3.6). Most of his songs are in F or G major, starting on a dominant upbeat and remaining in the diatonic major throughout, save for a few secondary dominants (see “Jack Junk,” “The Nancy” and “The Shipwreck’d Tar”). The advanced technical requirements of Dibdin’s songs, along with their consistency of style, suggest that he wrote them with his own voice and performance preferences at the forefront of his mind.

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Dibdin identified himself as a classically-trained musician (though in reality, he had little formal training, if any) and his writing reflects the tradition with which he associated himself. Remaining consistent with the classical conventions of his day, Dibdin rarely ventured into minor keys (“Giles Scroggin’s Ghost” is a notable exception), and I have not found any songs of his which may be termed modal. His vocal lines can be quite operatic in nature, and clearly imitate the contemporary classical—rather than folk—tradition. Opera from the Continent was still a favorite import in Britain, and as Dibdin was writing songs that would be performed on stage and in pleasure gardens—as well as on street corners—he fused Britain’s native ballad tradition with more cosmopolitan musical styles. These songs may have been sung in pubs by the British working classes, but they were not composed with the amateur singer in mind.
In a post-Romantic world, listeners and singers expect that music—when intended for a specified text—will to some degree reflect the meaning of the lyric, but word-painting is not a prominent feature of Dibdin’s vocal music. Most of his songs were written in true ballad (strophic) form, and therefore word-painting would have been of limited effect, as the same music accompanied multiple verses of a given song. It is also important to recognize that Dibdin had something of a “winning” formula for writing popular music, and though he routinely infused his melodies with a nautical or martial flavor, his music obeyed formula rather than text (Dibdin wrote nearly a thousand songs...
in his career, and so a melodic formula would have been expedient to rapid production).  
That being said, Dibdin did have a pleasing ability to reflect a song’s overall tone in the 
music. Perhaps the best example of this is “Tom Bowling.” Written after the death of the 
composer’s elder brother Thomas, this song was a sort of elegy for a dearly departed 
sailor, and it remains one of Dibdin’s most beloved ballads. Though it stays in C major 
throughout, the song is imbued with a bittersweet sentimentality through the use of 
descending lines, nostalgic ornamentation, and sighing leaps of a sixth (see Example 3.7). 
With the help of a good singer, “Tom Bowling” can be a very moving song, and it is a 
testament to Dibdin’s resourcefulness and skill in setting his texts.

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80 Dibdin’s frequent use of 4/4 meters, simple harmonic structures, arpeggiated chords, dominant 
upbeats, and dotted rhythms give his music a staunch, militaristic sound. However, there are few instances 
of what may properly be termed word painting.
Dibdin’s songs tend to consist of regularized phrases; four-bar phrases are the most common, but eight-bar phrases can also be found (see “True Courage”). Oftentimes, the composer will break an established phrase structure at the end of a song by expanding, curtailing or adding a phrase, lending the music a dash of the unexpected, presumably for effect. The number of phrases in his ballads varies: some songs have a

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82 There is a concluding six-bar phrase in “The Sailor’s Will” and “Tom Bowling,” a five-bar phrase in “The Nancy,” a three-bar phrase in ‘The Shipwreck’d Tar,” and a two-bar phrase in “Tom
conventional number of phrases (four phrases are found in “The Sailor’s Journal” and “True Courage,” and six phrases are found in “The Sailor’s Will,” “Lovely Nan,” and “The Nancy”). However, some have slightly less conventional phrase numbers, such as “The Shipwreck’d Tar,” which is divided into three phrases, “Jack’s Fidelity,” “Tom Tough,” and “True Courage,” which have five phrases apiece, and “Tom Tackle,” which has a remarkable fourteen.83

Dibdin liked to provide variation within his melodies, as many were in strophic form and would be repeated with each verse. He preferred to start a song with two parallel phrases, followed by one to four discreet contrasting phrases, sometimes ending with a return of the initial material. A good example of this is “Jack’s Fidelity,” which has been provided in its entirety in Example 3.8. This song consists of five four-bar phrases in the form AA’BCD. As was typical of Dibdin, the initial phrase starts on an upward-moving quarter-note anacrusis and traverses quite a large range in just four measures (an eleventh). It features a long-short-short (quarter note, eighth note, eighth note) figure and ends on a half cadence in C major. This phrase is immediately repeated,

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though the second iteration has an altered ending to accommodate a perfect authentic cadence. The B phrase is contrasting, but it also features the long-short-short figure, as well as two dramatic octave jumps, ending on a secondary dominant in G major (V). The C phrase abandons the long-short-short motive entirely and consists of seamless descending runs, concluding with yet another secondary dominant, this time in F major (IV). The ending D phrase introduces the obligatory dotted-quarter/eighth note figure, and ends on an ascending broken-third sequence. This song exemplifies many of Dibdin’s common compositional characteristics: it is written in a major key and features a simple harmonic vocabulary (there are only two chromatic alterations), a repeated first phrase, a large range extending to the F above middle C, dotted rhythms, anacruses and simple sequences. Dibdin certainly had a formula, but it is a credit to his compositional abilities that he could produce catchy, memorable tunes within this mold.84

Unfortunately, I have found no original accompaniments for Dibdin’s sailor songs; however, the accompaniments arranged by compilers or performers show a remarkable stylistic consistency. That being the case, it is possible that these arrangements reflect the conventions of Dibdin’s established performance and compositional style. Like the accompaniment for “Giles Scroggin’s Ghost,” the arrangements in Hogarth and Moffat’s compilations feature simple harmonies, walking or Alberti basses, and unelaborated melody lines (again see Example 3.8). This clean texture conforms to the musical aesthetic of the galant style in classical music of the late-eighteenth century, and its basic harmonic progressions and chordal arrangements ensure that it could be easily dashed-off in a performance.

84 See also “Tom Tough,” “The Sailor’s Journal,” True Courage,” “Jack’s Fidelity,” “Jack at Greenwich,” and “Tom Bowling.”
Example 3.8: “Jack’s Fidelity”

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JACK'S FIDELITY.

wife at each port; - But when that I saw'd Polly Ply, I

half'd her my love-ly, and gave her a kiss, And swore to bring up once for

all; And from that time black Barnaby splic'd us, to this,—from

that time black Barnaby splic'd us, to this, I've been constant and true to my

III (PAC)

IV (Tonicized)
I (PAC)

And till now all sorts of temptations I've stood;
For I afterwards sail'd round the world,
And a queer set we saw of the devil's own brood,
Wherever our sails were unfurl'd:
Some with faces like charcoal, and others like chalk,
All ready one's heart to overhaul;
'Don't you go to love me, my good girl,' said I; 'walk,—
'I've sworn to be constant to Poll.'

I met with a squaw out at India beyond,
All in glass and tobacco-pipes dress'd.
What a dear pretty monster! so kind and so fond,
That I ne'er was a moment at rest.
With her bob's at her nose, and her quaw, quaw, quaw,
All the world like a Bartlemy doll;
Says I, 'You Miss Copperskin, just hold your jaw,—
'I've sworn to be constant to Poll.'

Then one near Sumatra, just under the line,
As fond as a witch in a play;
'I love you,' says she, 'and just only be mine,
'Or by poison I'll take you away.'
'Curse your kindness,' says I; 'but you can't frighten me,
You don't catch a gudgeon this haul;
If I do take your raisabane, why then, do you see,
I shall die true and constant to Poll.'

But I 'scap'd from them all, tawny, lily, and black,
And mildly weather'd each storm;
And my neighbours to please, full of wonders came back,—
But, what's better, I'm grown pretty warm.
And so now to sea I shall venture no more,
For you know, being rich, I've no call;
So I'll bring up young tars, do my duty ashore,
And live and die constant to Poll.
Dibdin was by far the most popular and prolific composer of sailor ballads, but he was certainly not the only one. Fortunately, ballads by other nineteenth-century writers have survived with their purpose-written melodies—all of which originated from comic operas, monologues, or other staged entertainments. These may be found in Alfred Moffat and Frank Kidson’s *English Songs of the Georgian Period*, a valuable collection of popular music from the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries that provides both the words and music to two-hundred songs. It was compiled around the turn of the twentieth century, and includes very helpful notes and comments by the authors.\(^8\) Sailor-related songs form a considerable portion of this collection, but sadly only six coincide with the broadside ballads studied in this project. Some of the sailor songs included in Moffat’s edition may have been published only as parlor songs, intended for private, middle-class entertainment rather than public performance on the stage or in the street. However, it is likely that many of these songs were printed as broadsides, but have not survived in that form to the present day.

The first sailor ballad in this collection is “Tom Starboard,” with words by Andrew Cherry (1762-1812), an Irish ballad writer and playwright who was a contemporary of Dibdin’s and worked in England for part of his career. Interestingly, Moffat notes that the music for this song comes from the comic opera *The Turnpike Gate* by Joseph Mazzinghi (1765-1844) and William Reeve (1757-1835), which premiered at the Theatre Royal at Covent Garden in 1799.\(^7\) I have not been able to discover how Cherry’s words became associated with this playhouse tune (the extant broadside ballad

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\(^8\) Moffat, *English Songs of the Georgian Period.*

\(^7\) See “Tom Starboard,” Moffat, 80, and “Tom Starboard” (Snow Hill, Birmingham: D. Wrighton, 1812-1830), Bodleian Library Edition – Bod13872, accessed December 31, 2014, [http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/static/images/sheets/05000/01532.gif](http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/static/images/sheets/05000/01532.gif). Interestingly, the broadside version of this ballad attributes the words to Thomas Knight.
version does not reference the tune directly). Though Mazzinghi and Reeve’s work was called an opera, it does not appear to have been an opera in the Continental sense (opera seria); the music was likely from an English burletta or comedic opera. The song is a simple diatonic tune in strophic form, composed of four phrases in the key of F major. It has a melody that is reminiscent of Dibdin’s songs, with an emphasis on dotted rhythms and featuring a large range (an 11th).

Also by William Reeve is the music for “I’m a Jolly Roving Tar,” possibly with words by the same. This was apparently a very popular song, and in Moffat’s edition, it is in D in 2/4, again featuring dotted rhythms. Its most notable musical feature is its verse-chorus form. The term “ballad” is a bit of a misnomer for broadside songs, as not all were strophic; many employed worded choruses, nonsense choruses (fol de rol, tol de rol, etc.) or repeated taglines. This particular song has three verses and a chorus that is partly worded (“’Tis Yes! Yes! Yes! Drink, drink and kiss the lasses! Drink away, that’s your play!”), and partly nonsense (“Fal de ral lal lal,” etc.). It was sung by Charles Benjamin Incledon (1763-1826), who is known to have performed regularly at Vauxhall Gardens. He was associated with several other popular songs, including the sailor ballad “The Post Captain,” which was supposedly written for him. It was first performed ca.

88 However, it would appear that Reeve collaborated with other song and ballad writers. For example, another sailor ballad titled “Tom Tack’s Ghost” has words by Charles Dibdin and music by Reeve. This is a curious attribution when one considers Hogarth’s averment that Dibdin wrote music to all of his songs. Was a tune by Reeve substituted for Dibdin’s original, or did the two collaborate on songs and/or stage productions? These would be interesting inquiries to pursue, but unfortunately, they fall outside of the scope of this project. See “I’m a Jolly Roving Tar,” Moffat, 88, and “I’m A Jolly Roving Tar” (Great St. Andrew Street, Seven Dials, London: J. Pitts, 1802-1819), Bodleian Library Edition – Bod8529, accessed December 31, 2014, http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/static/images/sheets/20000/17809.gif and Charles Dibdin, “Tom Tack’s Ghost” (Fleet Street, London: Laurie & Whittle, 1808), Bodleian Library Edition – Bod11316, http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/static/images/sheets/05000/00832.gif.
1808 in a monologue entitled *Variety*. The words were by the songwriter John Rannie (n.d) and the music was by English violinist and light opera composer William Shield (1748-1829). While Rannie’s words may have been written for Incledon, it is very likely that Shield’s melody—which is more sophisticated than any ballad music examined thus far, including Dibdin’s—was in fact plundered from one of the composer’s operas (see Example 3.9).

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Example 3.9: Excerpt from “Post-Captain,” mm 26-34

According to Moffat, “The Disconsolate Sailor” was also performed at Vauxhall Gardens, sung by its writer, George Saville Carey (1743-1807) between 1788-9. George Saville Carey was the posthumous son of Henry Carey (1687-1743), the English writer and Ballad-opera composer who is remembered for his patriotic theatrical works including *Nancy, or The Parting Lovers* (1739). The younger Carey was not a very

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91 See “The Disconsolate Sailor,” Moffat, 259 and 341, as well as “Disconsolate Sailor” (1809-1821), National Library of Scotland, accessed December 31, 2014, [http://digital.nls.uk/74897002](http://digital.nls.uk/74897002). Henry Carey was an important figure in the development of the genre of patriotic plays in the eighteenth century, as Dibdin would be in balladry of the nineteenth century. The characters and themes of *Nancy, or The Parting Lovers* (1739) influenced a great many ballads of the nineteenth century, including “Henry &
successful actor but regularly performed at Vauxhall, and a number of ballads are attributed to him.92 The music for this particular song was by James Hook (1746-1827), the English organist, songwriter and composer who wrote comic operas for pleasure garden entertainments at Marylebone and Vauxhall.93 The melody is in F major, and consists of five verses of only eight bars, broken into two phrases. The range is similar to the other songs discussed earlier in the chapter, and once again, there is a notable use of dotted rhythms.

“The Disabled Sailor,” with words by Matthew Gregory Lewis (1775-1818) and music by Charles Dignum (1765-1827), is also typical of the sailor-song genre, and as Moffat points out, it is quite Dibdinesque—especially as it opens with a pair of parallel phrases.94 It is in F major, 2/4, with a slightly subtler use of dotted rhythms and a few notable large leaps in the melodic line. Dignum was an actor and a singer who performed in Dibdin’s The Waterman, and was a featured soloist in the debut of Franz Josef

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Haydn’s *The Creation*. He also composed the music for several patriotic songs and ballads. The lyricist, Matthew Gregory Lewis, was the English writer who became famous for his gothic novel *The Monk*, published in 1796.

The last sailor ballad with extant notated music is “Ben Block,” written, composed and performed by a man only identified as Collins. Unfortunately, there were several known performers by the name of Collins, and so the author’s identity is not certain, but I believe the man referred to was John Daniel Collins. Moffat adds that this work was written for the monologue *The Evening Busk*. It is in C major, consisting of four arcing, contiguous phrases that feature dotted rhythms and dominant anacruses.

The first third of this chapter was devoted to those nineteenth-century sailor ballads that include old-fashioned tune-references. Though only seven of the 202 ballads have explicit tune references, a surprising amount of information can be gleaned from them; most importantly, these examples demonstrate that sailor ballads were sung to music from a great variety of sources and backgrounds. Of the seven tunes examined, one dated from the seventeenth century, three dated no earlier than the nineteenth century, and three could not be dated at all; there was a hymn tune, a popular stage tune, and five—for want of a better term—“popular” ballad songs; there was one song with a

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verse-chorus structure, and six in true ballad form; there were two with existing printed scores, two with manuscript scores, and three with no notated music in existence; two songs had accredited authors, and five had no known author at all; none shared the same poetic meter. The variety presented in this small collection of tune references is characteristic of broadside balladry as a whole, and it is one of the great difficulties in studying this form of popular song. The broadside ballad tradition was, by definition, popular, a term that implies—if properly considered—a terrifying breadth of musical traditions. Nowadays, songs from a dizzying array of genres might safely be considered “popular” music: for example, most Americans could recognize the hymn “Amazing Grace,” the lullaby “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star,” the Beatles’ hit “Yesterday,” the theme from Pachelbel’s *Canon and Gigue for 3 violins and basso continuo*, and the eponymous melody from Webber’s “Phantom of the Opera.” The musical sound world of the nineteenth-century Britain was no less diverse: the tune references show that the broadside ballad tradition included folk music from the aural tradition, airs borrowed from the opera, playhouse tunes, and even church music.

The second section of this chapter discussed those sailor ballads with purpose-written tunes that are still in existence today—all of which were sung on the stage as well as on the street. Due to his immense popularity as a composer, actor, playwright and singer, Charles Dibdin contributed twelve of these eighteen ballads. The remaining six songs were from a great variety of writers and composers, but there was one important thread of commonality between them all: the theatre. Some of the tunes were borrowed from the opera, some from plays, and many were written for monologues or variety entertainments. These popular sailor ballads were—arguably—defined by Dibdin’s
successful song model, characterized by marching meters, major tonalities, and dotted martial rhythms. But they also illustrate the overriding popular style of nineteenth-century British music, featuring regularized phrases, *galant* accompaniments (very often featuring an Alberti bass), limited chromaticism, wider vocal ranges, opera-inspired passagework, and simple harmonic progressions. As Shepard noted, in the nineteenth century, all the strands of British entertainment became intertwined: composers wrote both operas and popular ballads; singers performed at Vauxhall, in the theatre, and in monologue entertainments; popular songs were performed onstage, sung to the affluent, and hummed by the working classes.

A relatively small minority of the sailor ballads has survived in notated musical form, but this collection is significant by its implication. How many nineteenth-century broadside ballads had purposely-composed music that has simply not survived the passage of time? As the broadside and theatre traditions converged, ballads may have eschewed jury-rigged musical settings for purpose-written melodies that were communicated to broadside audiences through performances on street corners or in theatres, opera houses, and pleasure gardens. But would this theory completely explain the mystery of nineteenth-century broadside ballads’ “missing” music? After all, there were star entertainers and performers like Dibdin whose music became more or less ubiquitous in British culture, but the broadside trade of nineteenth-century Britain included the works of many anonymous ballad writers and street poets who may have had

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98 Remember that Hogarth assured his readers that Dibdin wrote music for all of his songs.
no musical or theatrical background whatsoever. What can be said about the music and melodies of the sailor ballads that did not enjoy a dual life on the stage and on the streets?

In their essay “Music and Politics, 1793-1815,” authors Philp, Southey, Jackston-Houlston and Susan Wollenberg suggested that the tune for “Heart of Oak” enjoyed an unusual degree of influence in broadside balladry of the early nineteenth-century. This famous song had a tune written by Dr. William Boyce with words by David Garrick, and originally appeared in a pantomime called “Harlequin’s Invasion,” staged in 1759. The song became immensely popular, and because of its nautical subject, it was eventually adopted as the anthem of Britain’s Royal Navy, the Royal Canadian Navy, and the Royal New Zealand Navy. The theory implied by the essay—namely, that this melody was used by ballad writers as a favored vehicle for sailor songs because of its topical associations—was intriguing, and I decided to investigate whether there were any connections between the tune for this song and the genre of sailor ballads. “Heart of Oak” has a distinctive form consisting of a quatrain with an 11-11-11-11 syllable-count for its verse, followed by a quintain chorus with a syllable-count of 6-6-6-5-11. An extensive metrical analysis of the sailor ballads showed that very few sailor ballads

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102 As will be discussed in the next chapter, the theatre tradition had been interested in the subject of sailors for a good hundred or so years before popular song discovered it, and there are two fascinating books on the history of the sailor in the British theatre. It is no coincidence that Dibdin, who redefined Britain’s conception of Jack Tar through his popular songs and entertainments, came from a theatre background. His characterization of Jack Tar is, arguably, an extension and elaboration of the “Heart of Oak” character, as identified and defined by Harold F. Watson in *The Sailor in English Fiction and Drama, 1550-1800* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), 3. See also Terrence M. Freeman, *Dramatic Representations of British Soldiers and Sailors on the London Stage, 1660-1800: Britons Strike Home* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen, 1995).
shared any metrical similarities with “Heart of Oak.” Only seven ballads had quatrains with 11/12 syllable-count lines (as previously noted, ballads tended to be metrically inexact, and almost all show some minor variation within verses), and none of the nineteenth-century ballads included the unusual 6-6-6-5-11 syllable-count chorus. Therefore, there is no concrete evidence to link the music of Britain’s most famous nautical song with its nineteenth-century broadside successors—though the theory suggested by Philp and his colleagues would have provided an elegant solution to the problem of the sailor ballads’ music.

This leaves scholars with very few clues as to the melodies for the remaining 176 sailor ballads. Are there any other lines of inquiry that might prove fruitful? In their Grove article on broadside ballads, James Porter and Jeremy Barlow imply that the decline in tune references in the eighteenth century was primarily a result of the rise of the *single-sheet song*, an early form of sheet music that included a melody and a bass line, and which could be performed by a voice or a treble instrument such as a flute. It is quite possible that the single-sheet song was another medium through which ballad music was disseminated; however I do not find it logical to assume that the rise of single-sheet songs caused the decline of tune references in broadside ballads. If printed music made tune references redundant, would they not also make the broadsides themselves redundant? If people preferred to have notated music to accompany a song’s words, why then would they buy copies of the verses in broadside form? And in the nineteenth century, many people did: the broadside ballad industry sold literally millions of sheets in the early 1800s. It appears that demand for “music-less” songs was as great as ever. No,

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without further evidence, I do not believe it is logical to link the two phenomena (the omission of tune references in broadside ballads, and the proliferation of single-sheet songs).

Then were these broadsides intended for literary—rather than musical—purposes? Come the nineteenth century, did people start buying broadsides to read rather than sing? One cannot categorically deny the possibility, however broadside ballad scholar Leslie Shepard pointedly disagreed with this theory, stating that “Although his [the printer John Pitts’] broadsides and chapbooks supplied material for a rapidly-developing literacy, it must be stressed that these things were more than reading matter. They were songs, and meant to be sung.” The strongest evidence for the ongoing musicality of broadsides in the nineteenth century is the collection of first-hand accounts of ballads being sung on ships, in pubs and of course by peddlers on street corners. These contemporaneous accounts confirm that nineteenth-century broadside ballads were—to some extent—still musical, but they do not bring us any closer to identifying the music associated with the sailor ballads in question. And so once more, the question returns: if these ballads were songs, where is the music?

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104 Shepard, John Pitts, 45.
105 For testaments concerning the popularity of ballad performance, see the introduction to Alfred Williams, Folk Songs of the Upper Thames (London: Duckworth, 1923), as quoted in Shepard, John Pitts, 45, and also see 86–7 in Shepard’s same volume. For the popularity of sailor ballads among sailors themselves, see Wilfred Partington, Charles Dibdin, the Man Whose Songs Helped to Win the Battle of Trafalgar and Who Did Not Allow the Nation to Forget it, Either (London: Chaswick Press, 1944). Though this pamphlet may somewhat exaggerate the importance of Dibdin’s songs in the Royal Navy, it remains a valuable testament to their presence in the forces. Perhaps the importance of patriotic sailor songs was best established by the fact that the government commissioned the most successful sailor-ballad writer—Charles Dibdin—to continue writing patriotic songs during the war. See also Thomas Dibdin, “Memoir of Charles Dibdin,” in Songs, Naval and National: Of the Late Charles Dibdin; with a Memoir and Addenda (London: John Murray, 1841).
I have no definitive answers, but I will make a final note to close this involved, and somewhat inconclusive, examination of sailor ballads’ melodies. In considering the provenance of the music discussed above—both tune references and purpose-written melodies—one may observe that almost all of these songs (22/25 to be exact) were less than 100 years old by the time of publication. This fact cannot point us to any specific music, but it does suggest that in the nineteenth century, the public wanted new songs: not old folk tunes or the popular melodies from previous generations, but newly-devised music from theatrical entertainments, the opera, or even from church. Notably, there is only one modal melody from this collection with probable roots in the aural folk tradition, the rest are written in more modern and cosmopolitan styles.

In his monograph on the ballad printer John Pitts, Shepard posited that ballad chanters would have been quite able to improvise a melody for a given broadside, and he even suggests that the average consumer of broadside ballads would have been able to do likewise. Therefore, in considering the musical settings of these ballads, I would suggest that buyers preferred to sing broadsides to new, improvised tunes rather than established melodies suggested via a tune reference. It is possible to attribute the decline of explicit tune references in broadside balladry to an increased emphasis on modernity, and even a trend toward musical autonomy. The British folk song and popular music traditions offered a vast wealth of melodies, but perhaps people were not very interested in the old repertory. They wanted what was new, and therefore they may have preferred to sing their broadside ballads to the latest popular melody from the stage or pleasure
garden, or perhaps they improvised something to fit. Of course, there is no clear evidence for either of these theories, but given what is known about the broadside ballad during this period, they are perhaps worth taking into consideration.
...as a prominent feature in my labours, I sung [sic] those heroes who are the natural bulwark of their country. This theme, which perhaps more from zeal than ability I have fortunately handled, had only been slightly touched upon till I undertook it; and though we have had some poetic specimens of nautical praise, the character of the British tar plain, manly, honest, and patriotic, had not very pointedly been put forward. I thought therefore the subject honourable, and commendable, and in some degree novel; especially as it would give an opportunity through public duty of expressing private affection. —Charles Dibdin, The Professional Life of Mr. Dibdin (1803)

This quotation was taken from one of several autobiographical accounts written by Charles Dibdin Senior (1745-1815), an English singer, actor, playwright, and composer who was critical to the development of the nineteenth-century sailor ballad.¹⁰⁶ Dibdin was the son a silversmith, and though his father intended him for the church, he chose to pursue music from an early age. Gifted with a fine voice, he sang in the choir of Winchester Cathedral as a boy, under the direction of organist Peter Fussell, who taught him the rudiments of composition on an informal basis. Dibdin then moved to London and sold a few of his songs to a publisher before entering the world of the theatre. His play The Padlock, written with Isaac Bickerstaff (1735-1812), was a great success, and his portrayal of the character Mungo was particularly well-received (this part is now considered to have been the first blackface role on the English stage).¹⁰⁷ Over the course of his theatrical career, Dibdin worked at a number of venues, including Covent Garden, Drury Lane, Sadler’s Wells and Sans Souci, but most of these arrangements came to

¹⁰⁶ Charles Dibdin, The Professional Life of Mr. Dibdin, Written by Himself, with the Words of Eight Hundred Songs, in Four Volumes (London: published by the author, 1803), xxii.
acrimonious ends after disputes with management. Dibdin then worked for a while as a solo performer, making several tours of England with his *table entertainments*—humorous variety shows constructed around his popular songs. He also gave memorable performances on a fantastical instrument of his own creation, which consisted of both a piano and an organ operated from a single keyboard.\(^{108}\)

Charles had thirteen siblings, but he was particularly close to his older brother Thomas Dibdin (c.1731–1780), an officer in the Royal Navy.\(^{109}\) Captain Didbin, having become quite wealthy, chose to settle in India, and attempted to persuade Charles to relocate to the colonies. Charles’ plans to follow his brother’s advice were stalled after Captain Dibdin’s death en route to England in 1780. However eight years later, as his professional relationships were disintegrating, Charles again made serious plans to relocate to India, leading him to undertake a spectacularly unsuccessful east-bound passage that did not proceed past Dunkirk. Though short and abortive, the trip gave Charles the opportunity to observe sailors in close quarters, as the occasion required him—according to his autobiographical accounts—to intercede on behalf of a rational crew that labored under the tyranny of a delusional captain.

After this fiasco, Dibdin concluded that the sailor was undervalued by British society, being “plain, manly, honest, and patriotic.”\(^{110}\) Touching as Dibdin’s story may be, there were undoubtedly other factors that influenced his decision to champion the fighting sailor in popular song. In mid-eighteenth century British theatre, there was a


\(^{110}\) Dibdin, *The Songs of Charles Dibdin*, xxiii.
proliferation of plays on overtly patriotic subjects by the likes of Henry Carey. Additionally, several staged works of this period featured rough, brave nautical figures—identified as the “Heart of Oak” characters by theatre historian Harold Watson—that bear a striking resemblance to Dibdin’s nineteenth-century Jack Tar.\textsuperscript{111} As a playwright, singer and actor, Dibdin would have been familiar with the theatrical trends of the previous decades, and so though his ill-fated passage may have sparked his interest in the British sailor, the tinder had already been laid.

After his comical relocation debacle, Dibdin returned to England, abandoned all plans to move to India, and proceeded to expend a great deal of energy writing songs about the British sailor—the defender of the \textit{wooden walls} of England. Dibdin did not write sailor ballads exclusively: he also wrote songs on soldiers and non-military topics, as well as a great deal of theatre music. Nevertheless, his approximately one hundred sailor songs became his most popular works, deeply impacting Britain’s relationship with her fighting sailors, and forming his most enduring legacy—one of his perennial favorites “Tom Bowling” is still often featured on the last night of the BBC Proms.\textsuperscript{112} Dibdin’s songs were printed in many forms during the nineteenth century, appearing on broadside ballads, single-sheet songs, and in several collected editions with arranged accompaniments. Only thirty-one of his sailor songs still exist in broadside form today, but the others may be found in song collections from the era.\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{111} See Watson, 3.
\textsuperscript{112} Gillaspie, “Dibdin, Charles.”
\textsuperscript{113} See Chapter 3.
Dibdin was not the only ballad writer who praised Jack Tar during and after the Napoleonic Wars. Nevertheless, he has a unique place in the history of the sailor ballad because he forged its subject—the likeable Jack Tar character that became immensely popular in nineteenth-century British culture. But who was this character that Dibdin created, and why did he become so influential? Chapter 2 elaborated upon the history of Jack Tar in popular culture leading into the nineteenth century, providing a brief overview of his evolving image in drama and song. This chapter will pick up where the second left off, examining Jack Tar’s image in the broadside ballad during and after the Napoleonic Wars.

Britain experienced something of a “nautical craze” during the first half of the nineteenth century: in the early 1800s, she was relying heavily on her navy for national defense, and the public realized that sailors were becoming tremendously important to the country’s ongoing autonomy. Popular culture needed an image for Jack Tar that was trustworthy, admirable, and quintessentially British.114 Recognizing the opportunity these circumstances afforded him and—arguably—drawing upon theatrical models of the previous generation, Dibdin devised a noble yet relatable character for Britain’s national defender. From the 1790s on, he employed his poetic and musical talents to bring Jack Tar to the center of the public’s attention, conjuring a nuanced, sympathetic character in the verses and memorable melodies of his songs. Dibdin was not formally educated as a musician or a poet, yet he managed to blend—with remarkable subtlety—heroism and believability, strength and weakness, nobility and humility, humor and melancholy, quaintness and eloquence. His songs did not simply represent Jack Tar, they brought him

114 Land, 7.
to life, giving him a character that is not only likeable, but also relatable, capable of engaging the interest and affections of society—lower class and upper class, landsman and sailor.115 In Dibdin’s own words: “…the perfection of a painter is to give soul to objects which are no more than body; and, the perfection of a poet to give body to objects which are all soul…”

A wonderful example of Dibdin’s Jack Tar may be found in the song “True Courage,” a beautiful and skillfully-wrought example of nineteenth-century broadside balladry. The Bodleian Library owns two editions of this song (Roud Number: V473), one published as a broadside by J. Evans between 1801 and 1805 in Long-lane London, and the other printed as part of a chapbook, published between 1803 and 1848 by J. Kendrew of Colliergate, York.116 Again, the broadside trade was very poorly-regulated, and as Dibdin’s ballads were immensely popular, they appeared on the broadsides, chapbooks, long-song sheets and garlands of publishers throughout Britain. According to Dibdin, most of these were un-licensed, and during the course of his career, he lodged several copyright suits against broadside ballad printers.

Following are the lyrics of “True Courage” in its entirety, transcribed from the Kendrew edition.

Why what's that to you if my eyes I'm a wiping,
A tear is a pleasure, d'ye see, in its way;
'Tis nonsense for trifles, I own, to be piping,
But they that han't pity, why I pities they:

115 See Land, 89, and Robinson and Leyland, xv.
Says the captain, says he — I shall never forget it —
If of courage you'd know, lads, the true from the sham,
'Tis a furious lion in battle, so let it,
But duty appeased, but duty appeased,
But duty appeased, 'tis in mercy a lamb.

There was bustling Bob Bounce, for the old one not caring,
Helter skelter, to work, pelt away, cut and drive;
Swearing he, for his part, had no notion of sparing,
And as for a foe, why he'd eat him alive:
But when that he found an old pris'ner he'd wounded,
Who once sav'd his life as near drowning he swam,
The lion was tam'd, and with pity confounded,
He cried over him just all as one as a lamb.

That my friend Jack or Tom I would rescue from danger,
Or lay my life down for each lad in the mess,
Is nothing at all, 'tis the poor wounded stranger,
And the poorer, the more I shall succour distress:
For however their duty bold tars may delight in,
And peril defy, as a bugbear or flam,
Though the lion may feel surly pleasure in fighting,
He feels more by compassion when turn'd to a lamb.

The heart and the eyes, you see, feel the same motion,
And if both shed their drops, 'tis all to the same end;
And thus 'tis that ev'ry right lad of the ocean,
Sheds his blood for his country, his tears for his friend.
If my maxim's disease, 'tis disease I shall die on,
You may snigger and titter, I don't give a damn;
In me let the foe feel the paw of a lion,
But the battle once ended, the heart of a lamb.

As implied by the song’s title, courage was a crucial and defining characteristic of
Jack Tar—it was one of his two “hallmark” traits. At his core, Jack Tar was a martial
figure, and his role in Britain’s national defense was the core of his cultural cachet. As
Britain looked to Jack for protection, his fortitude in battle became an issue of national
concern. Therefore indomitable courage was a prominent theme in Dibdin’s ballads: Jack
feared no Frenchman, and the wooden walls of England were safe in his hands.
Well over half of the extant Jack Tar ballads included wording that explicitly addressed the bravery of the British Tar and his “heart of oak.” One ballad assured audiences that “there’s one whose fearless courage yet, has never failed in fight, who guards with zeal his country’s weal, our freedom and our right.” Another song claims that “The gallant sailor ploughs the deep to face the threat’ning’ foe, he guards the shore while landsmen sleep and winds tempestuous blow.” In the latter quotation from “The Gallant Sailor,” the ballad uses the trait of courage to distinguish sailors not only from Frenchmen, but also from British landsmen: those who needed protection stayed on land and those who protected went to sea. This comparison had intriguing implications regarding masculinity in wartime Britain, but this will be discussed later in the chapter.

In broadside ballads (and other forms of popular culture), Jack’s bravery was often established within the context of Britain’s invasion threats. The following is the first stanza of “Loyal Sailors, England’s Glory.”

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117 As a reminder, “Heart of Oak” is a song with music by Dr. William Boyce and lyrics by David Garrick. It was premiered in 1750 in the pantomime “Harlequin’s Invasion.” This was one of the first songs that lauded the bravery of the British sailor, and it has endured to the modern day. It remains the anthem for the Royal Navies of the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Canada.


France has threaten’d Invasion, we all of us know,  
But old England, she fears not her Corsican Foe; 
While her Fleets rule the Main, and her Troops guard the Shore, 
His Defeat would be sure, shou’d he dare to come o’er. 120

Britain was only twenty miles from the French coast, and as Napoleon once said, 
“…it is necessary for us to be masters of the sea for six hours only and England will have ceased to exist.”121 Twice the French devised serious plans to invade Britain, once in 1797 and then again leading up to their 1805 defeat at the Battle of Trafalgar. 
Nevertheless, the threat of a French invasion plagued the nation throughout the wars. 
Recent scholarship suggests that this fear was actively fanned by Prime Minister Pitt’s government, as the threat of invasion was a powerful weapon against Britain’s simmering anti-war sentiment. Though the Royal Navy was in fact engaged in warfare against the French across the globe—from the West Indies to the Mediterranean and beyond—sailor ballads tended to situate Jack very close to home, effectively highlighting his defensive rather than offensive role in the wars.122 Patrolling the Channel was a simple and meaningful task that the average Briton could appreciate: it was not a part of an abstract naval strategy in a far corner of the world, and it would not have posed uncomfortable, complicated or confusing questions of global geopolitics. Though the average man may

122 Of course, military victories were celebrated in popular culture—particularly in the newspapers, but also in broadside ballads. Nevertheless, the proportion of sailor ballads that discuss character rather than event, and defense rather than offence, is notable.
not have been able to appreciate involved military strategies, he could understand the
importance of his home and country—he understood what an invasion would mean to
him. By painting Jack as a defender of his homeland, ballad writers effectively pardoned
him from whatever bloodshed he may incur. He was not a killer, he was a protector. The
ballads tailor Jack’s warrior nature to suit cultural tastes: the sailor of the nineteenth
century retained his belligerence, yet mindless pugnacity turned to protectiveness in the
English Channel.

Broadside ballads cast Jack’s courage as a defensive—rather than offensive—
weapon, but they also tempered his war-making with grace and charity, important
features of the sympathetic nineteenth-century sailor. In “True Courage” for example, the
underlying thrust of the song is that Jack—by nature—is a lover of peace, not war. The
last lines of the song’s first stanza (which return in an abbreviated form at the end of each
subsequent verse) read “But duty appeased, [the courageous sailor]‘tis in mercy a lamb.”
Similarly, another ballad declares: “Some sing the valiant British tar whose noble deeds
you find, brilliant as the sparkling star, yet still with mercy joined.”123 And the end of the
first stanza from “Gallant English Tar” qualify: “but tho’ his strong and ready arm
spreads havoc in its blow, cry quarter and that arm will be the first to spare the foe.”
These ballads associate war-making with Jack’s duty rather than his character: he does
not fight because he takes pleasure in bloodshed, but rather he rises to the occasion when
duty requires him to defend and protect. Courage is one of Jack’s key character traits, but
the context and intention behind his war-making is carefully defined in broadside
ballads—effectively divorced from his nature and consigned to his situation. Surprising

123 “The Brave Marine” (Market-place, Hull: J. Ferraby, 1803-1838), accessed October 17, 2014,
as it is to find the warrior and protector of Britain kneeling on a ship’s deck crying over the destruction of war, that is the sailor Dibdin lauds—a man with humanity, a character with a *face*. Though courage remained the foundation of his character, Jack Tar was not a pillar of nobility and strength; he was an average Briton with sympathy, empathy, and hardships of his own.

Jack Tar’s cultural relevancy was largely dependent on his relatability. Sailor ballads stressed Jack’s normalcy by contextualizing him within the realities of working-class British society. He was varyingly depicted as a boy torn from his mother, or a young man taken from his love; \(^{124}\) he was a long-distance provider, filled with fatherly feeling and crushed by his longing for hearth and home; \(^{125}\) he was a crippled beggar who fulfilled his patriotic duty to his country and sacrificed greatly for doing so; \(^{126}\) he was a fellow Christian, facing death with assurance, awaiting the day when “the sea shall give up her dead.” \(^{127}\) In ballads, Jack’s frequent use of nautical jargon emphasized his professional identity, but his clumsy grammar and dropped consonances contextualized

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\(^{124}\) See “The Sailor Boy’s Farewell to his Mother” (Church Street, Preston: 1840-1866), accessed October 17, 2014, Bodleian Library Edition – Bod12171
http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/static/images/sheets/20000/17634.gif.

http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/static/images/sheets/20000/19918.gif and “The Main Truck” (Castle-court, Belfast: Poet’s Box and General Printing Office, 1846-1852), Bodleian Library Edition – Bod3987
http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/static/images/sheets/15000/10630.gif.


\(^{127}\) See “The Christian Sailor’s Dream” (ca. 1840), National Library of Scotland http://digital.nls.uk/74891194 and “At the Burial of the Dead at Sea” from The Book of Common Prayer and the Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church, According to the Use of the United Church of England and Ireland: Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David, Pointed as They are to be Said or Sung in Churches (Cambridge: J. Smith, 1814).
him within Britain’s social stratification, highlighting his similarities with working-class audiences. Dibdin was particularly fond of dialecticisms and used them often in composition and performance.\textsuperscript{128}

Jack was depicted as “common” in both social status and profession, but it was his human weaknesses that added the final touches of human relatability to his character. Rather than abolishing sailors’ historic character flaws, ballad writers of the nineteenth century cleverly manipulated and redeemed vulgar or depraved traits, fashioning them into compelling and even endearing foibles. While the sailor of older ballads may have been a loud-mouthed, drunken frequenter of whore-houses, the nineteenth-century Jack was folksy and charming—yes, he still lost his money whenever he went ashore, but his coins were spent on magnanimous gestures towards his friends instead of sordid revelry.\textsuperscript{129} His appreciation for alcohol or \textit{grog} was no longer a pernicious habit, it was a harmless and quaint weakness, a predilection shared by many a true Briton.\textsuperscript{130} His language was still saturated with lower-class dialecticisms and nautical terms, but it was (largely) free of oaths.\textsuperscript{131} And though he was once a cheat and a scoundrel, the reformed

\textsuperscript{128} Gillaspie, “Dibdin, Charles.”
\textsuperscript{130} The term \textit{grog} can be traced back to Vice Admiral Edward Vernon who, in 1740, introduced a mixed beverage of watered-down beer and citrus juice to be served to sailors in place of rum. The citrus juice was used as a preservative, but it also prevented scurvy, a disease to which sailors were particularly prone. Vernon was known to wear a grogram-cloth boat cloak, and hence the term \textit{grog} became associated with the drink. See “Tarpauling Jacket” (Great St. Andrew Street, Seven Dials, London: J. Pitts, 1819-1844), accessed October 18, 2014, Bodleian Library Edition – Bod16794 http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/static/images/sheets/15000/10251.gif and “Tom Tuff” (Nottingham: Burbage and Stretton, 1800), Bodleian Library Edition – Bod14192 http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/static/images/sheets/10000/05508.gif.
\textsuperscript{131} For examples of the pre-nineteenth century Jack Tar’s language, see “The Sailor’s Dialogue” (1770-1800), accessed October 18, 2014, Bodleian Library Edition – Bod8370 http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/static/images/sheets/10000/09331.gif and “Jack’s the Lad” (Water-lane,
Jack was honest and—ironically—gullible, too pure-hearted to believe others could cheat him.¹³² Jack’s weaknesses and failures endured, but nineteenth-century sailor ballads used them not to condemn, but rather to invigorate: it was the small imperfections in his character that made the sailor not simply a vague concept, but a character with a *face*.

Dibdin’s characterization of Jack Tar was very influential in popular music and other forms of British media. Nineteenth-century cartoonists quickly adopted the Dibdin-esque Jack Tar, depicting sailors that were strong and powerful, yet slightly buffoon-like, ruddy, and inelegant. When discussing the visual images of Jack Tar in British culture, Isaac Land concluded that though the sailor was depicted as an important tool for British victory, his character “did not possess the face of a hero.”¹³³ This examination of broadside balladry has found that the nineteenth-century Jack Tar had a wealth of noble traits, but Land’s strongly-worded interpretation of the sailor’s visual representations would considerably lessen his dignity: was Jack the gallant defender of Britain, or was he simply her useful tool?

Dibdin used two strong, contrasting images to describe the sailors in “True Courage.” He said they were as brave as lions, and yet as merciful as lambs. Considered separately, these metaphors skillfully describe the duality of Jack’s character (belligerent and sympathetic), but together, they introduce fascinating—and powerful—Biblical

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¹³³ Land, 93. For excellent examples of cartoons from the Napoleonic Wars, see Alexandra Franklin, Mark Philp, and Katrina Navickas, *Napoleon and the Invasion of Britain* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2003).
imagery. Both lions and lambs are closely associated with Christ Jesus, who is the “Lion of Judah” (the protector of his people), and the “Lamb of God” (the sacrificial lamb who died to save them). Therefore we see that Dibdin—and other ballad writers who used lion and lamb imagery—cast Jack in the image of a savior. Perhaps he was not the hero of Classical mythology, a paragon of beauty and grace—I would agree with Land that the Jack of popular culture never met this description. Nevertheless, he was a savior of the Christian mold: like Christ, Jack is the servant of a master (the monarch), sacrificing himself to save his people (the Britons).

The Christian conception of a savior—as opposed to a Classical hero—was by its nature a humble one, and it provided a unique framework within which Jack’s commonality and nobility could converge. But this marriage was inherently troubling: while popular ballads depicted Jack as a savior, the fact remains that he clung to the lowest rungs of a very long hierarchical ladder, as both a commoner who was subject to the king, and as a sailor who was subject to a captain. He was a fusion of the dignified and the mundane, a character as much influenced by Republican ideals as Monarchical tenets. To quote Betty T. Bennett:

The epithets once reserved only for officers of the army and navy were applied to ordinary fighting men. They were ennobled not only in their military role, but given credit for excellent, albeit rough, intelligence, and sensitivity as well….Ironically, the result of the effort to ennoble the position of the fighting man was less to bind him to notions of status quo, that is servitude and obedience without question, then

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135 For another example of lion imagery, see “The British Seaman” (Water Lane, Fleet-street, London: Jennings, 1790-1840), accessed October 17, 2014, Bodleian Library Edition – Bod15614 http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/static/images/sheets/10000/06782.gif and for an example of Jack Tar in the role of a sacrificial savior, see “British True Blue” (Great St. Andrew Street, Seven Dials, London: Pitts, 1819-1844), Bodleian Library Edition – Bod13428 http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/static/images/sheets/05000/01274.gif.
to further democratize the working and middle classes. If the ordinary man
demonstrated the capacity to respond intelligently and bravely in the defense of his
nation why then might not the same ordinary man have a voice in government and a
greater share of the national wealth.136

By casting Jack as Britain’s savior, nineteenth-century society was also—by
default—making him a sort of republican hero. And while the sailor of popular culture
ventured from his social station, the real Jack Tar was pursuing his own republican
agenda in a very tangible manner. During the momentous Mutinies of 1797, the sailors of
the Royal Navy closed ranks to form the United Kingdom’s most powerful and
successful republican political force, which was, according to Conrad Gill, “the climax of
the revolutionary movement in this country [the UK].”137 The Mutinies of 1797 formed
an extraordinary chapter in the history of the British Navy, consisting of two mass
mutinies in the home fleet: the first at Spithead, near Portsmouth, and the second at the
Nore, near the mouth of the Thames Estuary.

In the Spithead Mutiny, thirty thousand sailors of eighty ships under the control of
Admiral Richard Howe declared they would not weigh anchor until the Admiralty had
addressed a list of grievances that had been lodged through proper channels, but had till
that point been ignored. The mutineers swore an oath to stay true to their cause till their
complaints had been addressed, but assured the British public—through the
newspapers—that should the French invade (as was feared at the time), they would
suspend the mutiny and go to war for their country. Remarkably, the mutineers did not
spill a drop of blood, and enforced strict naval discipline throughout the fleet during the

mutiny, requiring sailors to obey the officers’ every command—save for weighing anchor. Delegates were nominated from each crew to sit on a panel that met with the Admiralty. What ensued was a battle—in the press. Prime Minister William Pitt waged war against the mutineers in print, but the sailors’ own manipulation of the newspapers was masterful, and by adopting the new popular image of Jack Tar originally conceived by Dibdin—an honest, patriotic and family-oriented Briton—they won the sympathy of the public. Not all of their demands were conceded by the Admiralty, but many were; several particularly inhumane officers were removed at the sailors’ request, and the entire fleet was given the King’s Pardon.

Inspired by the success at Spithead, the Nore fleet followed suit. In the event however, the crews lacked the organization and discipline to successfully contend with the Admiralty. Ultimately this mutiny failed, and several mutineers were executed. Nevertheless, the Spithead Mutiny remains the largest and most successful mutiny ever conducted in the British fleet, thanks to the restraint, tact, organization and unity exercised by the sailors.\textsuperscript{138} As an organized republican body, Jack Tar had conquered the British government, and in doing so, he had demonstrated the power he could exercise through his new popular image. He had also indelibly connected himself with republicanism, complicating his image in Britain for many years to come. His country

\textsuperscript{138} The remarkable organization and strategy displayed by the mutineers has been credited to the influx of educated men into ship’s crews, as press gangs became more desperate to their fill quotas.
still depended on him, and his popularity had awarded him considerable power; yet he had used that power to turn against his own monarchical government, wielding the enemy’s scourge—republicanism. Where did Jack’s fealty truly lie?\textsuperscript{139}

The inherent tension between Jack’s monarchical and republican associations was particularly palpable in the sailor ballads’ depiction of his patriotism. If courage was the first hallmark of Jack’s character, patriotism was the second: national loyalty was essential during the wars, as it provided identity and a common purpose, creating a bond amongst servicemen and uniting the general populace. Patriotic fervor helped servicemen and civilians effectively “other” the enemy, rationalizing and justifying a bloody war against the French people. Interestingly, a close inspection of the sailor ballads reveals that much of their patriotic jargon stems from national patriotism rather than monarchical allegiance, identifying either a personified Britain as the object of Jack’s patriotic fervor, or else the British people themselves.\textsuperscript{140} This brand of patriotism subtly reinforces Jack’s republican ties: his loyalty to “Britannia,” “Old Britain,” or “the Britons” identifies the country by its race, history and people—not its king.

\textsuperscript{139} For more information on the Mutinies of 1797, see Gill, and Ann Veronica Coats and Philip MacDougall, eds., \textit{The Naval Mutinies of 1797: Unity and Perseverance} (Suffolk: Boydell, 2011).

Conversely, there are a substantial number of ballads in which Jack explicitly pledges fealty to his monarch (during the Napoleonic Wars, this was King George III). In one ballad, the sailor boldly cries “When the drum beats to arms each bold British tar bids farewell to his girl, wife or friend, courageously flies to the banner of war, his country and king to defend.”141 In another, Jack declares that he will “conquer every enemy of George our King,” and even promises that “Prize-money and all my self, in trust I give the king.”142 In “The Island of Britain. A Loyal Song,” Britain is likened to a ship, the king to a captain, and the Britons to her crew: though the use of a nautical analogy for Britain’s governance seems quaint and even sentimental, it has powerful implications. The comparison of the navy to a monarchy reinforces the navy’s traditional hierarchies, monarchical structure, and monarchical allegiances.143 Other ballads, such as “Tom Halliard” and “True Courage,” similarly highlight monarchical power structures, as in both cases, a captain—the ship’s monarch, for all practical purposes—paternally instructs or rewards his crew from a place of revered authority, placing the humble Jack in relation to a benign dictator.144 More interesting, however, is a ballad dating from after the wars entitled “Our King is a True British Sailor,” which identifies King William IV

(the third son of George III) in terms of the common Jack Tar.¹⁴⁵ This ballad is an intriguing example of Jack’s power as a cultural image: though the ballad’s lyrics highlight Britain’s monarchical governance, they use the sailor Jack Tar as a standard against which the king’s virtues are measured. The King may remain on his exalted throne, but he is acceptable because he is deemed by the common man (an anonymous broadside-ballad writer) to have reached the moral heights of a very common subject (Jack Tar). This chapter has already discussed the numerous ballads that glorify Jack by awarding him noble attributes—like “The Sailor’s Consolation” which says that “if honour gives greatness, [Jack] was great as a king.”¹⁴⁶ But now the value paradigm itself has shifted: Jack is the paragon of British-ness and British manhood, and nobles are honored to be likened to him. The subtle but opposing nationalist and monarchical views embedded in sailor ballads is indicative of Jack’s complicated political role in British culture, embodying both a republican ideal and dutiful British obeisance.

Allied to Jack’s patriotism—whether republican or monarchical in nature—was his loyalty, a prominent theme of nineteenth century sailor ballads. The old Jack of popular culture could at times be ambivalent to country and king, employer, messmate and wife. Without allegiance, Jack Tar was unpredictable, dangerous, and socially unacceptable—a veritable loose cannon. This chapter has already examined Jack’s

¹⁴⁵ Because of his service in the Royal Navy, William IV was known as the “Sailor King.” See “Our King is a True British Sailor” (Great St. Andrews Street, Seven Dials, London: J. Pitts, 1819-1844), accessed October 20, 2014, Bodleian Library Edition – Bod5540 http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/static/images/sheets/15000/14305.gif.
patriotism—that is, loyalty to king and/or country—however there are two other important manifestations of Jack’s loyal nature: loyalty to his wife/sweetheart, and loyalty to his brother officers.

After the Battle of the Nile, Rear-Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson referred to the officers under his command as his "band of brothers," a reference to the St. Crispin’s Day Speech in Act IV, Scene iii of Shakespeare’s *Henry V*.147 Over the course of the wars, this term became associated with Nelson’s unique style of command, by which he fostered intimacy with and between his captains, taking them into his confidence to engender mutual respect and camaraderie. Nelson’s success at the Battle of the Nile is largely attributed to the exceptional cooperation resulting from this dynamic. The French Admiral Brueys directed his fleet by a standard form of *semaphore* (flag signaling), which was cumbersome, as it traveled slowly along a line of battle and relied upon clear visibility between ships. Nelson, on the other hand, discussed battle tactics with his captains in detail before the engagement, and then gave them leave to determine how best to execute the strategy during the heat of battle. History proved that Admiral Nelson’s approach was extremely successful, and the term “band of brothers” came to represent a martial—and particularly naval—ideal of loyalty and cooperation.

Jack Tar was not an officer; but if Nelson had his brother officers, Jack had his brother sailors, or messmates. A *first-rate ship of the line*, such as Nelson’s *Victory*, had a full complement of over eight hundred men, all living on a vessel of less than two-

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hundred feet. The crew was composed of divisions, each under the command of one midshipman or officer. The men in the division ate together, worked together, fought together, were punished together, and died together. Naturally, this fostered a very strong bond between the men that often lasted long after a cruise was completed. Of course crews did experience internal conflict: new crew members were often subject to hazing, and national or ethnic differences could divide crewmember from crewmember, even within a given division. However, the idealized image of an imperfect reality saturated sailor ballads, depicting a relationship between sailors that was as unbreakable as blood-ties, defined by loyalty and sacrifice. The idea of a brotherhood built on loyalty was not limited to the navy; male bonding in the context of war is as old as war itself. Brotherly ties provide identity and security to warriors, and they allow the violence of war to be reinterpreted as a form of duty or loyalty to one’s friends, fellow fighters and brothers. Glorified depictions of a martial brotherhood pervaded Jack Tar ballads, and they reflected nineteenth-century Britain’s evolving masculine ideals.

148 A ship of the line was a vessel that could be used in large naval engagements, in which the opposing forces assembled battle lines that faced each other. Smaller vessels, including frigates, brigs and corvettes, were not appropriate for this type of naval engagement. The ratings system of the Royal Navy was instituted in the early seventeenth century and lasted till the end of the Great Age of Sail. A first-rate ship of the line referred to the Royal Navy’s largest ships, reserved for large-scale battles and ceremonial purposes. They were often used as Admirals’ flag-ships, as in the case of Nelson’s Victory. By the time of the Napoleonic Wars, a first-rate was a ship with 100 guns (standard cannons) or more.

149 Land, 34-5.

The Great French War lasted for more than twenty years and involved well over a dozen European powers, pervading Europe with military conflict. In Napoleonic France, this had a palpable effect on perceptions of masculinity. According to Michael J. Hughes, during the Revolution, the ideal Frenchman was to be a devoted citizen of the patrie and a soldier when needed. Under Napoleon, the citizen-soldier became a soldier-citizen. The Napoleonic regime employed its vision of martial masculinity to forge a new kind of man defined by his military attributes, a man who was a soldier first, and who earned the benefits of being a citizen through military service.151

France placed a particularly strong emphasis on men’s militaristic roles, but ironically, Britain also turned to martial paragons of masculinity in this period. By upholding the warrior as a model of manhood, British society awarded a certain distinction to servicemen currently in uniform, and encouraged those Britons who had not yet joined the war effort—and therefore, had not yet reached the summit of manhood—to sign up. The move towards a martial masculinity not only reflected Britain’s reliance on servicemen, it also signaled British culture’s rejection of the refined manliness of the eighteenth-century continental gentleman, or macaroni, as he was contemporaneously termed. “Representations of the officer in the popular fiction of the early nineteenth century show him as both a moral and masculine antidote to the overly refined gentleman or macaroni-type of the eighteenth century.”152 Though both France and Britain adopted forms of martial masculinity during the Napoleonic Wars, their implementations and manifestations were quite different. The French adopted martial masculinity to establish and identify themselves as an all-conquering nation; the British adopted it to rebel against

the continental masculine gentility of the previous century, forging a new British masculinity that had “a decidedly manly essence, or, to phrase it in the terms of the time, taste[d] more of British roast beef than of French salad.”

The concept of martial masculinity may seem to be at odds with the compassionate sailor described in the songs of Dibdin and other ballad writers. If British masculinity was defined by belligerence, why was Jack Tar repeatedly depicted as compassionate and peace-loving? To solve this riddle, one must understand the difference between gentleness and gentility. The nineteenth-century Jack Tar was a variant of the “heart of oak” character that appeared in British drama in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and he continued in the tradition of his dramatic progenitor, representing a man who was not courtly or well-mannered, but who was essentially good. It was effeminate gentility that British masculinity was rejecting, not high moral character. The country’s new masculinity valued action and principle over elegance and manner. Therefore Jack Tar’s goodness and Christian benevolence do not ultimately conflict with his martial identity. A fierce warrior could only be accepted by British society if he was constrained by both morality and humanity.

The powerful association between masculinity and military service in Britain can be clearly perceived by considering the state of the volunteer service during the wars:

With the resumption of war in 1803, the Government was faced with a tide of volunteering that they could neither ignore nor, seemingly, control. Returns to Parliament in 1804 recorded a total of 480,000 volunteers in uniform. Added to those in the regular forces and the militia this meant that close to one in five able-bodied men were in uniform.

153 Freeman, 105.
154 Franklin et al, 13.
Volunteering was instituted in Britain with the 1798 Militia and Volunteers Act, which allowed men to join their local regiment but remain at home, providing “a wonderful opportunity for dressing up, parading round, inventing coats of arms and songs for the unit and being seen by one’s neighbours to be doing work of consequence.”

Associating themselves with the military—even if they never actually left home shores—allowed men to perform masculinity within a culture defined by war. In this context, Jack Tar became a model and exemplar of true British manhood—a martial figure against whom all British men, commoner and king, were measured.

But masculinity is, in a sense, only half of a binary, and defining it must be done in relation to its partner—femininity. It would seem that ballad writers were keenly aware of this, as they took great interest in Jack’s love-life, Pre-Napoleonic Wars and beyond. In his book *War, Nationalism and the British Sailor, 1750-1850*, Isaac Land brought the issue of homosexuality to bear on this phenomenon. He posits that the numerous references to women in popular depictions of Jack Tar—particularly in Dibdin’s ballads—are calculated affirmations of Jack’s heterosexuality, aimed to combat the assumption that he was in fact homosexual. The British sailor lived aboard a ship with hundreds of other men, at sea for months at the time, with only his “band of brothers” for companionship, and therefore—in reality—his sexuality was an ambiguous

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157 Land, 94.
Historians disagree about the actual occurrence of homosexual practices in the fleet, but there is no doubt that the Royal Navy treated the crime of sodomy with great seriousness. Like piracy and cannibalism, it was punishable by death, indicating that the government was afraid that homosexuality would take root amongst naval crews.

Additionally, the Royal Navy became a target of pronatalist activists starting in the mid-eighteenth century, as Britain struggled to man both her merchant and military ships. Pronatalists like Robert Wallace were concerned with the ongoing replenishment of Britain’s military forces. With over a hundred thousand Britons at sea, Jack’s sexuality became a political concern, and several outlandish schemes were devised to ensure that it was properly directed in order to maintain Britain’s population—and her military defenses.  

In the realm of popular culture—and broadside balladry in particular—the issue of Jack’s sexuality was unambiguous. At times, his sexual relationships were not very honorable or socially-acceptable, but his heterosexuality was never in question. Before the Napoleonic Wars, he spent his money on prostitutes and importuned any female with whom he came in contact. True, he did not function within a conventional family unit, but even at his most dissolute and morally-bankrupt, there was little doubt about his sexual orientation. Contrary to Isaac Land, I do not believe that nineteenth-century depictions of Jack’s heterosexuality were calculated or politically-motivated: I simply do not find any evidence indicating as much. This facet of his image never changed.

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158 The subject of the sexuality of British sailors is a very complicated one. Here, I only wish to engage with Land’s suggestion that Jack Tar’s heterosexual identity in popular media was a cover-up for his (presumed) real-life homosexuality. As I am principally interested in the fictional Jack Tar of balladry as opposed to his historical counterpart, I have had to omit many issues pertaining to the British sailor’s sexuality in the nineteenth century. For a detailed discussion of this topic, please see Land, 83-88. Also see Robert Wallace, A Dissertation on the Numbers of Mankind in Antient and Modern Times: In Which the Superior Populousness of Antiquity is Maintained (Edinburgh: G. Hamilton and J. Balfour, 1753).
Nevertheless, in the nineteenth century, Jack Tar’s relationship to his “Poll” or “Nancy” did undergo a notable transformation.\textsuperscript{159} For the most part, the days of his promiscuity were ending: he had one wife or sweetheart, and his faithfulness to her became an increasingly-emphasized trait in broadside balladry. This could be interpreted as a corollary of Jack’s blossoming patriotic fervor: the sense of responsibility he felt for king or country was analogous to his dutiful husbandry of a wife, and his fatherly concern for children. Indeed, one could make the argument that Jack’s familial ties had to be strengthened as his patriotic loyalty increased, as the roles of negligent husband and self-sacrificing patriot are—on a fundamental level—incongruous. In addition, Jack’s newfound marital fidelity could have been the result of audience expectations and demands. The consumers of broadside ballads came from the working classes, and with over a hundred thousand British men at sea, the wives and families of sailors would have found little pleasure in songs depicting Jack Tar’s serial inconstancy.

The first portion of this chapter attempted to describe and demonstrate the “new” image of Jack Tar that appeared during the Napoleonic Wars. But tempting as it is to treat the “pre-Napoleon” Jack and the “post-Napoleon” Jack as discreet and opposing popular images—the latter of which rose to quash the former—the reality is of course not that simple. The sympathetic image of Jack that took root in the nineteenth century became extremely popular, however the “new” and “old” Jacks actually coexisted in broadside balladry during the first half of the nineteenth century. In fact, some of the most condemning ballads were published well into the 1800s: in “Tide’s a Flowing,” dated 1860, Jack corrupts a young lady, takes fifty pounds off of her, and then runs off with

\textsuperscript{159} Poll and Nancy were the two most common names for Jack’s sweetheart in broadside ballads and other forms of popular media, including theatre and fiction.
another girl, drinking on his merry way.\footnote{See “The Jolly Sailor” (Kent Street, Borough: J. Sharp, ca. 1845), accessed October 30, 2014, Bodleian Library Edition – Bod 12152 http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/static/images/sheets/05000/02827.gif and “Tarpauling Jacket” (Seven Dials, London: J. Pitts, 1819-1844), Bodleian Library Edition – Bod16794 http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/static/images/sheets/15000/10251.gif and “Drink and Kiss the Lasses” (J. Harkness, 1840-1866), Bodleian Library Edition – Bod12008 http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/static/images/sheets/05000/02651.gif and “I’m a Jolly Roving Tar” (Bloomsbury: Ryle & Co., 1845-1859), Bodleian Library Edition – Bod12376 http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/static/images/sheets/05000/04358.gif and “The Servant of Rosemary Lane” (Seven Dials, London: Pitts, 1819-1844), Bodleian Library Edition – Bod2472 http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/static/images/sheets/10000/05157.gif and “A True & Lamentable Ballad Call’d Billy Taylor, Shewing the Fatal Effects of Inconstancy” (Fleet Street, London: Laurie & Whittle, 1804), Bodleian Library Edition – Bod11301 http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/static/images/sheets/05000/00819.gif and “Riding Down to Portsmouth” (Byrom Street, Liverpool: William M’Call, 1850), National Library of Scotland http://digital.nls.uk/74892373.} This particular ballad was a reprint, and may have been written in the early-nineteenth century or even the late-eighteenth century, but whether newly-composed or reprinted, ballads of the “Pre-Napoleon” Jack certainly endured, though in the minority. Even Dibdin himself, the creator of the noble Jack, dabbled with the image of Jack as a rascal: he wrote both “Jack’s Fidelity,” a song which lauds the sailor’s constancy to his Poll, and “Jack in His Element,” in which the trusty sailor has “in every port a wife.”\footnote{Charles Dibdin, “Jack’s Fidelity” (Manchester: R. & W. Dean & Co., ca. 1805), Bodleian Library Edition – Bod12078, accessed December 31, 2014, http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/static/images/sheets/05000/02736.gif and “Jack in His Element” (Great St. Andrew Street, Seven Dials, London: J. Pitts, 1802-1819), http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/static/images/sheets/10000/05383.gif.}

In reconciling these images to one another, it is helpful to understand the “two Jacks” as collections of related traits—many of which are binaries—that distinguish the one image from the other. Most sailor ballads 1800-1850 will fall somewhere between the two, incorporating traits from both extremes. For example, in “The Jolly Sailor,” Jack is courageous but borders on the blood-thirsty; in “The Mariner’s Compass,” the sailors are drunkards but also faithful to their women and king; in “The Rambling Sailor,” Jack is patriotic and faithful, but footloose and inconstant in love. The sailor of early
nineteenth century ballads is often a blend of the honorable and dishonorable. Jack was a fundamentally noble and dignified sailor, but he remained compelling because he had both strengths and weaknesses. Therefore depictions of Jack Tar could blend his newly-acquired nobility with old vices without undermining the fundamental essence of his nineteenth-century persona: strength in weakness. Flaws were acceptable—even required—in the Dibdinesque Jack Tar, but some more so than others. If there had to be a clear distinction between the “old” and “new” Jack Tar in broadside ballads, the line would have to be drawn on issues regarding his two “hallmark” traits: courage and patriotism. Ballads that portray the sailor at his most dastardly charge him with either cowardice or inconstancy toward his king or country. This would typify the old Jack. There is no room for cowardice or treachery to country in the heart of the new Jack. However, constancy to women, drunkenness, and even honesty were negotiable issues. Despite the variations in his manifestations, the new Dibdin sailor became a powerful, clearly-identifiable cultural icon. As Isaac Land succinctly said: “The spokesmen for the greatest mutiny in the history of the British Navy [the Spithead Mutiny] used Dibdin’s words and imagery to justify their actions, and the British public interpreted that mutiny in terms of the representations of seamen that Dibdin had made popular.”162

But as Jack Tar is ultimately defined by his relationship to country, one must ask: what role did the government play in the production of sailor ballads during the wars? Britain had been a staunch adversary of France since the beginning of the French Revolutionary War, but the country was internally divided over its war policy. From 1783-1806, Britain had a Tory government, supported by King George III and led by

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162 Land, 97.
William Pitt the Younger from 1783-1801 and again from 1804-1806, with Henry Addington holding the position of Prime Minister in the interim. In opposition to the conservative, pro-War Tories were the Whigs, who had gained influence in the eighteenth century as representatives of industrialists and reformers, with a political ideology that was heavily influenced by John Locke. As a pro-war Tory, Prime Minister Pitt had been against the French Revolution from its inception, but many Britons saw things differently. 163

Even after the Reign of Terror begun, many in Britain supported the Enlightenment ideals of the French Revolution, as after all, Britain enjoyed a limited monarchy thanks to its own successful revolts against absolute rule. Those that opposed the war with France and the incumbent Tory government were labeled Jacobins, a term associated with the radical republican ideology of the Jacobin Club of France. During the French Revolutionary wars, loyalist and reformist associations were formed in Britain, and both set about producing propaganda. 164 These organizations employed the press as a means of influencing the public’s opinion of the war and politics: major newspapers of the day were dedicated to the ideology of one party or the other, according to their ownership and subsidy. 165 But pamphlets, cartoons and broadsides (of the non-ballad variety) were also implemented as tools of political propaganda. After the French Revolutionary Wars transitioned into the Napoleonic Wars, much of Britain’s ideological objections to the conflict with France abated: Napoleon, or “Boney,” was easily cast as Britain’s arch-villain—an apostate who was rumored to have massacred thousands of

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163 Bennett, 11.
164 Franklin et al, 10.
civilians in the east (many of whom were captives), and who poisoned his own plague-ridden troops. These events are collectively known as Napoleon’s Black Legend, and provided a lot of material for pro-war propagandists in Britain.\footnote{For more information, see Simon Burrows, “Britain and the Black Legend: The Genesis of the Anti-Napoleonic Myth,” in Resisting Napoleon, ed. Mark Philp (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 141-157, at 144-146.}

It is difficult to make blanket statements about the influence of the government in the sailor ballads of this era. Though the ballads I have studied are—without exception—anti-French, I hesitate to attribute this to widespread government-sanctioned propaganda. In 1803, as the amorphous threat of invasion was materializing in the form of Napoleon’s vast invasion fleet, Prime Minister Addington commissioned Charles Dibdin to write eight war songs a month, published as \textit{British War Songs} from 1803-1804—some of which were printed in broadside form. A pension was also awarded to Dibdin for his service to the country, but it was repealed under the subsequent Prime Minister, the Whig William Grenville, who Dibdin vociferously condemned in his self-pitying pamphlet \textit{The Public Undeceived About His Pension}.\footnote{Dibdin, \textit{The Public Undeceived About His Pension}, pamphlet (London, 1807).} Therefore, it is clear that the government exercised \textit{some} direct influence over the construction and perpetuation of sympathetic martial figures and pro-war sentiments. However, I have found no evidence of government interference in broadside balladry apart from this isolated incident, and it should be noted that Dibdin’s pension and commission were in place for a relatively small window of time. They cannot account for the scores of ballads written by other writers, as well as the influential ballads Dibdin himself produced before and after this period—for example, some of his most popular sailor songs, including “Tom Bowling”
Historically, the government expressed very little interest in the broadside ballad trade as a form of popular media. There is one recorded incident when broadside ballads of a seditious nature were banned from the streets of Birmingham, but on the whole, the government paid the industry little heed.169 As noted in Chapter 2, John Pitt, one of the two giants of nineteenth-century ballad printing, never even registered his press. If the government did not feel that the industry was potent enough to require proper routine regulation, would it look to the broadside ballad as a tool for its own propaganda? Broadsides (employing the term as a printing specification) were used by political organizations as tools of persuasion, but the government itself was actively engaged in preventing the average working classes from participating in current politics via the newspaper trade. The government did not simply abolish Whig or anti-war newspapers; no, they levied a tax so that people of a certain class could not read any printed political materials.170 It would seem that the government was less concerned with the lower classes holding the correct opinions, than in their holding no political opinions at all. But if the government was not responsible for the unrelieved pro-war sentiment found in the sailor ballads, how else may one account for it?

I would suggest that the broadside ballads’ audience may explain the phenomenon. The working class had very little direct influence (or—one could argue—understanding) of the political intricacies and intrigues of the government and its foreign

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168 Gillaspie, “Dibdin, Charles.”
169 This took place in 1792. See Mark Philp, Roz Southey, Caroline Jackson-Houlston and Susan Wollenberg, “Music and Politics, 1793-1815,” in Mark Philp, ed., Resisting Napoleon, 173-204, here 175.
170 The Stamp Act of 1712 was instituted to prevent the lower classes of British society from having access to current news and political information via newspapers. Interestingly, this tax can be linked to the rise of the broadside ballad, as the working class turned to ballads as an alternate news source.
policy. Nationally-recognized poets such as Byron and Southey may have had the opportunity and inclination to engage with international affairs, along with the newspaper editors that published their politically-charged poetry, but ballad writers and printers from the Seven Dials would have had neither. The writers, printers and audiences of broadside ballads were, for all intents and purposes, excluded from political decision-making. Their experience of the war was having their family members or friends sent overseas to fight the tyrant Bonaparte; to risk over-simplification, the war was a straight-forward matter of good and evil to this group of Britons. Jack Tar and the redcoat were popular images in culture—and powerful ones at that—but they were powerful not just because of their social relevance, but also because of their personal relevance. If one’s father (or brother or husband) had been pressed into patrolling the English Channel to defend Britain against a French invasion, would one be predisposed to question the cause for which he may very well sacrifice his life?

The proliferation of nineteenth-century ballads featuring Britain’s fighting sailor was undoubtedly the result of many factors: international politics, invasion fears, enterprising ballad writers, and governmental influences. But ultimately, broadside balladry was controlled and consumed by the common man. Therefore, the Jack Tar ballads, with their unswerving message of patriotism and honor, must be interpreted as a reflection of the sentiments of the British people.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

In 1815, the Congress of Vienna marked the beginning of what has been termed the Pax Britannica—an era during which Britain literally “ruled the waves,” maintaining European peace through unquestioned naval dominance, while annexing overseas colonies to forge an immense empire. Despite its ongoing importance in nineteenth-century international geopolitics, Britain’s Royal Navy would not participate in another extended military engagement until the beginning of the First World War in 1914. During this period of relative peace, it underwent several considerable changes.

Britain’s international cachet remained dependent on her renowned navy, but after Napoleon’s defeat, the institution lacked practical—and visible—purpose. This problem was partly solved when the Royal Navy undertook a series of daring exploratory missions to the arctic. The expeditions launched by Sir John Ross (1777-1856) and his successors not only gave the navy an ongoing purpose, they also garnered renewed admiration from the public. As Land states, polar expeditions became “associated quite closely with the reputation, and the postwar identity, of the Royal Navy.”

By the end of the eighteenth century, James Watt (1736-1819) had made significant advances in steam propulsion. Around the time of Napoleon’s defeat at Waterloo, the Royal Navy was investigating the implementation of this technology in maritime warfare. With the introduction of steam power and iron-clad vessels, the structure and form of the Royal Navy changed considerably. The British sailor was no

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171 Land, 153.
longer a crusty, pigtail-wearing Jack Tar who darted up ratlines and defended his ship with pistol and cutlass. By the late nineteenth century, the fighting seaman was an entirely different figure that had a new fleet, a new skillset, and even a new name. After the Royal Navy instituted a standard uniform for ratings in 1857, common sailors were referred to as “blue jackets”—while the term “Jack Tar” was ceded to the fighting sailor of bygone days. 172

In the most meaningful sense, Jack Tar’s role as national defender had ended very early in the nineteenth century with Napoleon’s defeat in 1815—or to be more exact, with the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. Nevertheless, Britain was not at all ready to relinquish her nautical prizewinner. Jack Tar appeared in many broadside ballads of the 1850s and 1860s—some of which were reprints of ballads from earlier decades, but some of which appear to have been newly-composed. The last half of the century also saw a renewed interest in Jack Tar on the stage and in fiction—particularly notable is Gilbert and Sullivan’s comic opera *H.M.S. Pinafore* (1878), which included nautical characters borrowed from the broadside ballad tradition. 173 In an era of Victorian sentimentality, Jack Tar became a cherished relic of Britain’s past glories, a beloved character that had materially influenced the country’s military, political, social, and of course musical, histories.


But Jack Tar did not survive purely on the strength of nostalgia. His complicated characterization meant he was uniquely placed to appeal to later nineteenth-century tastes and audiences. As discussed in Chapter 3, Jack Tar was framed in broadside ballads as a “savior” of the Christian mold—self-sacrificing, gentle, and yet powerful in overcoming evil. This Christ-like character would no doubt have been compelling to an increasingly-Christianized Victorian Britain. Additionally, the Jack Tar of popular culture bore a striking resemblance to the much-admired “noble savage” figure found in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature, depicting humanity in its genuine, uncultured, and unspoiled simplicity. Jack could also be considered an early “hero” of the Romantic archetype—a courageous, suffering warrior who faced a redoubtable foe and gloriously overcame him. Last but not least, he was a powerful cultural icon coming out of the wars, representing British independence, sovereignty and military prowess—all of which would define Britain’s empirical, post-war era. The multivalence of Jack Tar’s popular image is perhaps his most compelling feature: though he was the product of early nineteenth-century society and politics, he embodied many of the ideals and aesthetics that would shape the philosophy, literature, and art of later decades.

The fascination with Jack Tar has never truly died. In the twentieth century, a great deal of research was produced on both the real and the fictional British sailor. The work of documenting and studying him—his life, experiences, hardships, and implications—has continued seamlessly into this century, but interest in these naval subjects is not limited to the academic realm. There is a modern, thriving subculture built around “Nelson’s Navy” (as it is often termed), populated by a set of international, eclectic, and well-informed enthusiasts who keep the historical discussions alive.
Entering the world of nautical history through the Jack Tar ballads was an adventure that was at once overwhelming, intriguing, delightful and addictive. Unfortunately, my enjoyable excursus into this lively historical field contrasted greatly with my experience in the musicological field of broadside balladry. While the former is colorful and vital, the latter is moribund.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I quoted Patricia Fumerton and Anita Guerrini’s introduction to *Broadsides and Ballads in Britain*, in which the authors addressed the “delimited” nature of broadside ballad scholarship.174 Sadly, my time in the field confirmed their diagnosis. Even now, no scholarly consensus exists on nineteenth-century broadside ballad music, and therefore over a hundred years of Britain’s popular song remains an unsolved riddle. This project was both helped and hindered by the dearth of musicological scholarship on broadside ballads. On the one hand, my topic remains undesirably isolated, as it cannot be properly situated within its broader musical context; on the other hand, the research conducted in the course of the project is all the more valuable because any small discoveries made, any insights contributed, have the potential of substantially improving our understanding of the genre as a whole. Ideally, one is able to study brushstrokes within the context of the larger picture; however, if the larger picture is obscure, one must look to details to formulate an understanding of the whole.

Needless to say, there is a pressing need for further scholarship on British broadside balladry. This is a very long, very large, and very valuable tradition with ample primary source materials still in existence. As an important facet of Britain’s social,
cultural, and musical histories, the genre deserves much more attention than it has received. In particular, it needs to be made the subject of musicological—rather than literary—research, so that the tradition’s inherent musicality may be reclaimed. The breadth and variety of musical materials found in this project indicate that the broadside ballad has an incredibly rich and complicated musical history—especially in the nineteenth century—and it is worthy of considerable attention.

This topic proved far more intriguing and complicated than even I could have hoped, and my only regret is that I could not cover the subject as comprehensively as it deserved—there is much more to say than could be said here. In the course of research, it became apparent that the lines between parlor songs, pleasure garden entertainments, and broadside ballads were highly permeable in the early-nineteenth century, and therefore these genres of sailor songs should really be discussed in conjunction, rather than in isolation. Ironically, I ended up following in the notorious footsteps of Francis James Child—approaching my topic with a narrow scope, as well as somewhat naive preconceptions of generic delineations. However, a broader examination of British sailor songs must be left for a later date. Ultimately, I believe this project accomplished its goal of elucidating the history, purpose, characters, conventions, and importance of the sailor ballad—an intriguing, entertaining, and endearing genre of nineteenth-century British song.


Bonaparte, Napoleon. \textit{A Selection from the Letters and Despatches by the First Napoleon, with Explanatory Notes by Captain the Honorable D.A. Bingham in Three Volumes}. London: Chapman and Hall, 1884.


Dibdin, Charles. Songs, Naval and National: Of the Late Charles Dibdin; with a Memoir and Addenda. London: John Murray, 1841.

---. The Musical Tour of Mr. Dibdin, in which—Previous to his Embarkation for India—He Finished his Career as a Public Character. Sheffield: J. Gales, 1788.

---. The Professional Life of Mr. Dibdin, Written by Himself, with the Words of Eight Hundred Songs, in Four Volumes. London: published by the author, 1803.


*The Trial of the British Soldiers, of the 29th Regiment of Foot, for the Murder of Crispus Attucks, Samuel Gray, Samuel Maverick, James Caldwell, and Patrick Carr.* Boston: Emmons, 1824.


APPENDIX A

BROADSIDE BALLADS ONLINE FROM THE BODLEIAN LIBRARIES, OXFORD

1. “A Bold and Brave Crew” (Roud Number: V9216)
2. “A New Song, Called Haul Away, Yeo Ho, boys!”
3. “A New Song Called the Sailors' Fraud on Shields Road; or, the Driver Taken in”
4. “Answer to Undaunted Mary; or the Banks of Sweet Dundee” (Roud Number: 5649)
5. “A Touch on the Times”
6. “A True & Lamentable Ballad Call'd Billy Taylor, Shewing the Fatal Effects of Inconstancy” (Roud Number: 158)
7. “Barney Buntline and Billy Bowling” (Roud Number: 12825)
8. “Ben Backstay” (Roud Number: 21256)
9. “Ben Cable” (Roud Number: 12896)
10. “Ben Mainsail’s Invitation” (Roud Number: V3121)
11. “Bill Block”
12. “Bill Bobstay” (Roud Number: V1239)
13. “Bleak was the Morn or the Sailor’s Return” (Roud Number: V1785)
14. “Bonny Shadwell Dock”
15. “British Man of War” (Roud Number: 372)
16. “British True Blue” (Roud Number: 22267)
17. “Britons to Arms, or Threat of Invasion”
18. “Busy Crew” (Roud Number: V7354)
19. “Buxom Nan” (Roud Number: V887)
20. “Cabin Boy”
21. “Cease My Nancy” (Roud Number: V3413)
22. “Come All You British Seamen Bold”
23. “Dark-ey’d Sailor”
24. “Dick Dock” (Roud Number: V6864)
25. “Drink and Kiss the Lasses” (Roud Number: V8046)
26. “Fair Maria”
27. “Fair Susan” (Roud Number: 1447)
28. “Fan Left on Shore”
29. “Firm as Oak and Free From Care” (Roud Number: V4632)
30. “Gallant English Tar” (Roud Number: V3933)
31. “Gallant Tom” (Roud V467)
32. “Hardy Tar” (Roud Number: V4171)
33. “Harry Buff”
34. “Haul Away Boys”
35. “Hearts of Oak” (Roud Number: V391)
36. “Henry & Nancy; or the Lover’s Separation” (Roud Number: V3409)
37. “Here I Am Poor Jack” (Roud Number: 22807)
38. “Homeward Bound”
39. “Honest Ben”
40. “How Blest the British Sailor” (Roud Number: V9271)
41. “I’ll Stay for My Jack and He’ll Wed Me” (Roud Number: V3367)
42. “I’m A Jolly Roving Tar” (Roud Number: V7360)
43. “Irish William”
44. “Jack and I Saw Them No More” (Roud Number: V12377)
45. “Jack in His Element” (Roud Number: 23108)
46. “Jack Junk” (Roud Number: V3365)
47. “Jack Mainmast” (Roud Number: V3377)
48. “Jack Oakum”
49. “Jack of Greenwich” (Roud Number: V649)
50. “Jack Ratlin” (Roud Number: V3358)
51. “Jack Returned from Sea” (Roud Number: 22807)
52. “Jack Robinson” (Roud Number: 1794)
53. “Jack’s Fidelity” (Roud Number: V3351)
54. “Jack’s the Lad” (Roud Number: V3350)
55. “Jack Tar, or the Green Empty Bed” (Roud Number: 276)
56. “Jack Tar’s Creed”
57. “Jack Tar’s Drunken Frolic in Wapping” (Roud Number: V3368)
58. “Jack Tar’s Invitation. A New Song”
59. “Jack Tar’s Return” (Roud Number: 8167)
60. “Jack Tar’s Return to His Brother John Bull” (Roud Number: V3364)
61. “Jack Tar, the Sailor”
62. “Jack Tar with His Trousers on” (Roud Number: 5603)
63. “Jolly Jack Tar’s Departure” (Roud Number: V3376)
64. “Jolly Tar” (Roud Number: 22234)
65. “Kiss in the Dark”
66. “Land! Land!”
67. “Larry O’Brian”
68. “Lovely Nan” (Roud Number: V6038)
69. “Low Lands of Holland” (Roud Number: 484)
70. “Loyal Sailors, England’s Glory” (Roud Number: V8181)
71. “Lullaby”
72. “Maggie’s Secret” (Roud Number: 12886)
73. “Maria” and “Answer to Maria”
74. “Mother be Proud of your Boy in Blue” (Roud Number: V8728)
75. “My Blue-Eyed Ellen” (Roud Number: V1599)
76. “My Jolly Sailor Bold”
77. “Nautical Philosophy”
78. “Naval Victories”
79. “Ned Mizzen”
80. “New Version of the Return of the Admiral” (Roud Number: V2980)
81. “On Board the Charming Polly” (Roud Number: V343)
82. “Our King is a True British Sailor”
83. “Peter Pull Haul”
84. “Poll of Wapping Stairs”
85. “Poor Jack” (Roud Number: V3366)
86. “Poverty is No Sin”
87. “Pretty Susan, the Pride of Kildare” (Roud Number: 962)
88. “Remember Jack” (Roud Number: V2152)
89. “Remember Me”
90. “Sailor’s Epitaph”
91. “Sailor’s Life at Sea”
92. “Sailor’s Tear” (Roud Number: 13884)
93. “Sailor’s Will”
94. “Saturday Night at Sea”
95. “Shipwrek’d Tar” (Roud Number: V7355)
96. “Smiling Kate” (Roud Number: V5378)
97. “Smiling Nan” (Roud Number: 23134)
98. “Song. The Invasion”
99. “Stand to Your Guns”
100. “Sweet William”
101. “Tarpauling Jacket”
102. “Tarry Sailor”
103. “Tarry Trousers”
104. “Tars of the British Sea” (Roud Number: V1097)
105. “The Advantageous Offer or the Man and Money for Life” (Roud Number: V1206)
106. “The Blanch” (Roud number: 4583)
107. “The Brave Marine” (Roud Number: 18526)
108. “The Breath of Life” (Roud Number: V6791)
109. “The British Man of War” (Roud Number: 372)
110. “The British Seaman” (Roud Number: V8558)
111. “The British Tars”
112. “The Cabin Boy”
113. “The Canvass Spread”
114. “The Careless Tar” (Roud Number: V7359)
115. “The Carfindo”
116. “The Endomynion’s Triumph”
117. “The Gallant Lady”
118. “The Gallant Sailor” (Roud Number: 17792)
119. “The Heart that Can Feel for Another” (Roud Number: 13785)
120. “The Island of Britain. A Loyal Song”
121. “The Jolly Roving Tar” (Roud Number: 913)

122. “The Jolly Sailor”

123. “The Lad in His Jacket So Blue” (Roud Number: 9260)

124. “The Lads of the Ocean” (Roud Number: V3096)

125. “The Last Whistle; or Sailor’s Epitaph”

126. “The Lucky Escape” (Roud Number: 1446)

127. “The Main Truck”

128. “The Mariner’s Compass” (Roud Number: V4160)

129. “The Nancy” (Roud Number: V3414)

130. “The Parting Tear” (Roud Number: V6798)

131. “The Ploughman Turned Sailor” (Roud Number: 1446)

132. “The Poor Old Worn-Out Sailor”

133. “The Post Captain”

134. “The Queen & the Navy” (Roud Number: V11986)

135. “The Rambling Sailor” (Roud Number: 518)

136. “The Rigs and Sprees of Ratcliffe Highway and Wapping” (Roud Number: V9164)

137. “The Sailor Boy’s Farewell to His Mother” (Roud Number: V8751)

138. “The Sailor’s Consolation”

139. “The Sailor’s Courtship”

140. “The Sailor’s Dialogue” (Roud Number: V10038)

141. “The Sailor’s Dream”

142. “The Sailor’s Farewell” (1)

143. “The Sailor’s Farewell” (2)

144. “The Sailor’s Glory” (Roud Number: V8194)
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<th>Title and Details</th>
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<td>“The Sailor’s Grave” (Roud Number: 2676)</td>
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<tr>
<td>146.</td>
<td>“The Sailor’s Hymn”</td>
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<tr>
<td>147.</td>
<td>“The Sailor’s Journal”</td>
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<td>148.</td>
<td>“The Sailor’s Return” (Roud Number: V5742)</td>
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<td>149.</td>
<td>“The Sailor's Will and His Power; or a Picture of Portsmouth Point”</td>
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<td>150.</td>
<td>“The Saucy Sailor Boy” (Roud Number: 531)</td>
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<tr>
<td>151.</td>
<td>“The Seaman’s Life”</td>
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<td>152.</td>
<td>“The Sea Rover” (Roud Number: V1822)</td>
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<tr>
<td>154.</td>
<td>“The Servant of Rosemary Lane” (Roud Number: 269)</td>
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<td>155.</td>
<td>“The Signal Gave” (Roud Number: V3081)</td>
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<td>156.</td>
<td>“The Sweet Little Angel”</td>
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<td>157.</td>
<td>“The Tar’s Advice. A New Song”</td>
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<td>158.</td>
<td>“The Unhappy Parting”</td>
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<td>159.</td>
<td>“To a Sailor” and “From a Sailor”</td>
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<tr>
<td>161.</td>
<td>“Tom Halliard”</td>
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<td>162.</td>
<td>“Tom Starboard” (Roud Number: V463)</td>
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<td>163.</td>
<td>“Tom Tackle” (Roud Number: V469)</td>
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<td>164.</td>
<td>“Tom Tack’s Ghost” (Roud Number: V1906)</td>
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<td>165.</td>
<td>“Tom Transom” (Roud Number: V12640)</td>
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<td>166.</td>
<td>“Tom Tuff (Yo Heave Ho)”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>167.</td>
<td>“True Blue’s Toasts and Sentiments, in Prose and Verse, Inscribed to the Gentlemen of the Navy”</td>
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<tr>
<td>168.</td>
<td>“True Courage” (Roud Number: V473)</td>
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169. “True Hearted Jack” (Roud Number: V3378)

170. “We Tars Have a Maxim”

171. “When First Went to Sea”

172. “William of the Man-of War”

173. “Young William of the Man of War”
APPENDIX B
ENGLISH BALLADS AT THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF SCOTLAND

1. “A Sailor’s Life”
2. “Ben Block”
3. “Bill Jones”
4. “British Tars are Hearts of Oak”
5. “Christian Sailor’s Dream”
6. “Disconsolate Sailor”
7. “Every Inch a Sailor”
8. “Faithful Mary”
10. “Jack Jigger”
11. “Jack’s Yarn”
12. “Post Captain”
13. “Powder Monkey Peter”
14. “Riding Down to Portsmouth”
15. “Sailor’s Caution”
16. “Storm”
17. “The Conquering Sailor”
18. “The Death of Parker”
23. “The Tide’s A Flowing”
24. “The True British Sailor”
26. “When at War on the Ocean”
APPENDIX C

ENGLISH BROADSIDE BALLAD ARCHIVE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA

1. “The Faithless Captain or Betrayed Virgin”
2. “The Storm, or the, Danger of the Sea”
3. “The Tar’s Frolic or British Sailor”