

# The Travels of ‘John Anderson, my jo’<sup>1</sup>

Kate Bowan

Far from being a lament or lamentation in any conventional sense of the genre, the song ‘John Anderson, my jo’ is—certainly in Robert Burns’ sanitised version—a homage to enduring love. The words of the female protagonist, however, also betray a palpable sense of shared personal loss (a perspective also common to lament), although what it is that is lost changes between iterations. An earlier, bawdy version focuses on the loss of youth with special attention to the accompanying loss of sexual function, whereas in Burns’ poem this has been reduced to lost youth alone. Nonetheless, the underlying theme of loss remains constant. The plaintive and lamenting character of the melody created by its minor mode and slow tempo affectively support the character of loss.

In this article I will examine how this underlying sense of lament informs the many political appropriations and parodies that were made of this song, focusing on its travels out to the colonies of settlement. These colonies, when taken together, have become known as the British world, a world constituted by a sense of shared British identity and culture.<sup>2</sup> I will demonstrate how the sense of loss, together with the affective qualities of the melody, was appropriated and reframed within the arena of radical politics across the nineteenth-century British world and identify the particular ways political appropriations transformed the poignant sense of loss into one of rebuke and complaint. By tracking various printed forms and performances of this song from Britain to Australia, New Zealand and Canada, this article will reveal a shared culture of political radicalism and popular song. The article will also highlight how in the political parodies of ‘John Anderson, my jo’, the personal and intimate become the political and public. Moreover, these versions demonstrate how the malleability of popular song provides a means of expressing local inflections within a shared inter-colonial culture. I will also consider the role of songs such as this in the formation of diasporic cultures and music’s important part in sustaining the memory of home for the thousands who forsook kith and kin and, either willingly or not, participated in the waves of nineteenth-century emigration from Britain.

---

1 I would like to thank Paul Pickering and anonymous readers for their helpful suggestions and comments.

2 For seminal studies of the British world, see Bridge, Carl and Fedorowich, Kent (eds) 2003, *The British World: Diaspora, culture and identity*, Frank Cass, London; Buckner, Phillip Alfred and Francis, R. Douglas (eds) 2005, *Rediscovering the British World*, University of Calgary Press, Calgary; Buckner, Phillip Alfred 2006, *Canada and the British World: Culture, migration, and identity*, UBC Press, Vancouver.

This research on 'John Anderson, my jo' takes its place as part of a broader project that is inherently interdisciplinary and centres upon the role of music, in particular song and singing practices, in the spread of radical political culture across the British world. As such it throws up questions about the disciplinary forms, methods and objectives of history and musicology. Whereas music has often held a marginal position in historical studies—in great part because of the specialist requirements of musical literacy and musical analysis—history has always been integral to mainstream musicology. Its primary uses, however, have been to cast light upon and bring greater understanding to a particular work of music—to provide a musical work its cultural context. Here, however, the direction is reversed; here music is used to cast light upon, and provide alternative dimensions of, history. My argument is thus twofold: that a tune functions as a vehicle of transmission that can cover vast distances, both temporally and geographically, and that songs themselves are at one and the same time agents and vessels of history, shaping it and containing it.

The eighteenth century saw into being on the one hand Enlightenment ideas such as rationalism and empiricism and on the other the rise of literary antiquarianism and the 'eighteenth-century British ballad revival'.<sup>3</sup> This was the time of not only the philosophical theorising of John Locke, David Hume and Adam Smith, but also the antiquarian ballad collecting of individuals such as Thomas Percy, Joseph Ritson and James Johnson. Multiple versions and variants of 'John Anderson, my jo' in both textual and musical forms are found in ballad collections from this period.

Burns' version of the ballad is the best known of the extant versions. It appeared in 1790 in the *Scots Musical Museum* (1787–1803) and was one of the more than 200 songs he contributed to James Johnson's substantial collection.<sup>4</sup>

John Anderson my jo, John,  
When we were first acquaint,  
Your locks were like the raven,  
Your bony brow was brent;  
But now your brow is belt, John,

---

3 See McLane, Maureen N. 2010, 'Mediating antiquarians in Britain, 1760–1830: the invention of oral tradition; or, close reading before Coleridge', in Clifford Siskin and William Warner (eds), *This is Enlightenment*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, pp. 247–64.

4 See Johnson, James 1787–1803, *The Scots Musical Museum*, William Blackwood, London and Edinburgh. There is another somewhat anomalous version in Thomas Percy (1765, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry. Volume 2*, Dodsley, London), which bears little resemblance to other versions. In a lengthy headnote, Percy claimed that it was a 'burlesque sonnet' set to 'solemn church music' written during the Reformation as an attack against the Catholic Church. According to Percy, the original was held 'in an ancient MS. Collection of Scottish poems in the Pepysian library' and John Anderson himself was town piper from Kelso some time in the 1600s (pp. 110–11). This is repeated in the notes found in the *Scots Musical Museum* index. For further details on its provenance, see also Cazden, Norman, Haufrecht, Herbert and Studer, Nomran 1982, *Folk Songs of the Catskills*, SUNY Press, Albany, NY, pp. 368–9.

Your locks are like the snaw,  
 But blessings on your frosty pow,  
 John Anderson, my jo.

John Anderson my jo, John,  
 We clamb the hill thegither,  
 And mony a canty day, John,  
 We've had wi ane anither;  
 Now we maun totter down, John,  
 But hand in hand we'll go,  
 And sleep thegither at the foot,  
 John Anderson, my jo.<sup>5</sup>

Like many of Burns' poems, it is a polite adaptation of a far older and far bawdier text, the second stanza of which is given below. Only the first line is common to both versions.

John Anderson, my jo, John,  
 When first that ye began,  
 Ye had as good a tail-tree,  
 As ony ither man; but now it's waxen wan, John,  
 And wrinkles to and fro;  
 I've twa gae-ups for ae gae-down,  
 John Anderson, my jo.<sup>6</sup>

As Maureen MacLane has recently reminded us, '[b]allad books are print objects that ceaselessly point beyond print and to other modes of communication—singing, reciting, speaking, saying, writing'.<sup>7</sup> 'John Anderson, my jo' is at once a poem and a tune. The origins of the tune are, as is usual with the oral tradition, equally unclear as the text. It appeared with this title in the *Skene MS* of 1630; in 1731 it accompanied the Scottish poet Allan Ramsay's words in John Watt's *Musical Miscellany* as well as being used twice in Ramsay's own *Tea-Table Miscellany*; and it was printed again in James Oswald's *Caledonian Pocket Companion* of 1752, and in James Aird's *Selection of Scotch, English, Irish and Foreign Airs* in 1782.<sup>8</sup> Scholars from the nineteenth century on, however, have remarked on its similarity to other tunes—in particular two English melodies, 'Paul's Steeple' and 'I am the Duke of Norfolk'. Matthew Gelbart recently

5 Burns' poem appears in several broadside ballads with two additional stanzas.

6 The bawdy versions appear in *Philomel* (1744, London) and *The Masque* (1768, London) and appeared later in 1800 in Burns' own collection of bawdy and erotic verse, *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*.

7 MacLane, 'Mediating antiquarians in Britain', p. 256.

8 See Watts, John 1731, *The Musical Miscellany*, [London], vol. vi, no. 202; Ramsay, Allan (ed.) 1723–37, *The Tea-Table Miscellany: A collection of choice songs, Scots and English*, [4 vols], Edinburgh; Oswald, James 1752, *The Caledonian Pocket Companion*, [London], vol. iv, no. 22; Aird, James 1782, *Selection of Scotch, English, Irish and Foreign Airs*, [Glasgow], vol. ii, no. 167.

identified it as a Scottish fiddle song, surmising correctly that it ‘probably derived from a bawdy song’.<sup>9</sup> These variants that are all ‘John Anderson’ call to mind Foucault’s insights into the fruitful but ultimately doomed pursuit of origins in his work on history and genealogy.<sup>10</sup> ‘John Anderson, my jo’ rises up out of the murky depths of the oral tradition and exemplifies the complexities of popular song provenance.<sup>11</sup>

The nineteenth century saw the continued and rapid proliferation of print culture; nonetheless the relationship between printed forms of song and the oral tradition remained dynamic. Newspapers, journals, pamphlets and other ephemeral printed formats both disseminated and mediated oral song culture. Although emerging from a far older tradition, ‘John Anderson, my jo’ became part of a broader nineteenth-century popular song culture. It cut across genres and printed formats, appearing in broadside newspapers, as a street ballad, a part song and, given the voracious Victorian appetite for Scottish folk song, in countless parlour song books. The ballad appeared most often in the two-stanza version by Burns set to the melody found in the *Skene MS*, and my research to date has shown that it is also this version that was most often the subject of appropriation and parody.

The practice of setting new words to pre-existing tunes had long been axiomatic in popular song culture and continued throughout the nineteenth century and beyond. Appropriations served a range of functions: they could take the form of parody in the generally understood sense of that term and ridicule, satirise or attack, but they could also pay homage, show allegiance to the original and enlist its meaning for their own agenda. Appropriation is then a broader practice within which lies parody. Parody provides a critical distance from which to question and dissent and creates a space in which ironic inversion can occur.<sup>12</sup> New texts borne of local contexts interacted with the song’s older

---

9 Gelbart, Matthew 2007, *The Invention of ‘Folk Music’ and ‘Art Music’: Emerging categories from Ossian to Wagner*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

10 See Foucault, Michel 1971, ‘Nietzsche, genealogy, history’, in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader*, Pantheon, New York, pp. 76–100.

11 Recent scholarship on the ballad by Paula MacDowell and Maureen McClane gives extended examinations of the challenges of ballad provenance that not only face current scholars but also were always at the forefront of balladeering. As McClane has observed: ‘The whole problem of representing something like a ballad in print, moreover—its tune as well as its words, its variants, its ellipses—is one that eighteenth-century editors identified and grappled with in revealing ways.’ See McClane, ‘Mediating antiquarians in Britain’, p. 251. Paula MacDowell has also explored what she calls the ‘hybrid textual and oral nature of ballads’. See MacDowell, Paula 2006, ‘“The manufacture and lingua-facture of ballad-making”: broadside ballads in long eighteenth-century ballad discourse’, *The Eighteenth Century*, vol. 47, no. 2, pp. 151–78, at p. 173.

12 In the history of Western musical composition the term parody is used in a qualitatively different manner. In this context parody denotes a compositional technique that incorporated pre-existing works into new ones. Parody technique was particularly widespread in the sixteenth century and resulted in the genre of the parody mass. Unlike literary parody, this technique did not engage with ideas of ironic inversion or satire, and so seems to be closer in sense to appropriation than literary parody. This is true also of the technique of contrafactum—the placing of a new text to a pre-existing melody, which can be traced back to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and even earlier in plainchant.

meanings. The new texts' relationship to the original was varied and often complex and the new meanings were reliant on a shared knowledge of the original. Intertextuality is thus at the centre of this fluid cultural practice, and it is made possible by the tune. The appropriations and parodies become part of the history of the tune. Early song collectors largely dismissed parodies as somehow degenerate, but for the historian they are valuable documents telling us much of contemporary events and attitudes. Accretions of meanings, layers of use, memories and associations were instantly reanimated by the invocation of a song title and with these came the music flooding into the reader's mind.

John Anderson my Jo.  
Written for this Work by Robert Burns.

260

John Ander-son my jo, John, When we were first Ac-  
Lively  
-quent; Your locks were like the ra-ven's, Your bony brow was  
brent; But now your brow is beld, John, Your  
locks are like the snaw; But blefs-ings on your  
frosty pow, John Ander-son my Jo.

John Ander-son my jo, John,  
We climb the hill the gither;  
And mony a canty day John,  
We've had wi' ane anither:  
\*Now we maun totter down, John,  
And hand in hand we'll go;  
And sleep the gither at the foot.  
John Ander-son my Jo.

Figure 1 'John Anderson, my jo' from James Johnson's *The Scots Musical Museum*

Source: Johnson, 'John Anderson, my jo', in *The Scots Musical Museum*, p. 269

'John Anderson, my jo' had appeared as a tune for new texts from the mid eighteenth century before Burns had produced his own poem. Parodies continued to appear throughout the next century, covering a range of topics from poverty to local government and city parks.<sup>13</sup> Among these parodies are examples of not only intertextual play with the poetic text, but also a kind of play in which the titles of the tune are in conversation with the original. In some instances these changes in the title of the tune served to intensify the sense of loss expressed in the new text. For example, the poem 'The Departed', in Joseph Barker's *Democratic Hymns and Songs*,<sup>14</sup> is set to the tune of 'John Anderson's Gone', and a street ballad called 'In the days when I was hard up', which centred on the individual experience of privation and difficulty, takes it one decisive step further with the tune given as 'John Anderson's Dead'.<sup>15</sup> There is no way of knowing if the semantic play in these titles left the tune untouched or not.

'John Anderson, my jo' found an explicitly political expression both as an appropriation and in its original form when it was featured prominently during the liberation tour of Scotland by the Chartist martyrs John Collins and Peter Murray McDouall in 1840. Far from being objects of satire, these Chartists were celebrated as returning heroes. Collins and McDouall had spent the previous year imprisoned for sedition, both victims of the government crackdown in the aftermath of the presentation of the Chartists' National Petition in 1838. Scottish songs dominated the celebrations of their freedom. As they travelled across Scotland, the liberated patriots were heralded by performance of many of Burns' best loved and politicised songs, notably 'Scots wha hae' and 'A man's a man for a' that'. The working people paid their respects, particularly to John Collins, through various performances of 'John Anderson, my jo'. Unsurprisingly in this context, ironic inversion is absent in their appropriation of 'John Anderson, my jo' in which they retained and celebrated the powerful sense of affection that permeates Burns' version. The connection between song and individual was made explicitly at Glasgow's Grand Soiree, during which a Mr McCrea from Kilbarchan was called upon to sing his own version of John Anderson, a tribute to the Chartist leader, in which the last line of every verse was changed to 'John Collins, oh my jo'.<sup>16</sup> At a public dinner the following week in Edinburgh, Collins

---

13 See "'Airn John", To the tune of: "John Anderson, my joe"', 1858, Glasgow, viewed 29 September 2011, <[http://bodley24.bodley.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/acwwweng/ballads/image.pl?ref=2806+c.11\(224\)&id=12790.gif&seq=1&size=1](http://bodley24.bodley.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/acwwweng/ballads/image.pl?ref=2806+c.11(224)&id=12790.gif&seq=1&size=1)>

14 Barker, J. 1849, *Democratic Hymns and Songs*, J. Barker, Wortley, UK.

15 Ibid., p. 23. "'In the days when I was hard up" to the tune of "John Anderson My Joe"', [c. 1845–59], Ryle, London, viewed 29 September 2011, <[http://bodley24.bodley.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/acwwweng/ballads/image.pl?ref=Firth+b.26\(221\)&id=16908.gif&seq=1&size=1](http://bodley24.bodley.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/acwwweng/ballads/image.pl?ref=Firth+b.26(221)&id=16908.gif&seq=1&size=1)> For broadside ballads about poverty, see Hepburn, James G. [c. 2000–02], *A Book of Scattered Leaves: Poetry of poverty in broadside ballads of nineteenth-century England*, [2 vols], Bucknell University Press, Lewisburg, Pa.

16 *Northern Star*, 26 September 1840. Expressions of solidarity through banners, clothing, toasts, recitations and singing were central to 'the culture of popular protest'. James Epstein has explored how many of these

was introduced by the chairman who, after outlining his sacrifices to the cause, handed over to the 'excellent instrumental band' who honoured him with yet another performance of 'John Anderson, my jo'.<sup>17</sup>

Collins remained in Britain until his death in 1852. McDouall, however, after a further stint in prison between 1848 and 1850, gave up on his lifelong goal of achieving reform in Britain and, like many of his fellow Chartists, decided to emigrate, determined to create a better Britain in the colonies of settlement. McDouall, however, drowned just off the coast of Australia never to realise his dream of democratic change.<sup>18</sup> 'John Anderson, my jo' had in fact arrived in Australia much earlier. Music travelled with people and, as Britons dispersed across the Empire, so did their musical culture. 'John Anderson, my jo' took its place in a shared popular culture that spread rapidly over the Empire with the onset of mass emigration.<sup>19</sup>

The Scottish people formed a substantial proportion of those who immigrated to the colonies of settlement. They came to Australia in increasingly large numbers from around 1820. The 1820s ushered in what Susan Cowan has described as 'a new age of free settlement' when land was opened up by means of grants.<sup>20</sup> Scots came as part of an assisted-emigration scheme, helped by the emigration societies that proliferated from around 1820, or as self-funded immigrants or as reluctant victims of the Highland Clearances that dispossessed so many Gaelic-speaking Highlanders (their number was increased further by the impact of a potato blight between 1846 and 1848).<sup>21</sup> Between 1832 and 1850, 16 000 people came as assisted immigrants, more than 20 000 came without assistance and around 10 000 as a result of the Clearances. Although many individuals came in search of a better life and embraced and realised the possibilities of the new world, there was nonetheless an enduring sense of loss.

This sense of loss created an urgent need to maintain a sense of cultural identity. The singing of songs such as 'John Anderson, my jo' was a crucial way to ensure the survival of Scottish culture. A vivid expression of this is found in an account of a performance during the voyage to Australia aboard an immigrant ship in the early 1840s given by John Hood. Hood described an evening

---

became 'radical dining rituals'. For an extended discussion of such symbolic practices, see Epstein, James 1988, 'Radical dining, toasting and symbolic expression in early nineteenth-century Lancashire: rituals of solidarity', *Albion*, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 271–91.

17 *Northern Star*, 3 October 1840.

18 For McDouall, see Pickering, P. A. and Ashton, O. R. 2002, *Friends of the People: Uneasy radicals in the age of the Chartists*, Merlin Press, London, pp. 7–28.

19 For a comprehensive history of emigration from Britain out to Empire, see Richards, Eric 2004, *Britannia's Children: Emigration from England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland since 1600*, Continuum, London.

20 Cowan, Susan 2003, 'Contributing Caledonian culture: a legacy of the Scottish diaspora', *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 27, no. 76, pp. 87–95, at p. 88.

21 See 'Scots and Australia: immigrants—Scottish Australians', viewed 22 September 2011, <<http://www.ltsotland.org.uk/scotsandaustralia/immigrantsscotsaustralians/index.asp>>

when, to the great delight of us Scots, a Blaugowrie man and two other Highlanders struck up, in admirable style, a whistling trio—‘Scots wha hae wi’ Wallace bled,’ and ‘John Anderson my jo.’ The effect was electric: the airs of Scotia on the wild strange sea sounded more touchingly to us than they ever did before.<sup>22</sup>

Hood’s final line powerfully conveys the anxiety felt by emigrants in the face of an uncertain and unknown world. This collective expression of Scottish identity not only draws our attention to the emigrant fear of cultural loss in the face of dislocation and displacement, but also shows us the power of music to ameliorate this fear. It accounts too for how Burns and his political sentiments shaped by the French Revolution and British radicalism made their way to the far reaches of Empire. The Burns clubs and Caledonian societies that proliferated from Cape Town to Melbourne, from Halifax, Nova Scotia, to Dunedin, New Zealand, and the Scottish and Caledonian concerts that became regular popular entertainments were part of a diasporic community’s determined agenda to assert and maintain cultural identity in new and alien environments and to compensate for the loss of home.

Although ‘John Anderson, my jo’ never attained the enduring iconic status in radical political song repertoire of other of Burns’ songs—notably ‘Scot wha hae’—it nonetheless retained its capacity to carry political resonances in these new environments. Satirical parody—although absent in the liberation tour of Scotland—was nonetheless an integral part of the political culture of opposition and subversion, taking its place in what E. P. Thompson has identified as the plebeian tradition of counter theatre.<sup>23</sup> Like many ballads, ‘John Anderson, my jo’ gives itself up easily to ironic inversion in which the gently humorous but still loving reference to the encroachment of old age is turned on its head to become a mocking reproach for betrayal and disappointment. Many of the surviving printed parodies are satirical addresses to politicians and they can be found throughout the British world.

In stark contrast with the celebration for the Chartist martyrs, there was no trace of affection in the parody of ‘John Anderson, my jo’ that appeared in Sydney almost a decade later in the *People’s Advocate*, a radical newspaper edited by former Chartist and poet Edward Hawksley, who, unlike McDouall, had reached Australian shores. This satirical attack on Lord John Russell that appeared in the poetry section in September 1849 was taken from London’s *Punch*.<sup>24</sup> Russell

---

22 Hood, John 1848, *Australia and the East Being a Journal Narrative of a Voyage to New South Wales in an Emigrant Ship with A Residence of Some Months in Sydney and the Bush and the Route Home by Way of India and Egypt in the Years 1841 and 1842*, John Murray, London, p. 16.

23 See particularly, Thompson, E. P. 1974, ‘Patrician society, plebeian culture’, *Journal of Social History*, vol. 7, no. 4, pp. 382–405.

24 *People’s Advocate*, 29 September 1849. I specify London here, as *Punch* itself is an ideal example of the way that cultural forms were transported around the British world. Colonial versions of *Punch* appeared in places as far afield as Dunedin, Melbourne and Montreal.

had been active in the Whig campaign for the great *Reform Act* of 1832, a cause that gave rise to widespread optimism among reformers generally. Radicals, who had vociferously supported the campaign, had been given the impression by the Whigs that the passage of the Act would be the first instalment in a process of incremental reform. In government, the Whigs had proven a great disappointment and popular hopes for further democratic reform had been dashed when Russell explicitly ruled it out in 1837, earning him the sobriquet 'Finality Jack'. 'John Anderson, my jo' lent itself to parody in part because it is an address to an individual; if their name was John or Jo so much the better, but it was not necessary. In almost all parodies, specific individuals are taken to task as radical-turned-Tory traitor. In this parody, Russell is censured for his betrayal of fundamental radical democratic concerns. The dynamism inherent in the print–oral nexus is brought into play as the tune comes to mind despite the resolute silence of the printed medium:

John Minister, my jo, John, when we were first acquaint,  
Ye were a bold Reformer, on liberal measures bent;  
But now ye're growing cold, John, ye're getting slack and slow;  
I wonder what has come to ye, John Minister, my jo.

Betrayal and disappointment suffuse the poem, as the singer protests 'Ah! Ye're not what ye used to be, John Minister, my jo', and then goes on to accuse him of being 'tamed', but suggests hopefully that if Russell were to have a change of heart and 'resume the path of progress' he would find forgiveness. Ultimately, however, the final stanza reveals Russell to be irredeemable in the eyes of the protagonist, and the image of the couple sleeping 'thegither at the foot' after facing life's challenges as a united front is fundamentally destroyed:

John Minister, my jo, John, we've clamb the hill together,  
And both have had to struggle with very stormy weather;  
And I have kept ahead, John, but you have crept below,  
And now are sleeping at the foot, John Minister, my jo.

This practice of what we would nowadays call syndication was a vital element of the development of communication within Britain and beyond. The inclusion of an item from a British publication in an Australian paper was *de rigueur*; the democratic culture of print ephemera was in no way geographically bounded. This parody takes its place in a vast body of print that circulated around the Empire, finding a place in countless publications. Furthermore, in 1849, the year of its publication in Sydney, Russell was the prime minister of a government bent on reintroducing transportation to New South Wales. Opposition to transportation became, as Paul Pickering has noted, a metaphor

for the campaign for self-government.<sup>25</sup> Its reappearance in a radical Sydney newspaper at this moment was, then, no coincidence; and this new dimension of dissent would not have been lost on the *Advocate* readership.

Although John Anderson's most frequent appearance in the Land of the Long White Cloud was as an advertisement for a public house, it was also brought into the political sphere. Two satirical parodies found in nineteenth-century New Zealand newspapers show exactly how the earlier theme of lost youth and inevitable mortality is transmuted to a loss of political radicalism. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, a resident of Toko (a rural settlement on New Zealand's North Island) was not impressed with his Member of Parliament and, on behalf of the 'simple-minded Toko folk', took him to task:

John Anderson, my jo, John,  
When first we were acquaint,  
Ye were a smooth-tongued canty chiel—  
A beauty without paint.  
But you're now an MHR, John,  
And I should like to know  
If ye have gathered any sense  
John Anderson, my jo.<sup>26</sup>

The author of the second example from New Zealand disclosed the influence of the immediate and improvisatory nature of song culture in his short explanatory preface to his disgruntled attack on the politician and prohibitionist Thomas Edward Taylor:

Sir,—As I sat the other night contemplating the conduct of the junior member for Christchurch, the old air of 'John Anderson my Jo' came into my head, and my thoughts arranged themselves somewhat as follows:—

Taylor, T. E., of Christchurch  
When we were first acquent,  
I thought you were a Radical  
And what you said you meant...

'T. E.', you're now a different man,  
A Tory, not a 'Rad',  
And everything seems very good  
You once thought very bad.<sup>27</sup>

---

25 For the campaign against transportation, see Pickering, P. A. 2005, 'Loyalty and rebellion in colonial politics: the case against convict transportation in Australia', in P. Buckner and R. D. Francis (eds), *Rediscovering the British World*, University of Calgary Press, Calgary, pp. 87–107.

26 'John Anderson, My Jo (new version)', *Bruce Herald*, 3 July 1888.

27 W. H. D. 1899, 'Correspondence: the junior member for Christchurch', *The Star*, 19 August.

More than 50 years earlier in lower Canada, 'John Anderson, my jo' was enlisted in a bitter election campaign. As the tune for an election song that was disseminated as a song sheet among political radicals, it is a fragile piece of ephemera that has somehow survived the vicissitudes of time, capturing and preserving a complex historical moment. 'Another New Song to Another Old Tune' was a direct address to the Irish-Canadian politician John Donellan. Although it is, as they often were, an awkward setting in which aesthetic concerns have given way to those of political utility, it is nonetheless still singable:

John Donellan, my jo, John,  
When we first acquaint,  
Your politics were good, John,  
On Freedom you were bent.  
But now you're getting old, John,  
You've forgotten long ago  
And you've turned Tory on our hands  
John Donellan, my jo  
John Donellan, my jo, John  
In Eighteen Thirty Two,  
TRACY [sic], the friend of Irishmen  
Found an enemy in you.  
You left our ranks in dudgeon, then,  
And joined our mortal foe;  
The quid the vote you'll get from us,  
John Donellan, my jo.  
John Donellan, my jo, John  
You swore you would oppose,  
The 92 Resolves, John,  
We passed against our foes,  
But we'll stick by O'CONNELL, John,  
Whilst HANCOCK and AULDJO  
Spill their blood in your support,  
John Donellan, my jo.  
John Donellan, my jo, John  
You hope to gain your ends,  
With ARMOUR & TOM BEGLEY, John,  
And such like Tory friends,  
Who falsely called the IRISH, John,  
'The tools of Papineau',  
Because we would not be their tools  
John Donellan, my jo.  
John Donellan, my jo, John

The day is coming fast  
When you will be defeated John—  
When you'll have polled your last.  
And then you'll toddle home, John,  
Cursing Dolye and Co.  
Who first advised you to set up,  
John Donellan, my jo.  
For the Irish have resolved, John,  
To stick like friends together  
And not desert the truth, John,  
For you or any other.  
With PAPINEAU & NELSON—John,  
They triumphed long ago,  
And they'll conquer with the same again  
John Donellan, my jo.<sup>28</sup>

The mock exasperation and wry knowingness expressed in the title's 'another' suggest the anonymous author's awareness of its position as part of the not-so-new 'new song' genre. There is a wealth of historical detail within this more extended political parody. It is peppered with names of key individuals and historical references: John Donellan, the year 1832, Tracy, the Ninety-Two Resolves, O'Donnell, Auldjo, Tom Begley, Papineau, Nelson. These details are enough to identify it as an election ballad that formed part of the arsenal of the reformist Patriote campaign led by Louis-Joseph Papineau and Robert Nelson against the conservative Irishman John Donellan and his running mate, William Walker, for Montreal West in the riotous election of late 1834. The ballad can be seen as an agent in the events leading up to the 1837 Rebellion, which was a significant marker on the road to Responsible Government in Canada.

Between 1828 and the early 1830s a 'climate of sympathy', to use Mary Finnegan's words, arose between the Irish and French in Canada.<sup>29</sup> Drawing upon their shared religion and experience of British oppression, the two ethnic groups came together. The renowned Irish politician Daniel O'Connell, dubbed 'The Liberator' for his central role in the campaign for Repeal of the Union, had taken up the French Canadian cause in the British Parliament, and the Canadians in turn held him up as a 'symbol of hope', drawing favourable comparisons between him and Papineau, who they hoped would become their own 'Liberator'.<sup>30</sup> O'Connell's activities were reported in both French and Irish

---

28 Anon. [18??], 'Another new song to another old tune air, "John Anderson, my jo"', [S. I.], CIHM No. 51821, Metropolitan Toronto Library, Toronto.

29 Finnegan, Mary 1985, 'Irish-French relations in lower Canada', *CCHA Historical Studies*, vol. 52, pp. 35-49, at p. 35.

30 Jackson, James 2005, 'The radicalization of the Montreal Irish: the role of "the Vindicator"', *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, vol. 31, no. 1, pp. 90-7, at p. 92.

radical newspapers. Daniel Tracey, with whom the author of this song so clearly identified, was a key player in the Irish involvement with the Patriote movement during these years. He was the editor of the radical *Irish Vindicator and Canada General Advertiser*, which had started in December 1828. Reporting on both Irish affairs and local Patriote activities, Tracy performed an important role in agitating for reform and successfully ran in the 1832 by-election for Montreal West. Nevertheless, the ballad also points to a division within the expatriate Irish community in the lead-up to the 1834 election. It is clear that French Canadians had to be careful not to let their attacks on Donellan be seen as an attack on the Irish more generally. Significantly this song comes from within Irish ranks, and possibly played a role in the noisy meetings of Irish electors of the West Ward prior to the election—meetings that may have been attended by Donellan's Tory supporters Thomas Begly and Auldjo. In this respect the ballad proves its worth as a primary source by telling us that Donellan, despite having worked alongside Tracey promoting the Irish cause, had, as early as 1832, turned against him—a fact not noted in the current scholarship.<sup>31</sup>

Also in 1834 the Patriotes sent their Ninety-Two Resolutions to London. These resolutions, which stand as their 'political manifesto', consisted of a series of grievances against the Legislative Council and proposed reform measures for colonial policy. The ultimate rejection of the resolutions by Britain and the official response in the form of none other than Lord John Russell's Ten Resolutions contributed to the 1837 Rebellion. Recently James Jackson has identified the 'radical nature' of the Ninety-Two Resolutions as a key cause for the subsequent divisions that fractured the Patriote party—divisions he sees as the Tory party's attempts 'to exacerbate by enticing the Irish away from their traditional support for Papineau'.<sup>32</sup> Donellan's Tory lieutenant, Thomas Begly, accused Papineau of exploiting the Irish for political gain. Tories sought to play upon anti-Irish sentiments among the Patriotes and rupture the fragile alliance between French and Irish so as to bring the Irish over to their side. To do this they exploited the general French Canadian opposition to Irish immigration. This opposition was fuelled in part by the cholera epidemics of 1832 and 1834, which were directly linked to the arrival of emigrant ships from Ireland (ironically it was one such outbreak that had killed Tracey just as he was to assume office in 1832). In this way the Tories managed to gain the support of many Montreal Irish after 1834. The song then sounded the death knell for the brief period of Irish–French Canadian solidarity in lower Canada. There was now 'outright

---

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., p. 94.

division in the Irish ranks' and considerable hostility towards them from the Canadians.<sup>33</sup> This election song shows just how effective music can be as a 'tool of historical inquiry'.<sup>34</sup>

Popular song was a readily available form of communication. It was part of a broad culture, but was also capable of acute specificity, and so allowed interplay between global and local understandings. In the telling of transnational history, popular song can play an important role in allowing disparate and often national histories to be woven together, for parallels to be drawn and comparisons to be made that would otherwise not. It is the tune that allows this play between textual meanings. It is the tune that sounds across time and space, acting as a historical agent, a vehicle of culture.

The diasporic community is at the centre of many of the examples cited above: the Scottish in the antipodes, the Irish and French in Canada. The keenly antagonistic or gently humorous political parodies of 'John Anderson, my jo' found in Australia, New Zealand and Canada, and the communal singing of the 'original' song by Scottish emigrants on their way to Australia, represent different expressions of, and engagements with, loss. Through these we can witness how a song could be used to reaffirm and sustain identity, or how its meaning could be rearticulated to represent loss of different kinds: of faith, loyalty or solidarity.

---

33 Ibid.

34 See Jackson, Jeffrey H. and Pelkey, Stanley C. 2005, *Music and History: Bridging the disciplines*, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, Miss., p. xiv.