

KENDALL WHALING MUSEUM MONOGRAPH SERIES Nº 9

**Oooh, You New York Girls!**  
**The Urban Pastorale in Ballads and Songs**  
**about Sailors Ashore in the Big City**

The 1995 Vaughan Evans Memorial Lecture  
of the Australian Association for Maritime History

by

**Stuart M. Frank**

(Director, The Kendall Whaling Museum)



**CO-PUBLISHED BY THE KENDALL WHALING MUSEUM AND  
THE AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION FOR MARITIME HISTORY**

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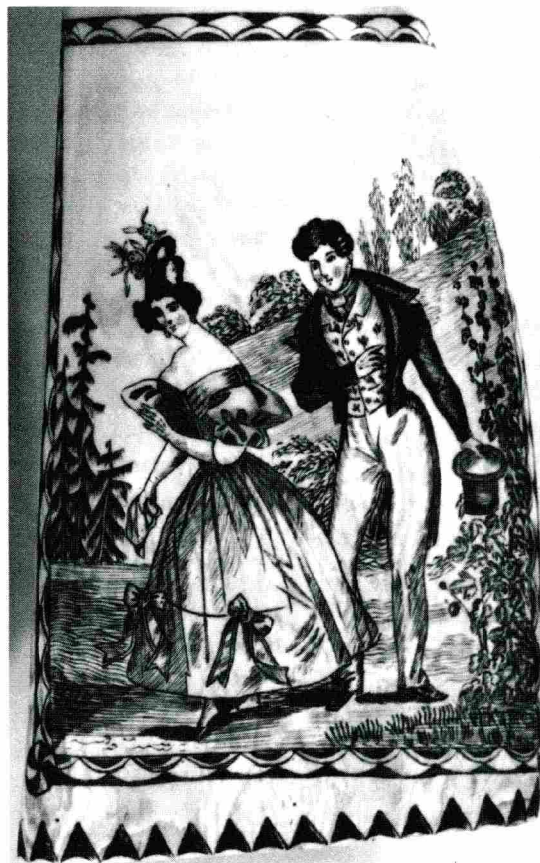
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**The Kendall Whaling Museum**

Sharon, Massachusetts

**The Australian Association for Maritime History**

Perth, Western Australia

**1996**

**In Memory of  
Mark Herman, Brian Benlifer, and Vaughan Evans**

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COVER ILLUSTRATION: Double female portrait anonymously engraved on a sperm-whale tooth by an American whaleman, circa 1840-50 (a whaling vignette engraved by the same hand on the other side of the tooth is taken from an illustration in Thomas Beale's *Natural History of the Sperm Whale*, London, 1839). [Collection of the Kendall Whaling Museum; photo by Eric H. Muller.]

TITLE-PAGE ILLUSTRATION: Pastoral vignette anonymously engraved on a sperm-whale tooth by an American whaleman known as the Banknote Engraver, circa 1835-45. [Collection of the Kendall Whaling Museum; photo by Eric H. Muller.]

## Foreword

by

Malcolm Tull

President, The Australian Association for Maritime History

This publication contains the text of Stuart Frank's Vaughan Evans Memorial Lecture, delivered at the Western Australian Maritime Museum in Fremantle on 11 November 1995.

This lecture is the second in an annual series of lectures designed to commemorate the memory of Vaughan Evans and honour his outstanding commitment to the Australian Association for Maritime History (AAMH).

Vaughan Evans was born in England in 1924 and served in the Royal Navy during the Second World War. After the war he worked for Lloyd's of London until 1955, when he migrated to Australia. He worked for the Prudential Assurance Company until his retirement in 1984.

Vaughan developed his interest in maritime history in England, where he founded the Thames Shiplovers' Society and was an active member of the Society for Nautical Research. In Australia, together with Frank Broeze and John Bach, Vaughan established the AAMH in 1978. He served as the first Secretary and edited the quarterly Newsletter from its inception in January 1980 until shortly before his death on 17 November 1993. The Newsletter was designed to cater to everyone interested in maritime history, and included anecdotes, responses to questions, and short notes on various aspects of maritime history. Every issue was a gem overflowing with his knowledge and wit. Vaughan also co-edited, with John Bach, the AAMH's journal, *The Great Circle*, between 1983 and 1988.

Vaughan played a key role in the establishment of the Australian National Maritime Museum, in Sydney, which opened in 1991 and named its reference library after him in 1993. Meanwhile, in 1988, the Australian bicentennial year, Vaughan was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for his services to maritime history.

The AAMH continues to promote the study, publication, and general appreciation of maritime history. Its membership and field of interest are not restricted to Australia and Australian maritime history but are international in scope. The AAMH is run by an Executive Council that has officers from all States and Territories, and is currently based in Perth, Western Australia. Membership is open to anyone with an interest in maritime history. The annual cost of membership is A\$30 for individuals, A\$25 for students, and A\$40 for corporate and institutional members. If you are interested in finding out more about the AAMH or would like to join, please contact:

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## Author's Preface

I am greatly indebted to a number of individuals and organizations for making it possible for me to go out to Western Australia and participate in the lecture series honoring the memory of my venerated colleague and beloved friend, Vaughan Evans: Dr Malcolm Tull and the Australian Association for Maritime History; Graeme Henderson and the Western Australian Maritime Museum; Gary Tonkin and the good people of Albany, Western Australia; and the United States Information Agency. Most of all I am indebted to Vaughan and Halcyon Evans, whose wisdom, good fellowship, and many provocative insights, imparted through an extensive correspondence and several personal encounters in New South Wales and Massachusetts over the years, have left an indelible impression on my life and career. Vaughan and I shared a keen enthusiasm for whaling history and for such softer aspects of maritime culture as sailors' songs, the decorative arts, and scrimshaw. Accordingly, it was a high privilege for me to represent my nation and my point of view — the latter so gently and benignly and irresistibly influenced by Vaughan Evans — on a subject of mutual interest that has given both of us great joy and helped clarify for both of us some of the larger issues of our mutual Anglo-American-Australian seafaring heritage.

Stuart M. Frank  
The Kendall Whaling Museum  
22 February 1996





"A COUP DE PIED." Pencil, ink, and watercolor drawing done in 1873 by whaleman Frederick Howland Smith of Dartmouth, Massachusetts; from his journal kept as master of the whaling bark *Petrel* of New Bedford, 1871-74. "This vision, assisted by traced patterns, was painted while Smith was at sea in the Indian Ocean" (Kenneth R. Martin, *Whalemen's Painting and Drawings*, 1983, 125), and is evidently set in William E. Harding's saloon (not located). There is a biographical sketch of the artist in Stuart M. Frank, *Dictionary of Scrimshaw Artists*, 1991. [Collection of the Kendall Whaling Museum.]

## Oooh, You New York Girls!

### The Urban Pastorale in Ballads and Songs about Sailors Ashore in the Big City

... A landsman can keep away from the sea indefinitely, whereas a seafarer cannot long remain away from shore. Nor does he necessarily wish to do so, for a large proportion of his satisfactions in life, ranging from frivolous delights to solid compensations, are to be had only on land and are eagerly anticipated and discussed during many weary watches at sea. Furthermore, if a landsman does go to sea occasionally, it is taken for granted that he cannot be expected to know much, if anything, about matters nautical — a courtesy which is seldom extended in reverse.... Instead [the seaman ashore] is expected to know what [landsmen] know and to act as they act, and is looked at askance, patronized as an immature and irresponsible character, or roundly condemned if he cannot or will not live up to their expectations.... The fact is simply that a real seaman, while ashore, is in a position which to him is never quite normal or natural, and which therefore gives rise to a long series of emotional and intellectual stresses and strains. The literature of the sea is filled with references to this feeling of strangeness on the part of seafarers ashore. This is particularly true of the more subjective aspects of that literature, such as diaries, biographies, and volumes of reminiscences, which refer again and again to the problem of adjustment faced by the seaman in his contacts with the half-forgotten and often uncongenial requirements of life ashore. (Hohman 1952, 201f)

Browsing through the classic ballad collections of Francis James Child and Cecil J. Sharp, and in G. Malcolm Laws' definitive taxonomies of broadside ballads, it becomes obvious that English-language ballad traditions in North America were not only founded upon and borrowed from forms transported to the New World by the original colonists, but continued to be profoundly influenced and affected by Anglo-Scots-Irish conventions long after American independence and well into the twentieth century. By then, of course, the cultural and musical influences were going in both directions. It can justifiably be said that certainly by the twentieth century, if not earlier, American and African-American influences on vernacular music in the British Isles far surpassed anything traveling the other way, at least until the Beatles repaid some of the debt. Nevertheless, as with the American legal system, social institutions, and national mores, American folk-song and ballad traditions are fundamentally and predominantly Anglo-Scots-Irish in origin, tempered and greatly colored by home-grown American attitudes and peppered by uniquely American ethnological, demographic, and political elements. The evolution of folk-song traditions in British Canada, Australia, and New Zealand is certainly analogous, and, perhaps because of longer-standing formal political and religious ties, tends to be even more pronounced.

In examining the urban sailor ballad it is therefore appropriate to take as a first example a charming eighteenth-century British precursor set in London (of course) which was, remarkably, still current in the Yankee whale fishery more than a century after its anonymous authorship in Hanoverian England. The title given the ballad in an American whaleman's transcription of circa 1842<sup>1</sup> is "Cobit's Garden," a corruption of "*Cupid's Garden*," which is the title given in a much earlier manuscript text reported from a Salem whaleship in 1767.<sup>2</sup> "*Cupid's Garden*," in turn, is a natural corruption of *Cuper's Gardens*, a place of amusement on the South Bank of the Thames opposite Somerset House in the London Borough of Southwark, not far from the administrative center of the great city. It was named for Boydell Cuper, a gardener in the family of the Earl of Arundel who laid out and opened the gardens in 1678. A genteel swatch of green, with botanical attractions, musical concerts, and famous displays of fireworks — a kind of urban Retiro for the multitudes — the place remained popular among respectable folks for two or three generations. It was eventually outclassed by a formidable rival, Vauxhall; and Cuper's Gardens finally closed in 1753. According to some early accounts Cuper's Gardens was "suppressed in consequence of the

dissoluteness of its visitors... the company was not always the most select,"<sup>3</sup> which may be a veiled reference to the sailors who frequented the place in ever larger numbers as their general presence in the Port of London increased. In at least one other nineteenth-century whaleman's version,<sup>4</sup> the name *Covent* Garden is substituted, an even further corruption in confusion with London's celebrated coffeehouse district and marketplace: Covent Garden remained a fundamental fixture in the London cityscape long after Cuper's Garden was forgotten. All this specificity about place is a precursor to later manifestations of rare geographical specificity in songs and ballads about sailors ashore in New York City. Unlike those, however, "Cobit's Garden" is flowery and genteel, beginning:

1. A down in cobit's garden with pleasure I did go  
To view the fairest flowers that in this garden grow  
The first it was the jassamine the lily pink and rose  
These were the fairest flowers that in this garden grow

The plot, what there is of it, is simple: there are two women in the garden; one is a virgin, whom the narrator admires and to whom he becomes betrothed; he must abandon her temporarily to go to sea, sailing from Portsmouth (indicating the Royal Navy); but he declares his love and suggests that they marry upon his return:

2. I had not walked this garden the space of half an hour  
Before i spied tow pretty fair maides setting under the shady bower  
The first it was lovely nancy moste beautifull and fair  
The other it was a virgin and still the laurels ware
3. I boldely step[p]ed up to them and u[n]to her did say  
Are you engaged to anny young man tell to me i pray  
I am not engaged to any one i solemnly declare  
I am to live a virgin and still the laurels ware.
4. Then hand in hand together this loveing couple went  
Resolved was the sailor to know her full entent  
To know if she would slight him and from his presence go  
No said she a no my dear i love a sailor boy
5. A down in portsmouth harbour our ship she does ly their  
And I must go to sea my love where the wind it blowes fair  
But if ever i return again how happy i shall be  
With my true love my owne true love set smiling on my knee
6. Fair you well my lovely virgin since i to the sea must go  
Whear their is many dark and dismal night and stormy winds do blow  
But if ever i return again unto my native shore  
I will mar[r]ly my lovely virgin and go to sea no more<sup>5</sup>

Though it is set in London, the ballad is deliberately rusticated: the sailor goes to the only kind of place in town that is vernal, tree-lined, and countrified; thus, the locale though scarcely a stone's throw from the commercial center of the world's largest metropolis, becomes a kind of rural glade,

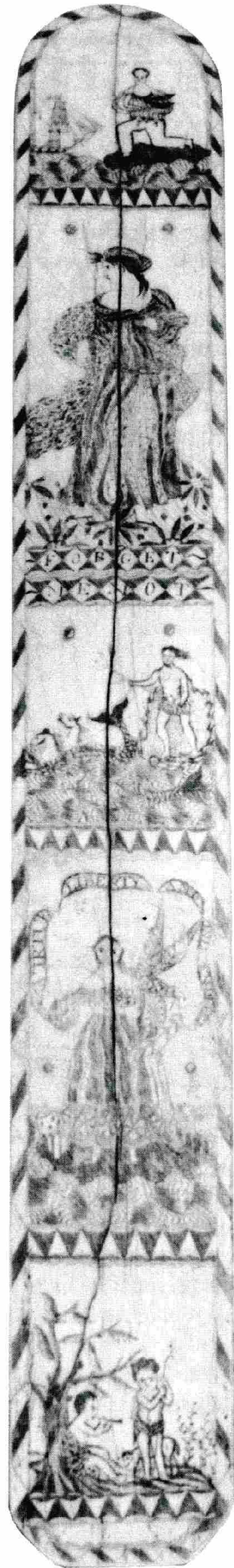


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removed from the dangers and confusion and squalor of urban life, a retreat of sorts, conducive to the contemplation of beauty and to romance. A similar rustication recurs in some nineteenth-century broadside ballads: "The Banks of the Lee" alludes to a minor stream that actually joins the Thames near the squalid East End docklands and Lime House, London's teeming Chinatown; likewise, another is set "on the Banks of the Schuylkill," rather than "in downtown Philadelphia." In each case a nominal urban setting is transformed into countryside and, as such, it differs little from the authentic pastoral settings of ballads — which are usually expressed generically, such as "down by the river side," or "on the banks of a river," or "in the fields and meadows." In such a vernal place, the would-be lover, who is more often than not a sailor, is said to "wander" or "roam," and inadvertently encounters a "fair young maiden." Sometimes her occupation or status is specified, such as a milkmaid or merchant's daughter or, better, a shepherd's daughter. The story can unfold in any direction and need not be so innocuous as "Cuper's Garden." Some broadside ballads are full of danger, deception, murder, homicidal brothers' opposition to the lovers, vengeful fathers, and other tenacious obstacles to a happy outcome; there may be an exchange of tokens, which are often redeemed after a prescribed period of seven years; it may end happily or tragically, and it may or may not have a numerically-quantifiable body count. However, even if they mention the name of a city or allude to such specific attractions as Cuper's Garden or the Schuylkill River, such ballads rarely have anything meaningful to do with cities or urban life. The English and Scottish popular ballads — the so-called Child Ballads, after Francis James Child's canon of old ballads — emanated from Medieval and Renaissance oral traditions in a culture still almost wholly rural and agrarian: as there were no cities of appreciable magnitude at the time of genesis it is therefore not surprising that the old ballads incorporate few urban elements. But the canonical broadside ballads, as catalogued by G. Malcolm Laws, do not seem to have much to do with cities either, notwithstanding that their origins coincide chronologically with the Industrial Revolution and with the rise of the metropolis and the manufacturing center and the urban seaport in Britain and America. Rather, they simply seem to equate romance and melodrama with the same old rural archetypes.

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Pastoral imagery abounds on this brilliantly engraved corset busk of sperm-whale skeletal bone, attributed to whaling captain Shubael S. Spooner (fl. circa 1832-59) of Fairhaven and New Bedford, Massachusetts. [Collection of the Kendall Whaling Museum; photo by Mark Sexton.]





As any statistical survey of Laws' *American Balladry from British Broadships* demonstrates, by far the largest pool of male protagonist types in the broadside ballads — actually constituting a majority — are sailors, whether or not a given ballad actually has anything much to do with sea-faring or sailing. This strikes an odd note: for all the romantic stereotypes attaching to sailors as carefree, world-roving cosmopolites, braving great storms on the trackless deep and frequenting exotic tropical isles, they are also a labor class that is fundamentally and quintessentially urban. Commerce transpires in cities; the greatest markets and distribution centers are in cities; thus, the majority of ship's cargoes are transported to and between and among cities; and whenever a sailor is not actually at sea and not actually at home, he is likely to find himself in a city. And it is useful to note that it is not generally his own city: a sailor is characteristically a vagabond from port to port, but most of his time spent in port is in some outport, someplace far from home. As the great sociologist Elmo P. Hohman has written,

While ashore [the sailor] is ipso facto off duty and consequently either on holiday or unemployed... Whenever or wherever he is ashore, in every port except his own home... the seafarer is either a stranger or a transient... [and this] stranger or transient status carries with it certain characteristics which help to account for the attitudes and actions of seafarers ashore. It represents a high degree of anonymity and thus permits and encourages conduct carried to a point well beyond the bounds of tolerance set by the restraints of more familiar surroundings.... Both the steadying influences and the emotional satisfactions of family relationships, too, are lacking.... Finally, there are no community ties through which to secure the stabilizing effects of such wholesome factors as neighborliness... etc. (Hohman 1952, 206f)

When he reaches his own home port, like as not he makes a beeline for home — if he has a home; and if not, he is homeless or footloose in port, in the city. In the mid nineteenth century, because of the volume of maritime traffic and the sheer weight of population that city was statistically likely to be London or New York. Yet the typical ballad of sailors ashore remains pastoral. In the canon of the broadside ballads, it is as if there were no cities at all.

A famous example is the ubiquitous American sailor ballad "The Lass of Mohee," which dates from the early part of the nineteenth century and derives from an English precursor known as "The Indian Lass," which has much the same plot.<sup>6</sup> "Lass of Mohee" tells the story of a sailor who meets an exotic Native maiden on a tropical island; they sit together under the coconut palms; she invites him to her hut in a coconut grove, and proposes that he stay with her permanently; but he declares his troth to the Yankee lady back home, and — tearfully — sails away; he later remembers her fondly, with equivocal sentiments, seeming nostalgically to regret his choice. The setting is the enchanting Hawaiian Islands ("Mohee" is the original pronunciation and original cartographic and nautical spelling of *Mau*); the ambience involves coconut groves, with no mention of harbor traffic or the hundreds of other sailors ashore; and the woman back home is hardly characterized as a New York Society matron or even a Bronx washerwoman: I envision her as a quiet lass in a New Hampshire farmhouse, like the pictures along similar themes on whalemens' scrimshaw.<sup>7</sup>

Another instance with an analogous plot in reverse is "The Lake of Pontchartrain," a ballad of Irish origin associated with the deepwater merchant trades and the port of New Orleans, to which Lake Pontchartrain is adjacent. However, the setting of the ballad is not the Big Easy itself, but the bayou, a wild swamp (perhaps more wild in the ballad than in real life). A sailor wandering there, "by the Lake of Pontchartrain," meets an exotic Native maiden, in this case "a lovely Creole girl"; she takes him to her cottage in the bayou, the local equivalent of a coconut grove. This time *he* proposes to stay with *her*, permanently; but she declares her troth to her sailor boy, now away at

The dialectic of the State of Nature versus the State of Civil Society is epitomized in this sperm whale tooth scrimshaw engraved by a Yankee whaler named George Hilliot in the 1830s or '40s. It is almost as though he set out to illustrate "The Lass of Mohee." On the obverse is the Polynesian *wahine*, a classic Island Maid, semi-dressed in native grass skirt, standing among coconut palm trees. On the other side is the "civilized" woman back home, a lady in a fancy gown shown in her own New England element. This is one of two similar scrimshaw teeth by the same hand; both are in the Kendall Whaling Museum [Photos by Mark Sexton.]



sea; tearfully, our man sails away and remembers her fondly, here with unequivocal sentiments: he regrets she made the choice she did. Like the much older "Cuper's Garden," most of the broadside ballads about sailors concern meeting girls, usually in pastoral settings, with miscellaneous results.

An obscure ballad of sailor manufacture, titled in the manuscript "Sailors Ashore," actually uses South Seas pastoralism for a surprise twist that goes against expectation, narrating a situation that at first seems to be a vernal-pastoral ballad (State of Nature), then reveals an outcome quint-essentially urban (State of Civil Society):

1. The sweet scented flowers from natures gay bowers  
Were shading their fragrance out on the first breeze<sup>8</sup>  
The village bells ringing the fair maids were singing<sup>9</sup>  
The own native songs amongst the Cocoa nut trees  
When I with some others as dear as my brothers  
All dressed in our long togs<sup>10</sup> we kept in good store  
There was Joe Tom and Jerry and we all being merry  
And bound to have some fun like sailors ashore
  
2. I being a bruiser and a regular cruiser  
We began as we ended in drinking all around  
With good jokes and loud cheering the Kikoes<sup>11</sup> not fearing  
We started to cruise up the white cora sound<sup>12</sup>  
And some being weary and wishing to tarry  
For the rest in the shade they all felt inclined  
And the next morning found us with iron gates around us  
We had in our rest in the stocks been confined<sup>13</sup>

Another popular theme is the sailor's contempt for landlubbers, personified in farmers, a theme that rose to prominence in the eighteenth century and, understandably, persisted with a vengeance in the nineteenth. The classic formulation is known by several titles in many versions ("Jolly Sailors Bold," "Sailors' Come-All-Ye," "Hearts of Gold," "Nantucket Whaling Song," etc.) with origins in the 1760s or earlier (this one from the shipboard journal of the 1860s):

1. Come all you nice young girls, O if you did but know  
The hardships and the dangers, Poor sailors undergo  
You would have a better regard for them, Than you ever had before  
And you would scorn to marry a land lubber, Who always stops on shore
  
2. They are always among the pretty girls, A telling them fine tales  
Of the hardships and the dangers, They find in their cornfields  
[But the] cutting of the grass [and weeds] is all that they can do  
While we like jovial sailor boys, Go plough the Oceans through<sup>14</sup>

Farmers were the perpetual butt of these disparaging sentiments; I know of no similar expressions in broadside ballads of the sailor's disdain for blacksmiths, hack drivers, or factory laborers.

Yet another popular theme is the duality of female views of the sailor, most vividly typified in the contemptuous mother and obstinate daughter. The prototype is "The Lowlands of Holland," a ballad with seventeenth-century (or earlier) roots in Scotland that has been widely distributed elsewhere, most notably in Ireland.<sup>15</sup> Here a disconsolate young woman mourns her lover, who has been pressed away to serve in foreign wars: she will not heed her mother's plea to consider other suitors; she would rather remain single and miserable:

No chain of gold about my neck no combing to my hair  
No candle light nor fire bright can [show my] beauties rare  
For its never married I will be until the day I die  
Since stormy winds and raging seas has parted my love and I<sup>16</sup>



Among the descendants of “The Lowlands of Holland” are “Tarry Trousers” and its kin, where the mother tries to warn the daughter about sailors’ perpetual absences, faithlessness, and dissolute ways:

Sailors you know they are apt for to ramble  
Away to some Foreign Contries they’ll go  
First they will court you and then they’ll leave you  
And that will prove your overthrow<sup>17</sup>

However, the daughter will have no one but her Sailor Jack:

I suppose you would have me to marry some farmer  
And not the man of my heart’s delight  
But it’s give me the sailor with his tarry trowsers  
That shines to me like diamonds bright

I suppose you would have me to marry some farmer  
One who is always digging dirt  
But I will marry my jovial hearted sailor  
Although he wears a ruffled shirt

I suppose that you would have me to marry some farmer  
One who is always following the plough  
But I will marry my true hearted sailor  
If I have to wait ten years from now<sup>18</sup>

Always farmers.

A transitional attitude expressed in one sailor’s ballad of 1860s vintage brings us much closer to an authentic urban context and urban sensibility. This can best be illustrated by the comparison of two quite different versions of the ballad, “The Lily of Lake Champlain”: one is conventional and predictable, the other has a bizarre twist. At core in both is a pleasantly formulaic celebration of the charms of “my lovely Mary, the Lily of the Lake,” whom the sailor-narrator has left behind and whom he could never forget, whether he “be in America or in some foreign land”:

There is as pretty a landscape as ever you did see,  
Its located between the Canadas and the Atlantic seas,  
Its covered all over with flowers & clad with virgin green,  
O it is to one the fairest land that lies on Lake Champlain.

The sailor-narrator goes off to sea, expressing his intention to return, and ends with the stanza:

Perhaps she has forgotten me but her I never can,  
May I be in America or in some foreign land  
O may I be rolling far o’er the deep, what else may be my fate,  
O she is my lovely Mary, the Lily of the Lake.

This is as far as the conventional form of the song goes, a simple “ballad of faithful lovers,” as transcribed at sea by a rural Nantucketer in the 1860s;<sup>19</sup> a similar text appears in an anthology of naval songs published in New York City in 1883.<sup>20</sup> However, whalerman Albert F. Handy of Binghamton, New York, wrote down another version at sea in 1862; it begins much the same way but it carries things much further: after all the usual sweet sentiments about the lovely Lily of Lake Champlain, vowing he’ll never forget her, the sailor-narrator explains that just in case the Lily has forgotten *him* while he’s been away at sea, “there is a *rose* in New York town” named Catherine — another woman — who *also* has many charms, which he accordingly enumerates in detail. The Lily can be exchanged for the Rose, and ultimately *is*:

But now I’ve gone and left her, I’ve bidden her adieu  
In New York there does dwell a maid both beautiful and true  
She has possession of my heart, sweet Catheran is her name  
So I’ll wed the rose and bid adieu to the Lilly of Lake Champlain<sup>21</sup>

The Lily is a rural rube from the wilderness up North on a vernal-pastoral lake bordering Vermont. The Rose, on the other hand, is a canny city girl from the Big Apple who knows the score. The romantic ideal — and its propensity in ballads to engender an unyielding fidelity that leaves the would-be lover pining away forever for his One and Only True Love, even when that love is hopeless and unrequited — is thrown over for the practical here-and-now; the State of Nature yields to the State of Civil Society. Unlike his starry-eyed colleagues in other ballads, this narrator callously discards his Lily without any evident thought for her feelings and, more to the immediate point, without mooning away about Nature and tender romantic notions.

Evidently nobody has ever done a comprehensive historical, statistical, and sociological survey of the New York waterfront in sailing-ship days. With respect to the literati at least, who might have written about such things at the time, it was a comparatively genteel Victorian era when frank, firsthand accounts were seldom committed to paper, much less to print. So we are stuck with the moralistic indignation of well-intentioned missionary do-gooders, whose knowledge is sheltered and second-hand, and who typically prescribe an inventory of remedies without ever specifying in unequivocal terms the exact nature of the maladies their efforts were intended to correct; and we are stuck with the degraded recollections of latter-day participants (such as the sometime Able Bodied Seaman Eugene O’Neill, who, in a period of chronic alcoholic stupor just before the first World War, was an intermittent denizen of New York’s Sailortown), and the subjective and anecdotal speculations of armchair raconteurs and self-made sociologists, such as Stan Hugill in *Sailortown* (1969). Still, sifted critically, such sailor’s-eye-views provide valuable points of embarkation and a sense of the texture of the raucous goings-on along the waterfront in the urban seaports. For starters, Hugill provides a pithy, though somewhat nostalgic firsthand quote about the Port of New York from someone described as “an old German sailor who had shipped out of a Brooklyn boarding house aboard the New York brigantine *Carib* for a West Indian voyage” in the 1890s:

This was a wonderful street, with all those sailing ships at the piers, sticking their jibbooms right across the street, very near to the houses opposite. And those wonderful smells! And the street hawkers selling fresh oysters and clam chowder and buckwheat cakes! Makes my mouth water still, just thinking about those things. And freshly cooked clams, and a cob with butter, and a large cup of coffee with two doughnuts used to be 5 cents, and for 5 cents you could also get a schooner of beer and eat your fill of a free lunch besides.... In South Street you found nothing but ship chandlers and riggers and sailmakers lofts, and of course a lot of pubs and boarding-houses. (Hugill 1969, 158f)

Hugill describes New York's Sailortown as "one of the toughest in the maritime world" (44), "one of those that spread its tentacles in many directions" (157). The district encompassed most of lower Manhattan, comprising South Street, Water Street, Cherry Street, the lower Bowery, and Chatham Square (155; 44) — an area of which the nightlife was little known to the general public except through missionary tracts of the nineteenth century, until it served as the basis for Eugene O'Neill's plays *The Long Voyage Home* and *Anna Christie*. These capitalize on O'Neill's years of firsthand experience as a besotted denizen of Jimmy-the-Priest's Saloon in lower Manhattan during his sailor days in the 1910s, and rehearse materials that he ultimately transforms in one of his masterpieces, *The Iceman Cometh*, which is not explicitly about sailors at all. Though Hugill's chronology and ethnology are esoteric and faulty, his colorful description bears repeating:

In its early days, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, [New York's Sailortown] was centered mainly around the Battery and the lower end of the Bowery. All the side-streets of the neighborhood catered to the roisterous packet-ship seamen, to the Irish, Polish, German, and other emigrants who landed, bekirtled, shawled, head-scarfed, and high-leather-booted, inevitably lost-looking and forlorn, at the infamous Castle Garden Immigration Shed... In the [eighteen-]fifties, with the coming of the clipper ship, the area spread across the neighborhood of East Street, and, as the steamboat made its appearance, to the West Street district, along the Hudson River... filling a wedge-shaped area between the East River and the Hudson.... Here, in the hundreds [sic] of drinking dens, dance-halls, tattoo parlours, skittle alleys, boarding houses, and tailor shops, were to be found the seamen of all nations, boisterously endeavoring to live to the fullest of their limited hours ashore on the town. It was a hive of sailor activity, which grew in size as the wharves and piers... multiplied, and the ships of the world made fast to them. (157; see also 44 and 155)



The intemperance and profligacy of sailors ashore is the subject of this anonymous woodcut, which was published as an illustration in one of Frederick Marryat's sea-novels around 1840 and appeared as the frontispiece of a New York edition of Marryat's *Complete Works* published in 1852. [Kendall Whaling Museum photo by Michel Zilberstein.]



Hugill's hyperbole requires some clarification. Far from there being "hundreds" of these establishments in New York's Sailortown, in fact, according to Dr. William Sanger's remarkably comprehensive statistics, in all of Manhattan and the Bronx in 1856 there were calculated to be 378 houses of prostitution, 89 houses of assignation, and 151 "dance halls and beer halls where illicit practices were tolerated or encouraged," in the aggregate employing an estimated total of 3,857 ladies of the evening. Of these, only a small fraction were actually located in the Fourth Police Precinct, the Sailortown district: 35 houses of prostitution (9% of the total for New York City), 13 houses of assignation (15% of the total), and 8 dance halls and beer halls where illicit practices were tolerated or encouraged (5%), employing an estimated total of about 750 prostitutes (19%).<sup>22</sup> While the quality-rating of these institutions in the hierarchy of New York nightlife may not have been the best, and while the district could not be called the safest in the City, the Fourth Precinct as depicted in Dr. Sanger's report could hardly be compared with some truly murderous quarters of Gotham, much less with the Barbary Coast of San Francisco or the vile dens of Singapore or London — or even the Liverpool Sailortown of the late 1830s described by Melville in *Redburn*.

On the other hand, Hugill may be in error trying to play down the situation in New York City by saying, "In [Melville's] day Franklin Square was the center of the sailor boarding-houses, but crimping was nothing like so bad as in, for instance, Liverpool in the thirties, and, in fact, didn't affect New York to any dire extent until the seventies and eighties" (159; 161). Actually, as ample evidence from the New England and Long Island whale fishery testifies, as early as the 1830s crimping was vicious and widespread in New York, even if not notoriously violent, tending more to economic coercion, switched merchandise, nefarious duplicities, and legalistic chicaneries, merrily perpetrated upon the sailor and would-be sailor, both domestic and foreign — as they were in any metropolitan port in the throes of the Industrial Revolution and in the absence of statutes and any effective enforcement to regulate labor practices. It was a time when even outright slavery had not yet been abolished in America, and seamen's unions were still two generations in the future.

In any case, Hugill seems to contradict his reticence about New York a few pages later, with reference to Captain Ringbolt, "who, writing about crimps in the early forties, tells a yarn of how his ship, when she tied up in New York after a passage from Singapore, became a 'hive of runners'" (162); and where he explains that shanghaiing and "The doping of seamen — putting knockout drops in their drink — was, of course, practiced from earliest times along the New York waterfront and throughout Sailortown... [using] tobacco dottle, opium dregs, opium, morphine, laudanum, and hydrate of chloral." (164)

Indeed, inscribed in whalemens' journals there are a few interesting original sailor-made songs and ballads that address crimping in the whaling industry, in New York and Boston (which were not whaling ports of any great importance, but where whalemens were recruited in large numbers) as well as in New Bedford and Sag Harbor (where whaling was the principal business). The classic stanzas that set the context have become perhaps the best known and most widely distributed of all American whaling songs:

'Tis advertised in Boston, New York, and Buffalo  
Five hundred brave Americans a-whaling for to go

Existing in several versions and variants, the song goes on to characterize the sailors' compounded economic woes at the hands of usurious crimps, parsimonious captains, and greedy owners.<sup>23</sup> In this and other sailor-made songs, some of the whalemens' own original lyrics are quite explicit:

For the owners at home a few words I will say  
We'll do all the work and they'll get all the pay  
You will say to yourself tis a curious note  
But dont growl for some day you may chance steer a boat<sup>24</sup>

When your fast to the whale running risk of your life  
Your shingling his houses and dressing his wife  
Your sending his daughter off to the high school  
When your up to your middle in grease you great fool<sup>25</sup>

However, such songs are mostly about crimping itself rather than about sailors' life ashore and have little do do with the cities themselves or with the love-life interests that proliferate in songs about sailors ashore. There is seldom any local color or any explicit sense of place. But there are a few sailor ballads that bristle with Big City flavor. Writing in 1849, Ben Ezra Styles Ely, a college-educated sometime whalerman from Narragansett, Rhode Island, provides a context for the kinds of expectations that a sailor might have coming ashore on liberty in the urban seaport:

That navigation and commerce enrich and aggrandize a nation none can deny; but what do most mariners profit themselves or their wives and children by all their voyages? The American sailor, I think, may generally claim pre-eminence over mariners of other nations; but even the seaman of the United States is generally treated as if he were a slave, and abused in a worse manner than any favourite brute. All the other classes of useful people seem to prosper more than sailors. Farmers, mechanics and tradesmen, by thousands have smiling families, domesticated in houses which they may call their own; but where will you find a sailor who has the fee simple of any house, except at the bottom of the ocean? (Ely, 118f)

When sailors have been shut up within the prison walls of a ship for months, and sometimes for years, can any wonder that they crave society, and are a little extravagant, so soon as they touch their mother earth? They wish to see and converse with some other beings than the crew of their own vessel. They must have some place of resort; and where decent sailor boarding-houses cannot be found, they are compelled to abide in such as they can find. In foreign ports, especially, a tar is avoided and gazed upon as an ass or a lion; and because people expect no good of him, and show him no civility, he is often reckless in his conduct. (Ely, 85)

The hard use of sailors ashore by greedy landlords and moneygrubbing crimps is a recurring theme in sailor songs and ballads; however, in these the sense of place is seldom highly developed, explicitly urban qualities are generally lacking, and specific allusions to the palpable features of any particular seaport are usually absent. The most familiar of these ballads is sometimes erroneously known as "The Jolly Roving Tar"; the real title is "Get Up Jack, John Sit Down," which tells all: the text mobilizes comic nautical, commercial, romantic, and theological imagery to express the unrelenting regularity with which "When your money's all gone, it's the same old song, 'Get up, Jack! John, sit down!'"

A better example — one of the best of the broadside ballads about the sailor's plight ashore — is "Green Beds" ("Young Johnny"). Here a tricky sailor's ruse leads to vindication and a sweet revenge: a young sailor named John "had been a gallant voyage at sea and just returned on shore, all ragged and [tattered] like one that was poor." He goes to his regular boardinghouse, where the landlady welcomes him back and says, "Last night my daughter Polly was dreaming of thee," and she asks him whether his voyage was successful. But when he sighs and replies, "By fortunes I have been crossed, All on the stormy ocean my ship and cargo was lost," she refuses to call down her daughter, declines to extend him credit for "a glass or two," and refuses him lodgings. Full well realizing what she's up to, the sailor roars:

How much then do I owe you tell  
down it shall be paid  
How much then do I owe you tell  
down it shall be laid  
It is eight and forty shillings John  
you owe to me of old  
Young Johnny he pulled out  
two handfuls of gold

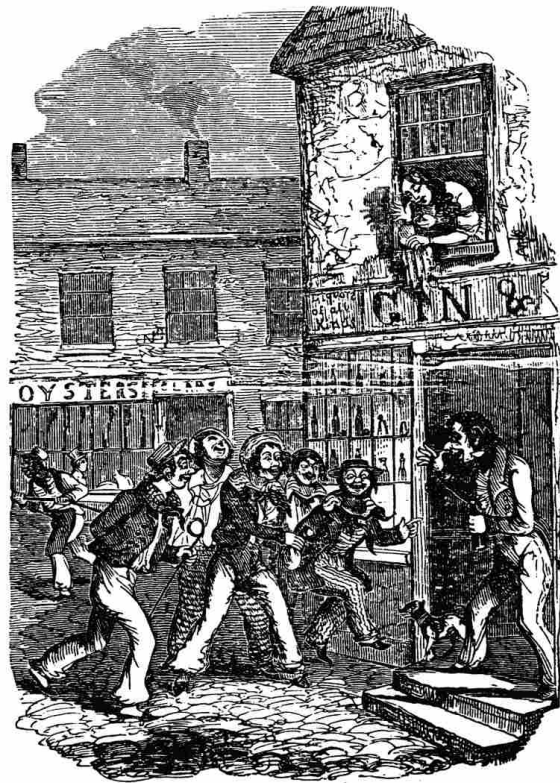
The sight of the gold made  
the old woman stare  
The sight of the gold made  
the old woman swear  
She cried forgive me Johnny  
for I was but in jest  
And don't you know young  
Johnny I love you the best

I'll call down my daughter Polly  
and set her on your knee  
I'll call down my daughter Polly  
and set her down by thee  
For my green bed it is empty John  
and has been so this week  
And if you wish young Johnny  
can go take a [restful] sleep

Before I would lie there I would lie in some dark cave  
Before I would lie there I would [first] lie in my grave  
[With] money in his pockets [a man] can rant and roar  
[But] without that [bright] companion they will kick you out of doors<sup>26</sup>

In many ways “Get Up Jack” and “Green Beds” typify the seamen’s own perception of the sailors’ plight ashore; but from all the sense of place and evidence of local color in the text, it could have happened — as it often did happen — in Sag Harbor or Fremantle, as easily as in London or New York. Fact is, after so many ports in so many parts of the world, they seem to blend together and, according to the ballads and songs, a sailor is always treated the same way, miserably.

A non-nautical ballad collected from a whaling journal of the 1850s provides unbiased insight into what is meant by the explicitly urban quality hitherto lacking in these texts. In a sense, the British music-hall song “All Around the Room” is just another pastorage: boy meets girl, admires girl, pledges troth, plans to marry, and expresses hopes for the future. But in this case the action explicitly takes place in a dance hall (“It was at a ball in Islington I first chanced to meet her”), not in some rural glade; and the plans of the soon-to-be married couple do not include farming or a snug little cottage somewhere in a bayou or a coconut grove. As this song was originally intended for performance on the London stage, it also has ostensibly comic interludes intended to be spoken in a broad vulgate. The first stanza opens without pastoral imagery:



Woodcut illustration from *Tales of the Ocean* by “Hawser Martingale” (Boston, 1846). [Photo by Michel Zilberstein.]



All around the room I waltzed with Ellen Taylor  
All around the room until the break of day  
And ever since that time I've done nothing but her beware  
And now she has gone to Margate the summer months to stay

Then blah, blah, blah about how they fell in love dancing, and so on, until the final stanza:

For seven long years I apprenticed in the city  
But four of them are gone I have only three to stay  
But if she should refuse me, oh crikey what a pity  
I'll go and ask her pa and I am sure he will not say nay

Lest one believe that his plans are, finally, to leave the city behind and, the two of them, head for the hills — where true love can uniquely blossom and flourish — or to a coconut grove or a bayou — a spoken vignette at the end expresses the URBAN romantic ideal:

*No, I don't think the old gentleman will refuse me and that I will marry Ellen and go into business. We will keep a catsmeat shop; no, a chandlery. Ellen will look so nice behind the counter serving the customers to a half pint of treacle, a red herring, or a pound of butter. Then we will have a one-horse shay, and Sundays we will take the children out to drive. Yes we will drive them all around the room.*<sup>27</sup>

Of course, though it was found in a New Bedford whaleman's journal, and though the allusion to a chandlery may make it vaguely nautical, this little song is one of the rare cases in which the male protagonist is not a sailor. But it illustrates handily what is meant by urban flavor, and sets us up very well for the few sailors' ballads about liberty ashore in the big city.

The enduring classic on this side of the Atlantic is the authentic sailor-made ballad "New York Girls" or "Can't You Dance the Polka" — of which the British equivalent is a very amusing piece generally known as "Jack All Alone" or "Peter Street," which likely dates from the 1830s:<sup>28</sup>

1. You apprentice lads and seamen bold, come listen to my song  
And I'll tell you how I met my fate when I was very young  
It was on the day I came from sea, a flash gal I did meet  
She kindly asked me to a dance down on Peter Street.
2. Says I, My charming fair maid, I cannot dance too well  
For Wigan town this night I'm bound, where all my friends do dwell;  
I've been to sea for seven years and saved up eighty pounds  
My parents are expecting me tonight in Wigan town
3. Says she, If you can't dance too well, you still can have a treat  
We can have a glass of brandy hot and something nice to eat  
At ten o'clock this very night I'll convey you to the train  
And you'd be sure to call on me when you're in town again



Woodcut illustration from *Tales of the Ocean* by "Hawser Martingale" (Boston, 1846). [Photo by Michel Zilberstein.]

4. So finding her quite friendly,  
and so nice to old Jack Tar  
Well, I agreed to go with her,  
and so I hailed a car  
Some gals passed by the other side,  
these words to me did say,  
By Jesus, lad! you'll lose your cap  
if you do steer that way.
5. And when we reached the barroom,  
boys, the whiskey was brought in  
When every man had had his fill,  
the dancing did begin  
My love and I we danced a reel  
to a good, old-fashioned tune  
And I did a couple of double shuffles  
all around the room
6. When the dancing it was over, boys,  
for bed we did prepare  
And when I awoke next morning,  
the truth I will declare  
My watch and clothes and 80 pounds  
with my fancy one had fled  
And she left me there, Jack-all-alone,  
stark naked on the bed
7. When I came to my senses, oh, nothing could I spy  
But a lady's shift and apron a-hanging up to dry  
I tore my hair and cursed the drink; Oh Lord! what could I do?  
I said, Farewell to Wigan town, I'll never more see you
8. When daylight was departing and night was drawing near  
I put the shift and apron on and walked down to the pier  
And as I crept aboard the ship, I heard one sailor say  
By Jesus, Jack! you've lost your cap since last you went away
9. Is that the latest fashion that the ladies wear on shore?  
Where is the shop that's selling it? and have they got any more?  
The last time that we spoke to you, why, you were homeward bound  
Christ! you might have got a better suit than that for eighty pounds
10. Sure, I might have got a better suit, if I had got the chance  
But I met a gal on Peter Street, and she took me to a dance  
I danced to my destruction, and got stripped from head to feet  
So I swore an oath I'd dance no more down on Peter Street<sup>29</sup>

The Manhattan equivalent, “New York Girls” (“Can’t You Dance the Polka”) must also be British, of course: British sailors in particular were extremely numerous in New York Port in the 1830s, ’40s, and ’50s. Like sailors of all kinds everywhere, they were victimized in droves by the city’s legions of landsharks, crimps, and ladies of the evening — although in this case, unlike “Peter Street,” the exact status of the woman is never quite made explicit. Even the slang has an up-to-date, urban character:

As I walked down the Broadway in the middle of July  
I met a maid who asked my trade; A sailor-lad, says I

*Chorus:* Then away, you Santy, my dear Annie  
Oh, you New York girls, can’t you dance the polka?<sup>30</sup>

So come my fine young maiden, and I will stand you treat  
I’ll buy you rum and brandy, love, and something good to eat

To Tiffany’s I took her, I did not mind expense  
I bought her two gold earrings, lads, they cost me fifty cents<sup>31</sup>

Says she, You limejuice sailor, now see me home you may  
But when we reached her cottage door, to me these words did say

My flash-man he’s a Yankee with his hair cut short behind  
He wears a pair of tall sea-boots and he sails in the Black Ball Line<sup>32</sup>

He’s homeward bound this evening, and here with me he’ll stay  
So fare-ye-well, you limejuice boy,<sup>33</sup> get you on your way

So I kissed her hard and proper before her flash-man<sup>34</sup> came  
And it’s fare-ye-well, you Bowery girl, I know your little game<sup>35</sup>

A comic period-piece transcribed by a whaleman from rural New Hampshire in the 1860s has nothing explicitly to do with sailors or seafaring but perfectly epitomizes the stylized, bareknuckles belligerence and tough-guy camaraderie that distinguish street culture in the big city from a quieter life in the provinces — the urban equivalent of the ritualized boasting of the American frontiersman, like the Davy Crockett, Mike Fink, and Jeremiah Johnson of folklore and the analogous heroic deeds of two-fisted swagmen and miraculously fast sheep-shearers in the Australian Outback. As members of their own downtrodden labor fraternity, with a fair measure of occupational pride and careers filled with salient moments of gallant teamsmanship, deepwater sailors would especially have appreciated this song about New York City volunteer firefighters. The whaleman’s version, comprising four stanzas entitled “I Am One of the Boys,” is a veritable slang festival, a music-hall-type production about rowdy shenanigans in Manhattan’s infamous Bowery district. It is a radical variant of “One of the Boys,” a much milder text of nine stanzas lacking a chorus and with much less slang, which appeared in print in the 1840s or ’50s.<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately, in the whaleman’s text while the sense of the action is relatively clear, some of the slang is impenetrable. *Keyser* is evidently the name of the fire brigade and *Gotham* one of the engines, after Washington Irving’s celebrated pseudonym for the metropolis.

1. I am one of the boys and up to the joys  
Of a New York City life  
When Syksez and I gets on a Spree  
We are always on hand for a strife  
When the boys cry we all aspire  
For to be the first on the brakes  
We go in for law whenever we can  
And carry away the stakes  
  
*Chorus:* Then hurry hurry up Keyserboys  
The Gotham how she flies  
For Mose my boys is one of the Boys  
And some of the G'Hals is Lize
2. At the fire last night we had a high old fight  
When they brought their machine  
O the boys stood by on hand for a hie  
It was the prettiest sight I've seen  
The boys got into a muss somewhere  
With a parcel of spooney lukes<sup>37</sup>  
They put in their licks like a pile of bricks  
And lammed<sup>38</sup> them out of their boots
3. At the Vauxhall Show I thought I would go  
So up steps Lize and me  
She cut such a swell she was such a belle  
I'll be damned if she wasn't sw'ee [?]  
I espied a fellow in a spank up rig<sup>39</sup>  
And he eyed her rather close  
Says I old Guy you had better mind your eye  
If you dont want a muss with Mose
4. Then it is hurry along and listen to the song  
The Keyser boys are some  
Dont you get in a muss if you dont want a fuss  
Or a lash with with the Marshal's tongue  
The boys are all right all gallus<sup>40</sup> and tight<sup>41</sup>  
And down on nothing but Sin  
O the rhino<sup>42</sup> is rough and rather tough  
But the heart is all right within<sup>43</sup>

Finally, among the almost 200 other songs recorded by the same whaleman-scribe are two that, together with "New York Girls," may be the most colorful sailors' ballads about being footlose in Manhattan. Neither song is of sailor manufacture and neither is explicitly about sailors, but each would have had a particular appel to sailors, and, like "I Am One of the Boys," each in its way epitomizes life in the metropolis, narrating events that could have happened in the big city.



“The Cove Wot Spouts” is a Shakespearean romp on the theme of The Rube and the Beaux Artes. It is rendered in the English music-hall style but the setting is a performance of *Richard III* at the Bowery Theatre in New York, with the eminent American tragedian Edwin Forrest (1806-1872) in the title role. (Sailors on liberty ashore appear to have been avid theatre-goers. Plays and music-hall revues figure frequently in sailors’ ballads, quotes from *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* are not uncommon in whalemens’ journals, and the scrimshaw here features a portrait of a famous actor on the London stage.<sup>44</sup>)

1. I am going for to sing a song a song  
     what happened the other night  
     It will not detain you long  
     And in the end you’ll say I’m right  
     My name is no matter what  
     I dont live here about  
     But I am welcome everywhere  
     for I’m the Cove wot spouts
  
2. Last Winter at the Bowery Theatre  
     I saw Edwin Forrest Richard play  
     O down down to Hell he cried  
     poor King Henry soon gave way  
     I got so careless drunk  
     I began to holler and shout  
     A horse A horse My kingdom for a horse  
     Like Richard I did spout
  
3. A policeman came in  
     and he grabbed me by the collar  
     Saying you look here young Man  
     this is no place for to bellow [holler]  
     He hit me on the head  
     which caused me to shout  
     Lay on Macduff and dam[n]ed be him  
     who first cries hold enough  
     Like Macbeth I did spout
  
4. O with that there rushes in  
     about a dozen or more  
     It took them all at once  
     for to lay me on the floor  
     Say[s] one we got you now  
     you will pay for this no doubt  
     O lay me in the grave with Juliet  
     Like Romeo I did spout



This scrimshaw by the anonymous so-called “Eagle Portraitist,” American circa 1840, depicts John Philip Kemble playing Rolla in Sheridan’s *Pizarro* (see text and footnote 44). [Collection of the Kendall Whaling Museum; photo by Eric H. Muller.]

5. O they took me off to jail and they put me into bed  
But there I could not sleep for dreams ran through my head  
I got up in the night and seized my comrade by the snout  
Crying Give me my pound of flesh  
Like Shylock I did spout
6. He commenced for to holler and yell and to kick up the very devil  
O the keeper was at the door and he thought us very uncivil  
He tried to come in but I made the blood [flow] from his nose  
Crying Blood Blood Iago blood run out  
Like Othello I did spout
7. O the policemen they came in and they took me off to court  
Saying as they went along we will put an end unto your sport  
The judge says who are you that dares kick up such a rout  
I am My Murdered father's ghost  
Like Hamlet I did spout
8. My father's ghost he cried, Why that man is surely mad  
To be insulted on the bench this is really too bad  
For six Months lock him up it is unsafe for to let him out  
And this was a sad recompense for learning how to spout<sup>45</sup>

This probably could not have happened in a coconut grove.

Analogously to "New York Girls," "Charming Jane Louisa" concerns the unsuccessful attempt to court a wiley female tailor, who allows the suitor to treat her to meals and entertainments, then abandons him when his money runs out. Very specifically localized to New York City, it flaunts local color, with the rhyming couplets contrived to accommodate some of the city's most popular places of amusement. Neither the places of amusement themselves nor the lack of detail employed in describing them much resembles Cuper's Garden. Part of the fun in "Charming Jane Louisa" is that *charming* has a double meaning, functioning as both adjective and verb:

1. It was in the pleasant month of May when the hills and fields were flowery  
It was on a Sunday in the afternoon as I was going down the Bowery<sup>46</sup>  
And there I met a lovely lass slightly known to me sir  
She was a tailoress by trade and her name was Jane Louisa<sup>47</sup>
2. I made my bow she took my arm and listened to my flattery  
And together we did walk until we reached the battery<sup>48</sup>  
And then she made me understand my manners did much please her  
It was then I thought I won the heart of charming Jane Louisa
3. She says kind sir please a wish for all to leave this dry land  
Suppose we go and take a walk away down to Staten Island<sup>49</sup>  
You may be sure I quickly went determined for to please her  
Nor cared I one cent how much I spent on charming Jane Louisa

4. And when we reached the other side<sup>50</sup> and gazed amongst the million  
 And then together our steps did glide toward the famed pavilion  
 A chucking<sup>51</sup> in ice cream and cakes O wasn't she a sneezer<sup>52</sup>  
 Three dollars very soon I spent on charming Jane Louisa
5. And still for more she seemed to lack altho' my heart was willing  
 I had tickets for my passage back but in my pockets not a shilling  
 Says I us had better take a walk the wind here blows a breezer  
 And quickly I came back to New York with charming Jane Louisa
6. She says kind sir I vow I ought to ask your pardon  
 But really I should like to go into the Castle Garden<sup>53</sup>  
 She said so with a winning smile I answered to appease her  
 My pocket book is left at home my charming Jane Louisa
7. She then began to cry and says you do not treat me right sir  
 Here comes a gentleman I know and to you I will bid good night sir  
 And then she left me by myself beneath a shady tree sir  
 And that was the way I lost fair false hearted Jane Louisa
8. Since then I never had a girl nor will I unless sir  
 There is some gentle lady here my loneliness will bless sir  
 I will treat her as husband ought and do my best to please her  
 And never more will waste a thought on charming Jane Louisa<sup>54</sup>

In part, these ballads about sailors in the Big City are urban lampoons of the once-prevalent sailor-and-his-bride ballad pastorage: a mercenary woman strings along the optimistic sailor-naïf, teasing, goading, playing on his weaknesses, until either he spends all his money on her or she gets him drunk and robs him outright. Eugene O'Neill's one-act play *The Long Voyage Home* takes up a similar theme in earnest: liquor and feminine wiles in a Big City waterfront saloon derail the Progress of the Innocent and foil his plans to return home to Mother and a Pastoral Farm; the sailor-character Olsen is a tragic figure unable to resist the ruinous temptations that will shipwreck his life permanently; meanwhile, his sailor-companions, caught in similar traps of their own, are powerless to fend off the disaster that is so obviously imminent.

However, the ballads are played for laughs, with self-deprecating, first-person humor: the sailor-in-the-apron tells his own story, playing the fool, and becomes an object of jovial derision among his shipmates ("Sure you could've got a better dress than that for eighty pounds!"); the sailor lad kisses the Bowery girl anyway and tells her to kiss off; the Cove and the Keyserboy spout pointlessly, as a futile effort at self-realization; and the would-be charmer learns "never more" to "waste a thought on charming Jane Louisa" while a self-evident moral proclaims, "Any sailor man-of-the-world should've known better in the first place!" In the end, the sailor, more hapless than tragic, and wearing a sheepish grin, resolves to know better and do better next time, and to beware of his own weaknesses and shortcoming as he runs afoul of the nefarious wiles of the Big City Sailortown. ■

## Notes

1. Richard C. Reynolds, MS journal of the ship *Janus* of New Bedford, 1842-44. [Kendall Whaling Museum.]
2. Huntington 1964, 92f: which he credits to a journal of the schooner [sic] *Leopart* of Salem, 1767. [Collection of the Essex Institute, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass.]
3. Rimbault, *Fly Leaves*; quoted by Chappell II:727.
4. Ship *Hercules*, circa 1828 (Huntington, 90).
5. "Cobit's [Cuper's] Garden" ("Cupid's Garden"): Not in Laws. Chappell 1855 II:728; Frank 1996 #92; Hatton & Fanning 2:128; Hullah #71; Huntington 90, 92; Moffat & Kidson; Kidson 1926.
6. Integral to the enduring myth of the Enchanted Islands — an element that predates Homer, confounded Odysseus on more than one occasion, provided Saint Amselm potent philosophical analogies, and transfixed European culture since medieval times, occasioning many a young visionary lad to sign articles for a sea voyage — was the allure of the exotic women that seafarers were inevitably expected to encounter in their travels to the farthest reaches of the watery world. In literary and cinematic interpretations, at least, native Tahitian women figure importantly in the drama of HMS *Bounty* and the flight of the mutineers to desolate Pitcairn; Fayaway is a native Marquesan Island lass eager to pledge eternal troth to the protagonist of Herman Melville's *Typee* (1847); and in Eugene O'Neill's *Moon of the Caribbees* (1917), the resonant pulse of native drums haunts and teases modern-day steamship sailors no less than the Sirens affected Odysseus's crew. The theme is often reiterated in whalemens's scrimshaw, shipboard drawings, poetry, and songs; and whether concerning the "Girls Around Cape Horn" on the coast of South America, the tropical South Seas, or the Frozen North, there is an ever-present tension between the exotic allure of remaining in a romantically-perceived State of Nature, versus returning to a State of Civilization back home. "The Lass of Mohee" is an indigenous Yankee sailor ballad along these lines, narrating a sailor's encounter with a beautiful Native woman and his reluctant refusal to remain with her rather than return to his lover left waiting in New England. The descent of the ballad is intertwined with the closely-related British ballad "The Indian Lass," and it has a corollary in "The Lake of Pontchartrain" (Laws #H-9), which is known in Irish tradition and New England. Huntington reports four complete texts of "Lass of Mohee" in whaling journals. One of these (with a fragment of a second) he published in *Songs the Whalemens Sang* (150f), where his disarmingly casual comments successfully expose the often foggy irrelevancies of "insightful" scholarly self-delusion: "Barry, in the *Bulletin of the Folk Song Society of the Northeast*, No. 6, pp. 15-16... says 'As the Kanakas were not Indians we conclude that Maui is adventitious, that the ballad originally dealt with the romance of an Indian and a pioneer.' Perhaps so, but this is not the original song 'The Miami Lass,' if that is indeed the original, any more than 'The Boston Burglar' is 'Botany Bay.' This is 'The Pretty Maid of Mohee' or 'The Little Mohee' and it is whalemens's work. For to a whalerman a Polynesian and an Indian would be pretty much the same thing. There were few ethnologists among them."
7. "Lass of Mohee": Laws #H-8; Carey 1971, 115; Colcord 199; Cox #116; Creighton 1933 #51; Eckstrom & Smith 233; Flanders 1931, 146; Frank 1985 #123 (2 texts); Frank 1996 #93; Huntington 148 (2 texts); Huntington MS 69 (3 texts); JAF 25:16, 35:408; Kidson 1893, 110f (2 versions of "Indian Lass"); Mackenzie #57, #58; Randolph #63, I:280; Shay 195; Smithyman 1970, 64-70.
8. That is, "the smell of the land" as experienced on shipboard approaching the shore; the other text has "blooming their fragrances."
9. The other text has the somewhat less tropical-sounding "The tower bells was ringing / The fair maids were singing."
10. *Long togs*: "Landsmen's clothes; nautical slang" (Partridge 894, citing Marryat and Dana).
11. *Kiko*: a non-pejorative reference to *aboriginals*, especially *Kanakas* (Polynesians) and other South Sea islanders, in both British and American usage: "Rhyming on *sy*e (Cockney for 'say') *so*. It is a Cockney alternative spelling of *cocoa*" (Partridge 1961, 1158). Thus, *kiko* literally signifies *cocoanut people* or *coconut people*. (Regarding the vernacular confusion between *cocoa-nut* and *coco-nut*, see Partridge 1961, 167.)
12. The other text has "white coral sound," of which the rendition here is an obvious corruption.
13. George Edgar Mills of Grafton, Vermont, third mate, bark *Aurora* of Westport, Mass., 1858; and George Wilbur Piper of Concord, New Hampshire, ship *Europa* of Edgartown, Martha's Vineyard, 1868-70. [Kendall Whaling Museum.]
14. George W. Piper, ship *Europa* of Edgartown, Martha's Vineyard, 1868-70. [Kendall Whaling Museum.]
15. "Lowlands of Holland": Ashton 167; Bronson II:418-427; Bronson 1976, 237; Flanders 1953, 113; Frank 1985 #106; Frank 1996 #20; Healy 1967 #42; Masefield 259; O Lochlainn 1965 #7a; Palmer 1973 #9; Sharp 1932, I #26; Sharp 1916 #23; Shay 45. For an adaptation more truly indigenous to the whale fishery, see "The Nantucket Mother and Daughter" (Frank 1985 #175; Frank 1996 #21).



16. Edward W. Collins, 1829, in a MS journal formerly belonging to his brother, Silas Collins, seaman aboard the brig *By Chance* of Dartmouth, Massachusetts, 1826-27. Edward took the volume with him to sea and eventually became a whaling captain.
17. Richard C. Reynolds, MS journal aboard the ship *Janus* of New Bedford, 1842-44. [Kendall Whaling Museum.]
18. George W. Piper, ship *Europa* of Edgartown, Martha's Vineyard, 1868-70. [Kendall Whaling Museum.]
19. George P. Worth, in the MS journal of William Keith aboard the schooners *William Martin* of Boston and *Edith May* of Wellfleet, 1865-69; and the merchant schooner *Cora Nash* of Boston, circa 1869-71. [Kendall Whaling Museum.]
20. *Naval Songs*, New York: Wm. A. Firth & Co., 1883.
21. George M. Jones, Albert F. Handy, and G.E. Sanborn: MS journal aboard the bark *Waverly* of New Bedford, 1859-63. [Kendall Whaling Museum.]
22. Sanger 1899, 480. Dr. Sanger's highly informed narrative is quite specific: "In the fourth [police precinct], where sailors mostly resort ... a majority of the women ... are of foreign birth, the largest proportion being Irish and German .... Most of the women are young, and many of them are very good looking, while the houses, particularly those kept by Germans, are in general conducted very quietly. Even in those places resorted to by sailors, the principal part of any noise which may occur is caused by the boisterous mirth and practical jokes of the visitors themselves. (559) ... [In] the brothels of the fourth police district ... the principal part of the women are of Irish parentage; some few are natives of the United States. The greater part of the visitors are sailors. When a succession of storms which have driven homeward-bound vessels off the coast is followed by a fair wind, so as to allow them to enter the harbor in large numbers, these houses are crowded, and for a few days, while the sailors' wages last, a very extensive business is carried on. The bar-room ... is the reception-room, and here may be seen at almost any hour of the day a number of weather-beaten sailors .... A sailor with cash in his pocket has a decided antipathy to drinking alone, and generally invites every one in the room, male and female, to partake with him. By such a course he very soon gets intoxicated, when the girl whom he has honored with his special attention conveys him to bed, and leaves him there to sleep himself sober [or worse]." (562)
23. "Tis Advertised in Boston" ("Blow Ye Winds"): Colcord 191; Frank 1985 #160; Frank 1996 #138; Harlow 130, 211 (2 variant tunes, 3 texts); Hugill 219-223 (3 texts, notes); Huntington 42; Palmer 1985, #118; Shay 126; Whall 21.
24. That is, get a promotion to boatsteerer (harpooner).
25. "A Voyage On New Holland," original lyrics to the tune of "Vilikins and His Dinah": attributed to John C. Sullivan, third mate, bark *Kathleen* of New Bedford, 1860; transcribed by George D. Marble, first mate; and Elizabeth C. Marble, wife of Captain John C. Marble [Marble Family Papers, Kendall Whaling Museum]. Frank 1985 #184; Frank 1996 #160.
26. "Green Beds" ("Young Johnny"): Type I (as described by Laws #K-36): Eddy #32; Mackenzie #93B; Sharp 1932, #58. Type II (as in Piper's MS): Frank 1985 #116; Frank 1996 #72; Mackenzie #93A and #93C (extensive notes). See also: "A Comical Dialogue Between an Honest Sailor and a Deluding Lady" (Ashton 1891, 135; also noted by Laws); Belden 160; Cox #124; Warner #49. "Jackson" (Sandburg 430; also noted by Laws) is a Mexican War adaptation or parody of Type I.
27. Frederick Howland Smith, boatsteerer, MS journal aboard the bark *Roscious* of New Bedford, 1858-61. [Kendall Whaling Museum.]
28. It should be mentioned that "The Fire Ship," also known as "The Flash Frigate," a nineteenth-century British sailor ballad that employs clever nautical metaphors libidinally and scatologically to describe the attractions and dangers of a lady of the night (but which usually lacks any allusion to a particular place) has not generally been collected from American sailor sources and has not been found in the Yankee sailors' shipboard manuscripts.
29. "Peter Street" ("Jack All Alone"): Laws #K-42; Greenleaf 222; Hugill 1961, 376; cf Kennedy 187.
30. Alternate chorus:     And hurrah, you Santy, my dear honey  
                              Oh, you New York girls, you love us for our money
31. Or *fifteen pence*.
32. Yankee packet-ship sailors in the North Atlantic trades in the 1840s were typically distinguished from their "lime-juice" British counterparts by their short haircuts (rather than pigtails) and high boots (rather than low pumps). The Black Ball Line was one of the premier merchant carriers on the New York-Liverpool route.
33. For their daily ration of grog, a mixture of rum, lime juice, and water (issued in the Royal Navy and most of the British merchant trades), British sailors were known as *limejuicers* or, later, *limeys*.

## The Urban Pastorale

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34. *Flashman*: slang term for a *beau* or *boyfriend*.
35. "New York Girls" ("Bowery Girls"; Can't You Dance the Polka"): Colcord, 108; Davis & Tozer, 12; Doerflinger, 58; Harlow, 37; Hugill 1961, 369-374; Whall 47.
36. *Elton's Songs and Melodies for the Multitudes* (New York and Boston, n.d., circa the 1840s).
37. *Spooney*, *spoony*: "A simpleton, a fool"; *luke*: "Nothing" (Partridge, 706 and 1131); hence, "foolish nonentities."
38. *Lam*: "To beat, thrash" (Partridge, 663).
39. *Spanky*: "Smart; showily smart" (Partridge, 1119), i.e. fashionable; *rig*: "clothing," derived from nautical usage.
40. *Gallus* ("a frequent pronunciation and occasional spelling of *gallows*"): "Enormous; 'fine'" (Partridge, 443).
41. *Tight*: "close-knit"; "intimate," in the sense of boon companions — a slang convention still in common usage but not clearly identified by Partridge.
42. *Rhino*: "money"; hence, "the rhino is rough" signifies "the pay is inferior" or "the wages are low."
43. George W. Piper, ship *Europa* of Edgartown, Martha's Vineyard, 1868-70. [Kendall Whaling Museum.]
44. *Pizarro*, first produced at the Drury Lane Theatre in London in 1799 and generally listed among the dramatic works of the Irish playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816), is actually an adaptive translation of *Die Spanier in Peru* ["The Spaniard in Peru"] (1790) by the German dramatist August Friedrich Ferdinand von Kotzebue (1761-1819). According to British theatre historian Pieter van der Merwe of the National Maritime Museum (London), "the ultimate source" of the picture on the scrimshaw is a full-length portrait of the actor John Philip Kemble (1757-1823) by Sir Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830) (Kenneth Garlick, *Catalogue of Paintings of Sir Thomas Lawrence*, Walpole Society, Vol. 39, 1962-64, p. 116). The painting captures Kemble in the heroic role of Rolla, "in a famous 'attitude' from that play when he rescues the Inca child and escapes across a rope bridge over a cataract from the pursuing Spaniards with the line, 'Then was this sword Heaven's gift, not thine! — (Seizes the Child [as shown].) Who moves one step to follow me, dies upon the spot'" [Act IV, Scene II]. The immediate source of the picture on the scrimshaw "is almost certainly... a 'penny plain, tuppence coloured' theatrical print — just the sort of thing a seaman might have" (private communication, 1991). Indeed, such pictures were often reproduced in magazines that circulated on shipboard.
45. George W. Piper, ship *Europa* of Edgartown, Martha's Vineyard, 1868-70. [Kendall Whaling Museum.]
46. The Bowery is a street in lower Manhattan, at one time very fashionable, later New York's most notorious skid row. The name appears in place of "Broadway" in some versions of "New York Girls" ("Can't You Dance the Polka").
47. It may be significant that in Boston and other sections of eastern New England, "Jane Louisa" is commonly pronounced "Jane Looezer," as if to rhyme with "me sir," "please her," and "sneezer."
48. The Battery is a district and a park at the southern tip of Manhattan, so called because it is the site of the old Dutch harbor garrison of Nieuw Amsterdam in the seventeenth century: "It was at one time a fashionable quarter, and is now [1889] frequented by the poor of the lower part of the city" (B.E. Smith 1889, 129).
49. Staten Island lies across New York Harbor from Battery Park, from which it is accessible by ferry. Since 1898 it has been the Borough of Richmond, an integral component of New York City.
50. They have undoubtedly crossed New York Harbor on the Staten Island Ferry, which remained famous for generations for its five-cent fare.
51. *Chuck*: "food of any kind"; hence, *chuck*, "to eat" and also "to spend extravagantly"; however, *chuck in*, "to challenge... compete," evidently from a boxing expression (Partridge, 152f).
52. *Sneezer*: "Something exceptionally good or bad, big or strong or violent, in some specified respect (19th-C. slang, 1820); a blow (dialect, became slang circa 1840); a gale (1855, mainly nautical...)" — Partridge, 792.
53. Castle Garden is a circular fortress on the Battery in New York (see note 48 above), constructed in 1805 and originally named Fort Clinton after a renowned governor of New York State. Converted to civic use in 1822, "it was for some years used as an opera-house (Jenny Lind first sang there), and civic receptions were held there. From 1855 to 1891 it was used as a place of reception for immigrants..." (B.E. Smith 1889, 223). As Jane Louisa was hardly likely to have wanted her escort to take her to "a place of reception for immigrants," the Castle Garden allusion suggests that the text predates conversion of the facility in 1855.
54. George W. Piper, ship *Europa* of Edgartown, Martha's Vineyard, 1868-70. [Kendall Whaling Museum.]

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"SEEING LONDON" [top] and "SAILOR BOARDING HOUSE" [bottom]: illustrations from *Recollections of a Sea Wanderer's Life* by George Davis (New York, 1887). The sailor-author's position seems to be that what is pictured in "Seeing London" is about the extent of the sailors' usual sightseeing in the metropolis (59); and while the other title is less specific, the text accompanying it amounts to much the same thing: "Of Liverpool I saw very little, and that little was 'Sailor Town'" (99).





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