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‘These Happy Effects on the Character of the British Sailor’: Family Life in Sea Songs of the late Georgian period.

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ABSTRACT: Songs about sailors were popular during the late Georgian period in Britain. Some were directed towards men in the navy or potential recruits, but they were also part of the musical repertoire of the middle-class drawing room. A common theme is the importance of family life. With large numbers of men needed to serve in the military in this time of war and colonial expansion, it was essential for the home front that their families remained cohesive, and ballads were sometimes written with the express purpose of promoting fidelity and patience on the part of both men and women. This chapter examines the varieties of family and conjugal relations presented in the verbal and musical rhetoric of a selection of these songs.

KEYWORDS: Ballads, British Navy, war, Jane Austen, Matthew Flinders

During the late Georgian period in Britain, life at sea, and the love lives of sailors, provided singers and song-writers with an endless source of material. Their songs may have been primarily thought of as entertainment, but in this age of war with France there was an implicit political agenda behind many of them.¹ As Mark Philp writes, during the period 1793 to 1815 ‘the war was linked to an unprecedented level of national mobilization in which music and song played a major role.’² While some songs criticized the war, others aimed to recruit volunteers and encourage courageous and ‘manly’ behaviour.³ Cheap printed copies of such songs were widely available, often subsidized by the government.⁴ The recurrence of the personal lives of sailors and their families in the songs reflects the pervasive influence of the continual state of war on the lives not only of the men serving in the military but also of their lovers, wives and children. These songs often make a direct appeal to patriotic duty and present a romantic ideal of the fidelity of both men and women.

The conflict between the Navy’s voracious need for highly mobile manpower during this period of war and colonial expansion, and the social stability represented at home by marital fidelity and family cohesion, was not lost on the authorities. The

¹ Ellen Gill provides a list of the wars between Britain and France between 1740 and 1820. During this 80-year period, the two countries were at war for a total of 50 years. Gill, 3.

² Philp, 173.

³ Lin, 18.

⁴ Philp, 174.

utility of popular music in reconciling these aims was perceived at the highest levels. In 1803, musician Charles Dibdin (1745-1814) was granted a government pension of £200 per annum in recognition of the importance of the songs he had been writing for decades. These songs had encouraged men to volunteer, and, equally importantly, reassured wives and sweethearts that their men would not only stay faithful while away, but would return.⁵ Dibdin's biographer, George Hogarth, writing in 1848, proposed 'that these happy effects on the character of the British sailor have been mainly caused by the Songs of Dibdin.'⁶

Songs sung on the streets and in the taverns would have reached all levels of society more readily than books and pamphlets. When songs were performed, their message reached literate and illiterate alike. They had the advantage of affecting anyone within earshot, even if they could not afford to purchase the printed ballad. As Gillian Russell writes, these songs, although often written for the theatre, were 'capable of reaching a wider audience than the usual range of playgoers, including the illiterate'.⁷ However, they not only reached the lowest ranks: there were straightforward stories of jolly tars and old salts, but there were also high-flown songs of love and duty presumably intended for the officer class.

In the first part of this chapter I look at why these ballads were important at this time, and the appeal they had to both sailors and officers, and their wives and lovers, in both the public and private spheres. In the second part, I survey a selection of songs by Dibdin and his contemporaries from music books belonging to the novelist Jane Austen and her family. My aim is to provide a 'snapshot' of the social background in which these songs were created and performed, and consider their likely effects.

PART 1: Life at Sea and the Power of Song

The Navy in the Late Georgian Era

British military spending increased from 1.9 per cent of gross domestic product in 1700 to 13 per cent in 1800, reflecting a similar increase in military personnel. Although the number of men recruited by the Navy fluctuated as the country alternated between peace and war, it was always the case that many more seamen than

⁵ Davey, 61. The pension was granted in 1803 but withdrawn in 1805 by a subsequent administration.

⁶ Hogarth, xxxi.

⁷ Russell, 101.

officers were needed.⁸ Life at sea was harsh and desertion rates were high: Admiral Nelson estimated that 42,000 British seamen deserted between 1793 and 1802, at a time when the overall strength of the service was around 120,000.⁹ Equally, mortality rates were high. Seafaring was a perilous business in itself, due to shipwreck, drowning and disease. On top of this, as Niklas Frykman points out, ‘war not only increased the demand for seamen, it also killed them by the tens of thousands.’¹⁰ The consequences of this on the home front were profound, as large numbers of the male population of marriageable age were required to leave their families and risk their lives at sea.¹¹ Marriage was the chief form of financial security for women at the time: as Jane Austen writes in *Pride and Prejudice*, it was ‘their pleasantest preservative from want’.¹² However, marrying a sailor or even a naval officer could mean a life of lonely destitution or hardship, especially if a woman had no family able or willing to support her. Women were also much less mobile than men at this time. It was assumed that it was unsafe and improper for a woman to travel even relatively short distances without a male escorting her, and regulations forbade women from travelling on naval ships, although exceptions were sometimes made.¹³ The Navy’s urgent need for manpower at various times is powerfully illustrated in the enduring cultural image of the press-ganged sailor torn from his wife and children. Recent work has shown, however, that volunteers greatly outnumbered press-ganged men, and that ‘across the eighteenth century hundreds of thousands of men entered the navy of their own free will’.¹⁴

Music has always been linked with military and maritime pursuits. There are marches and work songs, but equally societies have celebrated military victories and mourned fallen heroes in song. Folk music expresses the preoccupations of people of all classes and the most popular ballads reflect their ‘anxieties and recuperative

⁸ ‘The Royal Navy’s Size throughout history.’ The difficulties of obtaining accurate statistics of men serving in the eighteenth-century navy are explained in Rodger; For example, in the peace-time years 1753-1755, the average annual recruitment was 17,369, while the figure jumped to 74,771 for the Seven Years War from 1756-1763. There was a similar sudden surge in numbers for the American Revolutionary War of 1775-1783. The merchant navy’s recruitment numbers were more stable, fluctuating between 30,000 and 5,000 during the period 1736-1783. See Fischer and Nordvik, 25.

⁹ Frykman, 83.

¹⁰ Frykman 70.

¹¹ Lin provides useful statistics of British military personnel during the war with the French 1793-1815 in the first chapter of her thesis. She also points out that, contrary to popular belief, a significant proportion of those serving in the British military were family men (Lin, 15).

¹² Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 122-3.

¹³ Slope.

¹⁴ Davey, 44.

responses'. Caroline Jackson-Houlston identifies two strands in British songs of the early nineteenth century: 'The loss of loved ones (almost always male sexual partners) [... and] the fear of military defeat, and even of possible invasion.'¹⁵ While these songs were generally created by working-class people for each other, there were 'moral and patriotic pieces [...] produced by those higher in society for propaganda purposes'.¹⁶ In his examination of how songs and ballads were used to encourage men to enlist in the navy, James Davey points out that men who volunteered to go to sea were not merely following simple narratives of unthinking duty; on the contrary, they were individuals responding to complex motivations, community pressures and constructions of identity.'¹⁷

Ballads in the Public Sphere: A Comfort and Example to Sailors

As Gillian Russell writes, 'many nautical memoirs confirm [that] singing was one of the ways in which life on board a man-of-war could be made tolerable, enlivening the sailor's recreational moments as well as assisting him in his daily tasks.'¹⁸

Ballads, which would have been sung for recreation, should be distinguished from sea shanties. Shanties are work songs, 'rhythmically fitted to the seafaring processes' and sung during activities like 'pulling ropes or pushing the capstan,' while 'the true ballad is a narrative poem' – often, but not always, anonymous. The words of ballads (often referred to as 'songs' even when separated from the music, or 'airs', they were set to) were printed and sold in public places by ballad-sellers. They often dealt with topical themes – recent news stories and current issues.¹⁹ These broadsheets, or broadsides, were hugely popular in the eighteenth century. 'There is a mass of evidence describing unnamed sheets being circulated, pinned up in public spaces, given out, pulled out of pockets and sung to gathering audiences.'²⁰

According to Mark Philp:

The singing of street ballads was unpredictable in its effects, subject to interference, interpretation and subversion. Formal musical performances [...] were not similarly exposed – and while there was a dimension of symbolism on such occasions, there is also an element of sheer power, which has a

¹⁵ Jackson-Houlston, 191.

¹⁶ Jackson-Houlston, 184.

¹⁷ Davey, 44.

¹⁸ Russell, 100.

¹⁹ Scholes, 946.

²⁰ Davey, 47.

distinct impact on its audience. [...] There is little doubt that there was a deep appreciation of the power of loyal performances among many of those arranging public events, especially around the invasion of 1803.²¹

In her discussion of the representation of the ‘Jolly Jack Tar’ on stage, Russell argues that, while ‘the naval community was far from being a group of eager students, ready to be moulded [...] the theatre was profoundly important to the French wars because it became the place in which the civilian community’s ambivalence in relation to its armed forces could be acted out’, and nautical songs were an integral part of many theatrical performances.²² Versions of ballads which included the printed music, usually with a simple accompaniment for piano, were also printed and sold by the publishers of other types of sheet music. Several of these songs are to be found in both print and manuscript in surviving music collections, including that of Jane Austen (1775-1817) and her extended family.²³

Given the large numbers of men employed in the Navy, it is not surprising that many ballads of this period dealt with life at sea. Isaac Land discusses the blatant misogyny of many sailors’ ballads in the folk tradition, complicated by the increasingly serious ‘legal and social consequences of a sodomy accusation’ over the course of the eighteenth century. Although there were, as Land reveals, some women on British ships, smuggled on board, or disguised as men, it was predominantly a male environment.²⁴ Proving sailors’ credentials became imperative: given that ‘every male now needed to demonstrate an exclusive sexual interest in women in some public way, no one was in a worse position than Jack Tar.’ Thus the image of the sailor with a ‘wife’ in every port became common as a part of the ‘libertine bravado’ of sailors. However, as Land argues, it was combined with ‘a deep anxiety about women turning the tables and somehow playing the libertine themselves.’ Men fed on ‘a steady diet of misogynist song and story’ were ‘primed ... to vent their fury on women.’²⁵ Into this murky world, songwriters like Charles Dibdin intervened to create a more acceptable sailor. ‘Inevitably, Dibdin’s sailor would be not merely brave or fierce but also funny. ‘Poor Jack’ (1789), Dibdin’s most famous song,

²¹ Philp, 176.

²² Russell, 105.

²³ *The Austen Family Music Books*. Internet Archive. <https://archive.org/details/austenfamilymusicbooks>. Accessed 8 April 2018.

²⁴ Land includes a chapter on ‘cross-dressing’ in the Navy.

²⁵ Land, 45, 50, 52.

squarely addressed the old anxieties about sailors' sexual, and national, loyalties.'²⁶ Dibdin's typical sailor is singing on his own account, not being sung about: 'He prides himself on his plain speaking, but what he speaks about are his orthodox sexual and national loyalties, which intertwine and reinforce each other.'²⁷

Davey writes that 'politicians understood the cultural significance of ballads, and by the end of the eighteenth century radical and conservative commentators alike understood that they were one way into the hearts and minds of ordinary people.'²⁸ The rhetoric and humour of these songs was frequently aimed squarely at the 'honest British tar'. George Hogarth wrote in 1848 that if Dibdin's portrayals of sailors had been 'coarse and literal copies, the originals would turn away in anger and disgust'. However, if Dibdin had gone to the other extreme and portrayed them as 'mere fancy-pieces, they would be neither understood nor cared for'. Dibdin's ballads worked because in his seafaring characters 'the sailor recognizes a brother-sailor – a being like himself, but nobler and better than himself, whom he would gladly resemble more fully'. Hogarth, like those who had granted Dibdin a government pension, recognised that once the mariner approved of and sympathized with the 'high and generous sentiments' of these fictional characters, he could adopt them as his role models. Hogarth even suggested that, so influenced, 'His courage is no longer a brute instinct, sustained by a blind fatalism. He is calm in the midst of the battle [...] and yet prepared, should such be the will of Heaven, to die bravely in the cause of his country.'²⁹ Yet, according to Hogarth, it is not just a sailor's conduct in battle or dealings with his 'brother-sailors' that Dibdin models so effectively, it is his personal life. He goes so far as to claim that for the sailor, 'The image of his favourite hero stands between him and the allurements to sensual indulgence'. The hero of Dibdin's ballads focuses on 'his faithful girl, or tender wife' during the lonely midnight watch, as well as in the Saturday's carouse, when the merry crew assemble to toast their 'sweethearts and wives'.³⁰ Although Hogarth could be critical about Dibdin's personal life and musical abilities, he had no doubt of the efficacy of Dibdin's compositions in improving the character and family life of sailors.³¹ A striking demonstration of the political potency of this belief is the way the leaders of the Royal

²⁶ Land, 94.

²⁷ Land, 94-5.

²⁸ Davey, 60.

²⁹ Hogarth, xxxi.

³⁰ Hogarth, xxx-xxxii.

³¹ Hogarth, xxxi.

Navy 'Nore Mutiny' in 1797 recruited the language and sentiments of Dibdin's naval characters when issuing their demands:

The mutineers offered carefully worded lists of grievances balanced with affirmations of loyalty to king and country, but the affirmation of fidelity to sweethearts and wives was the most politically innovative part of their petition. By equating their fidelity to women with their fidelity to Britain, and making the case for a pay raise on the grounds that they had families at home to support, they established themselves both as family men and as steadfast patriots. [...] The language of the 1797 mutineers partook of Tom Paine, but also of Charles Dibdin.³²

As Joanne Begiato points out, 'The sailor's wife and infants and home were reshaped into the sailor's motivation to leave them: to defend and protect them and the nation'.³³

Songs in the Domestic Sphere: The Marriage of Matthew and Ann Flinders

These ballads were undoubtedly influential, and believed to be so, but they were not the only type of cultural product to encourage seafaring and the benefits of family life.³⁴ Matthew Flinders, the English navigator and cartographer, claimed that it was after reading Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* that he decided to go to sea and joined the navy 'against the wishes' of his father.³⁵ By the time Flinders proposed marriage to Ann Chappelle in 1801, he had spent most of the preceding decade at sea. Ann had little enthusiasm for marrying a 'servant' of the sea. Her father had been a mariner and died at sea when she was four, and her mother, from a Hull seafaring family, had also lost two of her brothers to the sea.³⁶ Although there was no doubting their mutual attraction, it took Matthew some persuasion, as well as some over-optimistic promises, to convince her that they had a future together. They married in April 1801 and lived together for a few weeks before Flinders left to survey the Australian coastline as commander of the HMS *Investigator*. Flinders had hoped to take his wife

³² Land, 98-99.

³³ Begiato (Bailey), 127.

³⁴ Davey, 60.

³⁵ 'Biographical Memoir of Captain Matthew Flinders, R.N.,' 178n. For more information about Flinders, see the script of my Royal Society Matthew Flinders Memorial Lecture: 'Matthew Flinders: The Man behind the Map of Australia.'

³⁶ Estensen, 133.

with him, but the Admiralty intervened.³⁷ Ann suffered deeply during their separation, which was to last nine years.³⁸ In 1803, while travelling back to England, Flinders was detained by the French governor on Mauritius in the Indian Ocean for more than six years. Stranded there, Flinders worried constantly about his family. He was the eldest son of a large family, and when his father died in 1802 he therefore became head of that family. His letters home to his stepmother and siblings show his anxiety at being absent and not knowing ‘the state of my affairs’, or being able to ensure that his younger sisters were receiving an adequate education.³⁹ He also worried about his wife, realizing that each year apart lessened the likelihood of their having children.⁴⁰ In March 1806 Flinders wrote to his brother about the possibility of Ann joining him on Mauritius:

Was she with me [...] I could make myself tolerably happy here [...]; but the dread of the fatigue and risks she must undergo, and the difficulty of finding a proper person to accompany her, prevent me from requesting her to come, it must rest with herself and upon the turn-up of circumstances. I have however forbidden the voyage, if one of the opportunities which I have described does not offer; the honour of a woman on board a ship, is too likely to be aspersed, without proper guardianship; however circumspect her conduct might be, the tongue of slander will find some occasion to defame it, if she is not protected by a father, an uncle, or a brother, or by some respectable family.⁴¹

In the event, Ann stayed in England with her mother and step-father. Flinders acknowledged Ann’s sorrow by writing words to a tune by Haydn and sending them to Ann in November 1805.⁴² Flinders wrote in the persona of the woman left behind: ‘Why, Henry, didst thou leave me? [...] Thou knew’st how much I loved thee, yet could resolve to go.’ He wrote one verse, and three lines of a second, adding ‘To be completed’ in place of the last line. On receiving the song, Ann responded to the implied invitation to co-authorship by finishing the second verse and adding two

³⁷ See Flinders, ‘To Joseph Banks,’ 24 May and 3 June 1801, in *Matthew Flinders*, 69-70.

³⁸ Gill (35-40) uses the Flinders marriage as an example of the importance of letters in maintaining intimate and familial relations at a distance.

³⁹ See, for example, his letter to Elizabeth Flinders, 13 April 1806, State Library of Victoria Manuscript Collection, MS Sequence, Box 2/7.

⁴⁰ Retter and Sinclair, 41.

⁴¹ Flinders, ‘To Samuel Flinders,’ 29 March 1806, in *Matthew Flinders* 147.

⁴² See Dooley, “‘When tired of writing,’ 9-13, for a discussion of this song and other aspects of music in life at sea. I have since ascertained that the tune in question is based on the Andante from Haydn’s ‘Imperial’ Symphony, Hob. 1:53.

more, ending: ‘Will comforts cheering sunshine e’er beam on this sore heart? / Yes, when we meet, my Henry, never again to part.’⁴³ In 1810 Flinders returned and the couple settled in London. In 1812, after suffering at least one miscarriage, Ann eventually bore a daughter at the age of 42. Flinders died less than four years after his return when their child was only two.⁴⁴ The story of the Chappelle-Flinders marriage, involving personalities now well-known, was unique in its particulars, but in its general outline was common enough during these decades of war and expansion. However, the use of song-writing as a form of apology, graciously accepted, is unusual.

Part 2: Examples of Sailors’ Songs in Jane Austen’s Music Collection

Flinders’s musical training and level of education meant that when he took to song to mediate in his marriage, it was in elevated poetic diction set to a melody by Haydn. The English composer Thomas Billington (1754-1832) set the words of a song, about a woman lamenting the absence of her lover William, to another Haydn tune:

Ye cliffs! I from your airy steep look down with hope and fear

To gaze on this extensive deep and watch if William’s there.

Sad months are past while here I breathe Love’s soft and constant pray’r.

This song also ends in the prospect of a reunion: ‘His promised signals from the Mast my timid doubts destroy / What was your pain, ye terrors past, to this dear hour of Joy.’

‘William’, first published in 1795, is known today only because Jane Austen copied it into one of her music manuscript books.⁴⁵ The words, like those in the Flinders collaboration, stress the suffering of the woman waiting at home for her sea captain, but place more emphasis on her constancy. Written for publication, it was (at least in part) a contribution to the public conversation about the way women should behave while their men were away, while the Flinders song was a private document. Ann Flinders wrote to express her own ‘misery & alarms’, her ‘silent agony’: she had no need to convince a reader or listener of her fidelity. It can be assumed from its

⁴³ Flinders, ‘Handwritten Sheet Music and Words’. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK. FLI/25, Online. Accessed 10 December 2017.

Flinders, Private Journal, xxx-xxxii.

⁴⁵ Thomas Billington, ‘William’, Album of Songs and Duets, *The Austen Family Music Books*, CHWJA/19/3, 4-6. Internet Archive. Accessed 10 December 2016. <https://archive.org/stream/austen1672310-2001#page/n11/mode/2up>

poetic register that ‘William’ was intended for a middle-class audience. The eponymous character would have been the captain or at least a high-ranking officer, since he was able to arrange a signal from the mast of his ship. Although it is certainly a narrative, it may not have been considered a ballad – defined by Davey as ‘a popular song sung in the streets – as opposed to a hymn or classical song’.⁴⁶ However, there was not a clear-cut class distinction. As Davey notes, ‘ballads were not only geographically ubiquitous; they also filtered across all levels of society’.⁴⁷ Ballads were often performed at theatres to middle-class audiences, and popular songs depicting the lives and loves of the lower ranks could also be part of the musical repertoire of the drawing room. Dibdin’s songs, and others on similar themes by composers such as William Shield and Samuel Arnold, were thus enjoyed not only by seamen. Indeed, Dibdin boasted that his songs ‘were sold in every music-shop, seen on every lady’s pianoforte, and sung in every company’.⁴⁸ While he may have been exaggerating, several of his sea songs do appear in the extensive private music collection of Jane Austen.⁴⁹

Austen had two brothers in the navy, so had personal experience to draw on when writing her naval novels, *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion*. However, the presence of these songs in her collection hints at a broader engagement with naval culture, which could also have influenced her depiction of naval officers and men. Although Austen’s naval connections were with the officer class – both her two naval brothers eventually became Admirals – the songs in her collection range from the refined art music of ‘William’ to the knockabout, though still relatively respectable, humour of ballads like those written by Charles Dibdin.

There are eighteen volumes of Austen Family Music Books, and the ownership of the various books has been traced to at least five other women in her extended family. However, Dibdin seems to have been a personal favourite of Austen’s: of the eleven Dibdin songs in the Austen music collection, nine are in Jane Austen’s own manuscript books. In the remainder of this chapter, I consider a sample of the ‘sea songs’ in Austen’s collection particularly from the perspective of the message they might be calculated to convey to women – of all classes – respecting

⁴⁶ Davey, 45.

⁴⁷ Davey, 47.

⁴⁸ Qtd in Land, 95.

⁴⁹ Qtd in Land, 95.

their behaviour in relationships with their lovers or husbands during their absence at sea, and on their return.

The Sailor's Farewell: Tears and Vows

One song in Austen's music scrapbook is an anonymous setting of three verses from John Gay's famous 1719 poem 'Black-Eyed Susan'.⁵⁰ This setting strips away the narrative drama of Susan's visit to William's ship and uses only the words that the sailor William addresses to Susan, including a verse which confronts head-on the popular belief in sailors' promiscuity:

Believe not what the landsmen say,
Who tempt with doubts thy constant mind,
They tell thee, sailors when away,
At every port a mistress find;

William is perhaps unusually eloquent for a common seaman, but elements like his appeal to Susan's fidelity, his sympathy with her tears, and his assurance that her love will keep him safe, are themes that will recur in later ballads. What is more uncommon is the frank admission of the navy's reputation for promiscuity, and the ingenious rebuttal which concludes this verse: 'Yes, yes, believe them when they tell thee so, / for thou art present where so e'er I go.' One could see this as an early example almost of propaganda – attempting to persuade women that it is safe to let their lovers and husbands go to sea, as well as encouraging good behaviour on the men's part.⁵¹

One of the Dibdin ballads in Austen's collection, 'The Soldier's Adieu', first appeared in one of his London 'entertainments', titled *The Wags*, in 1790. Most of the songs in this miscellany were comic character pieces he performed himself, but 'The Soldier's Adieu' was written to be delivered in heroic mode. Although it was obviously written about a different branch of the military service, Austen had other ideas. In her copy, she crossed out 'soldier' and substituted 'sailor' in the line,

⁵⁰ 'Susan', [words by John Gay, from 'Black-Eyed Susan'], Scrapbook of manuscript and printed vocal and keyboard music, c.1775-c1810, *The Austen Family Music Books* CHWJA/19/7, p. XLIV. Internet Archive. Accessed 12 December 2017. <https://archive.org/stream/austen1676459-2001#page/n44/mode/lup>

⁵¹ Gustar, 445. Gustar discusses the history of musical settings of 'Black Ey'd Susan', which continued to be included in folk song collections and community songbooks until well into the twentieth century. He points out that 'Gay's "literary artfulness" made the poem, and thus the song, stand out from the crowd.' The setting in Austen's manuscript book has not been dated, nor has its composer been identified.

‘Remember thou’rt a soldier’s wife, these tears but ill become thee’: the man in question is made of sterner stuff than Susan’s soft-hearted William. Verse 2 refers to the inspiration and comfort of wife and family:

My safety thy fair truth shall be
As sword and buckler serving;
My life shall be more dear to me
Because of thy preserving:
Let peril come, let horror threat,
Let thund’ring cannons rattle! -
I’ll fearless seek the conflict’s heat,
Assur’d when on the wings of love,
To Heav’n above
Thy fervent orisons are flown;
The tender prayer
Thou put’st up there
Shall call a guardian angel down,
To watch me in the battle.⁵²

The tortuous poetic syntax, combined with a tune that manages to be both martial and florid, must have made this soldier/sailor seem amusingly pompous when set alongside the other characters in *The Wags*. Dibdin varied the register and tone of his songs, and ‘his amazing ability to mimic provincial accents’ and people of different social classes meant he could carry the audience with him through an evening’s program containing nearly three dozen songs.⁵³

‘Yo Heave Ho’, from Dibdin’s 1799 show *Tour to the Land’s End*, is also in the Austen music collection.⁵⁴ The singer in this case is ‘Tom Tough’, former sailor looking back on his naval career, with pride and a certain amount of boasting: ‘I’ve seed a little service / Where mighty billows roll and loud tempests blow’. In the first verse he lists some of his commanders in order to establish his credentials: Howe,

⁵² Dibdin, *Songs* 257. Austen’s MS copy is at *The Austen Family Music Books* CHWJA/19/3, pp. 25-27. Internet Archive. Accessed 15 December 2017 <https://archive.org/stream/austen1672310-2001#page/n32/mode/1up>

⁵³ Carrasco, 167; Russell 101.

⁵⁴ Charles Dibdin, ‘Yo Heave Ho’, written and composed by Mr Dibdin, and sung by him in his New Entertainment called ‘A Tour to the Land’s End’ (London, 1799). This published sheet music is in a book in the Austen Music collection that belonged to Jane Austen’s brother Henry’s second wife, Eleanor, available online at <https://archive.org/stream/austen1677429-2001#page/n55/mode/2up>

Jarvis, Duncan, Boscawen, and Hawke. In the second, he shares the sorrow of parting from his love while suppressing his tears in order to do his duty:

When from my love to part I first weighed anchor,
And she was snivelling seed on the beach below,
I'd like to catch my eyes sniv'ling too, d'ye see, to thank her,
But I brought my sorrows up with a Yo heave ho!
For sailors, though they have their jokes,
And love and feel like other folks,
Their duty to neglect must not come for to go.
So I seized the capstan bar, like a true honest tar,
In spite of tears and sighs sung out, Yo heave ho!

Joanne Begiato argues that 'the tar was not sanitised and civilised' during the course of the Georgian era, 'but was given feelings', allowing the construction of masculine sensibility to reach the lower ranks.⁵⁵ In voicing his impulse to tearfulness and sympathy, and then suppressing it, Tom Tough recalls Flinders's sentiments: 'When stern duty calls thee, thou couldst not but obey'. He is more forgiving than the character in 'The Soldier's Adieu', who exhorts his wife (in Austen's version) to 'remember thou'rt a *sailor's* wife, these tears but ill become thee.'

Home Life: Families and Children

The last verse of 'Yo Heave Ho' adds another dimension to the sailor's lot – what happens at the end of his career:

And now at last laid up, in decentish condition,
For I've only lost an eye and got a timber toe;
But old ships must expect in time to be out of commission,
Nor again the anchor weigh with a Yo Heave Ho!
I smoke my pipe and sing old songs,
My boys shall well avenge my wrongs,
My girls shall rear young sailors nobly for to face the foe.
Then to country and king, Fate no danger can bring,
While the tars of old England sing, Yo, heave ho!
The tars of old England sing, Yo, heave ho!

⁵⁵ Begiato, 118.

Humour, self-parody, sentiment and patriotism all play their part here. A ‘timber toe’ is slang for a wooden leg.⁵⁶ The sailor’s ‘decentish condition’ is understatement for the loss of both a limb and an eye. But Tom Tough is a family man, with sons and daughters he has brought up – along with his wife, presumably the tearful woman he left behind in verse two – to follow his example and do their duty for ‘old England’. The tune combines rollicking hornpipe-like passages with a steady march rhythm, with the words ‘Yo heave ho’ set on three even, affirmative beats at the end of each phrase.

The implications for wives of injured men are made explicit in a song by Samuel Arnold from the comic opera *Fire and Water* (1780), in which the woman sings:

Sure ’twould make a dismal story
If when honour leads him on,
Love should slight the cause of glory,
Or disdain its wounded son.
If, his country’s rights defending,
He should some disaster prove,
Duty with affection blending,
Will but more increase my love.⁵⁷

In Jane Austen’s hand-written version of this song she perhaps mis-remembered or deliberately improved the second-last line to ‘Pity with my passion blending’.⁵⁸ In the opera, this brief song is sung by a woman making a case for marrying the man she chooses rather than one chosen for her. Divorced from this setting, with its simple, no-nonsense tune in common time, the song proffered a general statement about the duty of the patriotic woman to harness her affections (or indeed passions) in the patriotic cause.

A more idealized image of the sailor’s return comes in William Shield’s song ‘The Heaving of the Lead’ (1792). This four-square song uses the figure of the plumb-line being cast to measure the depth of the water as a ship approaches its home port, to illustrate the sailor’s longing for home and domestic comforts:

⁵⁶ ‘Timber Toe’.

⁵⁷ Andrews.

⁵⁸ Samuel Arnold, ‘Sure ’twould make a dismal story’, Scrapbook of manuscript and printed vocal and keyboard music, c.1775-c1810, *The Austen Family Music Books*, CHWJA/19/7, p. CXLIV. Internet Archive. <https://archive.org/stream/austen1676459-2001#page/n145/mode/1up>

And as the much-loved shore we near,
With transport we behold the roof,
Where dwells a friend or partner dear
Of faith and love a matchless proof.
The lead once more the seaman flung,
and to the watchful pilot sung,
Quarter less five! Quarter less five!⁵⁹

These sailors, unlike Dibdin's comic yet heroic characters, are generalized, and the commonality of their positive emotions assumed. They are equally reassuring to those waiting at home, or more realistically, perhaps, to the broader social field where a well-behaved, domesticated navy safely embedded in a familial network of equally devoted and docile 'friends and partners' spells a freedom from the kinds of social disruption which might well result from long absences and family separations.

Another song in the Austen collection, Joseph Major's 1800 ballad, 'Far O'er the Western Ocean', tells of a wife whose husband has been taken 'beyond the stormy sea'. He seems to have had no choice in the matter: perhaps he is an impressed sailor. The wife complains that she is subjected not just to personal sorrow, but to loss of reputation:

Some say that I'm deserted,
They flout and jeer and scorn;
And slander's hounds are started,
Because I am forlorn.

However, she is not only a wife, but also a mother:

My children seem forsaken
But he'll come back to me.

The wife concludes her song with a pious belief that 'the power that chastens' will bring her husband home: 'We'll twine our hearts together / A Family of Love!'⁶⁰ This ballad, with its simple but engaging melody and straightforward modelling of a long-suffering and virtuous wife and mother, illustrates Davey's point that 'ballads are not

⁵⁹ William Shield, 'The Heaving of the Lead,'[manuscript], Album of Songs and Duets, *The Austen Family Music Books*, CHWJA/19/3, pp 56-7. Internet Archive. Accessed 16th December 2017. <https://archive.org/stream/austen1672310-2001#page/n63/mode/2up>

⁶⁰ Joseph Major, 'Far o'er the Western Ocean, a Ballad, the Words by R.C. Dallas.' Printed and sold for the author, London, c. 1800. *The Austen Family Music Books*, Internet Archive. Accessed 8 April 2018. <https://archive.org/stream/austen1677429-2001#page/n174/mode/1up>

used simply to hold a mirror up to British society'. Their purpose is to actively 'influence opinions and ideas'.⁶¹

Cautionary Tales

One song in Austen's collection tells a cautionary tale, in this case it is cautioning *against* joining the navy. Dibdin's 'Lucky Escape' (1800) is a comically hair-raising story of a ploughman who is persuaded by a friend to go to sea, leaving his 'dear' at home.⁶² He is lured by promises 'of such things / as if sailors were kings', only to find that 'I did not much like for to be aboard a ship / When in danger there's no door to creep out.' Hurricanes and battles confirm his conviction that if he had been unwise 'to roam, when so happy at home'. When 'at last safe I landed, and in a whole skin', a helpful friend tells him that his father is dead and his wife has run away: 'Wives losing their husbands oft lose their good name,' he moans: 'Curse light upon the carfindo and the inconstant wind / that made me for to go and leave my dear behind!' But once he has expressed this remorseful sentiment, 'this very same friend' reveals that this news had been a ploy to test whether his desire to stay at home was genuine: in fact 'Dad's alive, and your wife's safe at home.' Our ploughman returns to his fields and his family – his 'wife, mother, sister and all of my friends', where 'once more shall the horn call me up in the morn', and nothing will 'e'er tempt me for to go and leave my dear behind.' It is notable that he is not only a husband, but a son and a brother, embedded in a network of family relationships, with implicit mutual obligations. Dibdin's melody for this little morality tale is full of character and drama. Like most of Dibdin's songs, the music supports the words and allows for a full range of comic expression. It certainly reinforces the importance of family values, as do 'Yo Heave Ho' and 'The Heaving of the Lead', but there is no countervailing appreciation of the bravery and endurance of Jack Tar. With its frank message of staying where you are well off, perhaps Dibdin intended to discourage impetuous decisions endangering family life.

Charles Dibdin's career appears to have declined in the early 1800s. In 1803 he wrote an 'Entertainment' called *Britons Strike Home*. 'Devoted as I have ever been to my public duty, it was impossible that, at the present moment, I should sleep at my

⁶¹ Davey, 46.

⁶² Dibdin, 'The Lucky Escape', Album of Songs and Duets, *The Austen Family Music Books*, CHWJA/19/3, pp 46-7. Internet Archive. Accessed 16th December 2017. <https://archive.org/stream/austen1672310-2001#page/n53/mode/2up>

post,' he wrote, presumably referring to Britain's resumption of war with France in May 1803.⁶³ For this Entertainment he wrote a song titled 'Victory, and George the Third', alluding to the 1695 song 'Britons, Strike Home' by Henry Purcell, a patriotic anthem which during the eighteenth century rivalled 'God Save the King' and 'Rule Britannia' in popularity. This ballad, with its 'king and country' lyrics, perhaps composed with the idea of demonstrating Dibdin's gratitude for the government pension, 'did not catch on to any measurable degree.'⁶⁴ Although Dibdin retired in 1805 at the age of 60, in 1808, owing to the withdrawal of his pension, 'he found himself [...] compelled to resume his professional labours. [...] But these endeavours terminated in failure and bankruptcy.'⁶⁵ He died in 1814 at the age of 69. It is possible to speculate that the government pension suppressed the vitality and variety of Dibdin's characterizations of British seamen and their family relationships in favour of an attempt 'to keep up the enthusiasm against our Gallic neighbours'.⁶⁶ Songs like 'The Lucky Escape', encouraging men to stay home on the farm with their families, or 'Every Inch a Sailor', in which both the sailor and his lover perish, could have no part in this morale-boosting project.

Conclusion

It is significant that Dibdin's career took a downward turn once he directed his energies towards consciously fulfilling his duty to 'keep up enthusiasm'. It seems likely that the humour, pathos and variety of Dibdin's maritime characters, and those of other composers and balladeers of the time, had a more positive effect on the morale of sailors and their families when they were not too blatant in their patriotic messages. While men would have listened to or sung many of these songs while at sea or in port, those they left behind – their sweethearts, wives, children and other family members – would have done likewise. Samantha Carrasco has remarked that 'Through their musical choices and the words expressed within a song, women could immerse themselves in the world of politics, marital affairs, compassion and free expression of emotion.'⁶⁷ For both men and women, a lively, rousing or tender ballad, combining music and words, enjoyed actively by singing along or passively by

⁶³ Quoted in Kitchiner, 21.

⁶⁴ Vandrei, 694; Philp 177.

⁶⁵ Hogarth, xxvi.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Hogarth, 228.

⁶⁷ Carrasco 176.

listening to a performance, could have a powerful effect on the emotions. Likewise, a private message of love and shared pain sent by means of a song, as in the Flinders example, could do the same. Both could result in a softening of the heart, a hardening of resolve or even a change in behaviour.

Dibdin's skill at characterization might perhaps have been the secret of his appeal to Jane Austen – and to other women who read, heard or sang his songs. Austen found the virtues of respect for women, fidelity in marriage and preference for domestic life attractive, and most of the men she portrays sympathetically have these qualities, whether they are minor characters or the destined husbands of her heroines. I am not proposing that Austen's novelistic practice was influenced in any substantial way by her familiarity with the ballads of Dibdin and his colleagues. However, in collecting, copying out and performing their songs for her own amusement (and perhaps that of her nieces and nephews), Austen was reflecting the national preoccupation with war and imperial expansion and the concern about its effect on families. In her last completed novel, *Persuasion* (first published 1818), Austen's admiration for men who go to sea is clear. All the naval characters are officers: Captain Harville, Admiral Croft, Captain Wentworth and Captain Benwick. All are quite distinct characters with different combinations of attractive qualities and virtues, but all are committed to a happy domestic life. The novel ends:

Anne was tenderness itself, and she had the full worth of it in Captain Wentworth's affection. His profession was all that could ever make her friends wish that tenderness less; the dread of a future war all that could dim her sunshine. She gloried in being a sailor's wife, but she must pay the tax of quick alarm for belonging to that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance.⁶⁸

This assessment of the naval profession is not merely a passing remark: it bears the added significance of ending the novel. As Kathryn Sutherland points out, 'Persuasion is Austen's most time-stamped novel [...] written after Waterloo' but set 'before Waterloo'. In this novel, 'through Anne Elliot's quiet characterization, Austen offers her most subtle domestic meditation on war's cost.' The lives of these characters were shaped by war and politics, like countless other families of the time whose stories were reflected in and perhaps shaped by contemporary popular songs.

⁶⁸ Austen, [*Northanger Abbey and*] *Persuasion*, 252.

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