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THE ONTOLOGY OF FOLK SONGS

A Master's Thesis

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To all the bonny light horsemen

ONTOLOGY OF FOLK SONGS

The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
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by

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THE ONTOLOGY OF FOLK SONGS
By Zeynep İlkim Karali

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

THE ONTOLOGY OF FOLK SONGS

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January 2026

Folk songs can have various lives across continents for centuries without a score, known authorship, a canonical recording, or even a definitive version. This raises questions about what exactly constitutes a work of folk music. The aim of this thesis is to investigate what kind of entities folk songs are. The two main topics on the ontology of musical works are the basic nature of musical works (what kind of entities they are, how they are individuated, and what kind of a relation they have to their performances), and how the ontological status of works may vary across musical traditions. In §1 of this thesis, I introduce special features of folk songs. In §2, I introduce methodological debates on the ontology of musical works, then I propose the term *anchoring* to refer to the way a work's identity conditions are specified, and argue that the anchor of a folk song is its genealogy. In section §3, I introduce views about the basic nature of musical works, such as simple and complex Platonism, nominalism, and other views, and discuss

the ontological diversity of works in different traditions. In §4, I rule out simple Platonism as a feasible ontological framework, because treating folk songs as eternal and immutable entities ignores their special features and how they are anchored. Finally, in §5 I introduce an alternative that is suitable, Roman Ingarden's ontological framework for artworks.

Keywords: folk songs, ontology of art, ontology of music, Roman Ingarden

ÖZET

FOLK ŞARKILARININ ONTOLOJİSİ

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Folk müzikte şarkılar, yazarları bilinmeden, notaları, kanonik bir kayıtları, hatta nihai bir versiyonları bile olmadan farklı kıtalarda yüzlerce yıl var olabilmektedir. Bu durum, bu şarkıların ne tür varlıklar olduğuna dair sorular açığa çıkarıyor. Bu tez, folk şarkılarının nasıl varlıklar olduklarını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Müzik ontolojisinde tartışılan iki temel konu, müzik eserlerinin temelde doğalarının ne olduğu (nasıl varlıklar oldukları, nasıl ayrıştırıldıklarını, performanslarıyla nasıl bir ilişkilerinin olduğu) ve farklı müzik geleneklerindeki eserlerin ontolojik durumlarının arasındaki farklılıklardır. Bu tezin ilk bölümünde folk şarkılarının özelliklerinden bahsediyorum. İkinci bölümde müzik ontolojisinde var olan metodolojik tartışmaları tanıtıyorum, ve bir eserin kimlik koşullarının belirlenmesi kavramını ifade etmek için *dayanaklandırma* terimini ortaya koyuyorum. Üçüncü bölümde müzik eserlerinin doğası hakkındaki basit ve karmaşık Platonizm, nominalizm ve diğer bazı görüşleri tanıtıyorum ve farklı müzik

geleneklerindeki ontolojik çeşitliliği tartışıyorum. Dördüncü bölümde basit Platonizm'in uygulanabilir bir ontolojik çerçeve olmadığını açıklıyorum, çünkü folk müzikte eserlerin değiştirilemez varlıklar olduklarını iddia etmek, folk şarkılarının özelliklerini ve nasıl dayanaklandırıldıklarını görmezden gelmekle sonuçlanıyor. Son olarak, beşinci bölümde, Roman Ingarden'ın sanat eserlerinin ontolojisi hakkındaki görüşlerinin folk şarkıları için uygun bir alternatif olduğunu açıklıyorum.

Anahtar Kelimeler: folk şarkıları, müzik ontolojisi, Roman Ingarden, sanat ontolojisi

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INTRODUCTION

The ballad “Matty Groves” originated in Britain and dates back to at least the early 17th century. Before folk songs were being collected by folklorists in the early 20th century, “Matty Groves” seems to have largely died out in Britain, but it was being sung and many different versions of it were recorded in Appalachia; only a few versions were recorded in Scotland and only one in England during that time. It seems like “Matty Groves” has had various lives across continents for centuries without a score, known authorship, a canonical recording, or even a definitive version. So, what exactly is "Matty Groves"? It is a musical work that belongs in the folk tradition; the many versions of “Matty Groves,” spread across regions and generations, challenge the notion that a musical work requires a single canonical version. This raises questions about what exactly constitutes a work of folk music.

The aim of this thesis is to investigate what kind of entities folk songs such as “Matty Groves” are. The two main topics on the ontology of musical works are the basic nature of musical works (what kind of entities they are, how they are individuated, and what kind of a relation they have to their performances), and how the ontological status of

works may vary across musical traditions. In §1 of this paper, I introduce special features of folk songs. In §2, I introduce methodological debates on the ontology of musical works, then I propose the term *anchoring* to refer to the way a work's identity conditions are specified, and argue that the anchor of a folk song is its genealogy. In section §3, I introduce views about the basic nature of musical works, such as simple and complex Platonism,[1] nominalism, and other views, and discuss the ontological diversity of works in different traditions. In §4, I rule out simple Platonism as a feasible ontological framework, because treating folk songs as eternal and immutable entities ignores their special features and how they are anchored. Finally, in §5 I introduce an alternative that is suitable, Roman Ingarden's ontological framework for artworks.

[1] I borrow this terminology from Andrew Kania (2024).

CHAPTER 1

PRELIMINARIES AND SPECIAL FEATURES OF FOLK SONGS

It is difficult to come up with an exact definition of folk music. Musicologists classify music into three archetypes with distinct characteristics: classical, popular, and folk (Weissman 2020). Classical music is formally composed, notated, and performed by trained musicians; popular music is created and marketed for mass consumption, driven by commercial industries; and folk music develops organically within families and communities, valued for its authenticity and freedom from commercial pressures.

The identity conditions of a folk song depend on its being able to survive the oral tradition. This means there is no reference text, or a correct/definitive version that demands perfect loyalty. Consider the history of the song "Barbara Allen."

> The British ballad "Barbara Allen" was first mentioned in the diary of Samuel Pepys in 1666. Three centuries later it had become the imported ballad most often collected in North America. The details of its origins and migrations are obscure: Did it begin life in cheap print, or was it circulated first orally? In the

> seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it appeared frequently in cheap print, but it also was recovered from oral sources with sufficient variation to assure us that print was not the ballad's only means of survival. In nineteenth-century America, the ballad was printed in songsters and broadsides whose texts were copied from British models. By the twentieth century, numerous variants had been collected, some clearly learned from printed sources but others so divergent that they must have passed through several generations of oral transmission. By the middle of the twentieth century, the song was fading from commercial media but continued to be collected in the field. Thus, the details of transmissions of "Barbara Allen" are vague, but both oral and written sources have played a role. (Cohen 2005, xxxix)

That "Barbara Allen" sporadically had a life as a pop song and has been disseminated through commercial means does not exclude it from being a folk song. It is clear that throughout its history it has survived via noncommercial means in the oral tradition. Theodore Gracyk (1996) argues that in the rock tradition, the "work," namely the object of aesthetic appreciation is the *record*. Gracyk gives examples of the same tune being interpreted by jazz and rock singers and cases where the same composition has both rock and non-rock performances. However, a record cannot be both rock and non-rock at the same time (5). In a similar vein, if the song has survived in the oral tradition like "Barbara Allen" has, if there is a traceable genealogy that links it to that practice, then it is a folk song.

When we think about folk music, we might think about it as a genre, a category that is defined by characteristics such as style, instrumentation, etc. However, there is a difference between a traditional folk song, and a song that might be classified in the folk genre because of the stylistic choices that the composers make. For example, if we look at Bob Dylan's "Boots of Spanish Leather" and "Daemon Lover," we might see that stylistically they are very similar; they are in fact indistinguishable in terms of having a

folk sound. Although Dylan emulates and borrows from traditional forms, his songs are authored by him, not a community. There is a canonical version, and even though it borrows elements from a tradition, the work itself has no traceable link to a particular genealogy, or any proof that it has survived without noncommercial means. It is part of a movement that reconstructs or reimagines the folk songs, rather than a direct continuation of the folk tradition, and therefore not anchored by genealogy like a traditional folk song would be.

Another important feature of folk songs is their hybrid form; that is, that they are made up of words and music. David Atkinson (2022) argues that "the combination of the two distinct media of language and music is fundamental to any consideration of such songs in an ontological perspective" (419). A look into folk songs shows us that 1) the tunes and lyrics of the songs are separable and 2) "in effect, texts (or textual elements) provide necessary and sufficient identity conditions for songs, but tunes do not" (420). However, each performance of a song is an integrated whole of tune and lyrics.

Which brings us to another feature folk songs, that is, they are temporally flexible[2]. Folk songs go through significant variation. One implication of this is that the principle that governs the change occurring is whatever the musician deems important enough to retain, or whatever they can remember, and these are related to the community that the musicians belong to. In jazz, a genre known for change and improvisation, these variations are often understood as demonstrative of individual skill or an exploration or

[2] Rohrbaugh (2003) argues that "an object is temporally flexible if and only if it is subject, in principle, to change in its properties over time" (186).

deliberate re-invention of the standard, they are always in dialogue with a known reference. In contrast, the variations of the folk song do not happen for innovation's sake, or as deliberate artistic deviation from a paradigm standard. Instead, the changes that happen are shaped communally, within a region and over a period of time.

Ultimately, we see that the common thread in all of these features is the link to genealogy. What determines the identity of a folk song is the fact that *this* tune, *these* lyrics, or *this* performance practice descend from prior performances in a continuous lineage. To strip a folk song of its genealogy would be to sever what sustains its status as a folk work. In this sense, the ontology of the folk song cannot be defined apart from the history, practices, and communities that sustain it.

Given what we know about how folk songs are treated in the tradition, we should see why certain features of folk songs become ontologically salient. Folk songs have *hybrid form*: both lyrics and melody are carried forward, and changes in one or the other can still belong to the same song if genealogical continuity is preserved. This makes *historical properties essential*: a folk song is what it is because of the tradition it is a part of, not merely because of its structural form. Finally, genealogy explains the song's *temporal flexibility*: variation across performances is tolerated so long as they remain connected to the historical lineage. Thus, the hybrid form, essentiality of historical properties, and temporal flexibility appear as the three most important and distinct features we must bear in mind when deciding what ontological framework best explains folk songs.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY IN ONTOLOGY OF MUSIC

What are we doing when we ask "what kind of an entity is a folk song?" How are we to know that a theory that proposes an answer to this question has succeeded? What is a reasonable thing to expect from such inquiry? And to what degree is the ontology of musical works accountable to the artistic practices of the tradition in which those musical works exist? This last question is a matter we should settle before inquiring about the ontology of folk songs.

There are a multitude of ontological accounts for musical works. What should our methodology be when we decide which view explains musical works best? There are two opposing views on this topic; *descriptivism* and *revisionism*. Descriptivism is the view that the agents involved in an artistic practice share implicit ontological conceptions about the "work" in that artistic practice, and that the task at hand is

describing and making explicit these ontological conceptions. Revisionism, on the other hand, argues that the best ontological account about works of art can revise those practices and pre-theoretic conceptions that people who partake in that practice hold. These views usually go hand in hand with other meta-ontological commitments about the nature of works of art, for example whether or not one thinks there are mind-independent answers to questions regarding their ontological nature,[3] however I will not be exploring arguments about this here. In the following part I will explain some of the preliminaries of these methodological views, and argue that artistic practices constrain the framework of ontology of musical works in the folk tradition, therefore demanding a less revisionary approach.

Dodd (2013) argues that meta-ontological realism[4] requires a folk-theoretic modesty, which is the belief that "If the ontological nature of *F'*s is fixed independently of what we think on the matter, then *F'*s could turn out to be very different from how we folk presuppose them to be" (1049). *Local descriptivists*, according to Dodd, think that folk-theoretic beliefs constrain the ontological character of artworks. He thinks that folk-theoretic modesty should be a given in metaphysics, and local descriptivists cannot give a convincing enough argument for the existence of such a relationship between the ontology of artworks and the artistic practices surrounding artworks. However, Davies (2017) argues that ascribing a grounding role to artistic practices does not conflict with meta-ontological realism. As Davies illustrates, even Dodd is committed to the

[3] Puy (2022), p. 596.

[4] Dodd (2013) argues that questions about the ontology of art are objective (i.e. mind independent); "their correctness is in no way determined by what we say or think about these questions" (1048-49).

grounding role of artistic practice: his claim that the repeatability and audibility of musical works are central to an ontology of musical works is “obviously not a result of analysis of the concept ‘musical work’ but of the way such works are treated in our artistic practice” (124).

Thomasson (2005) challenges the “discovery model” of knowledge borrowed from the natural sciences, and instead argues that we should analyze the conceptual frameworks and social practices that determine the ontological status of artworks. The discovery model presupposes that there are mind-independent truths that can be found through empirical inquiry. Take the term “whale,” for example: at one point people thought that whales were fish, but through empirical investigation we discovered that whales are actually mammals. The word “whale” picks out a certain kind in the world by pointing to a sample. Through studying anatomy, genetics and the evolution of whales, our mistaken assumptions about this kind were overturned, the mind-independent truth was revealed, and our concept of whale has changed over time. Facts about whales settle the matter, but this is not true for artworks. We cannot point at the facts about a symphony or a painting and determine whether it is a physical object, an abstract type, an event, and so on. That is because what kind of a thing an artwork is depends on human intentions and practices. Artworks are constructed and maintained by people, not discovered in nature. So, we ought to have a different model of inquiry when we wish to give an account of what kind of an entity an artwork is.

So, if ontological knowledge of artworks is not discovered empirically, how do we attain it? Thomasson argues that we examine the conceptual practices of "competent speakers who ground and reground the reference of the term" i.e., the *grounders* (226). Views about the ontology of artworks cannot be presented as discoveries of their "real truths," and the practices of the grounders provide collective epistemic privilege. It is conceptual analysis that's required when we ask what kind of a thing an artwork is. When we properly understand the grounding role of artistic practices, it becomes apparent that ontology of art cannot be revisionary of the folk understanding of the nature of art-kinds. This idea is what makes Thomasson a "global descriptivist," according to Dodd (2013), meaning she holds that "the facts of the matter in the ontology of art are not objective, but determined by the folk-ontological beliefs implicit in our critical and appreciative practice"(1055). While Davies disagrees with Dodd on the grounding function of artistic practices on the ontology of artworks, he is skeptical about Thomasson's idea that ontology of art cannot be revisionary. For Davies, ontology of art does not involve conceptual analysis like Thomasson proposes, but instead "the codification of a practice in a way that clarifies the role that certain things play within it" (127).

How do folk songs present in this light? It is apparent here that a part of the identity of a folk song is that it is sustained by the conscious acts of a community. Whether we take ontology of art as revisionary of practice or not, it is clear that artistic practices constrain the framework of ontology of musical works in the folk tradition. This meta-ontological reorientation is helpful when we want to give an ontology of folk music, because as the ontology of folk music is inseparable from the practices that make it what it is. Those

practices aren't just contingent facts about how a song is used; they determine that it is folk music at all. In this sense, accountability does not mean obedience to practice, but requires at least a serious engagement. This limits our methodology and our ultimate ontological account; e.g., we cannot account for this aspect of folk music if we believe there is one timeless abstract object of which the performances are an instantiation. To explain this relationship further, I will introduce the term *anchoring* next.

2.1 Anchoring

Friedell (2020) wants to propose a solution to "the revision puzzle": namely, that some individuals have privilege to alter works of art and other objects, whereas some don't. The picture here is that there are social practices that give these privileges to certain individuals or groups. The reason he cannot change Bruckner's *Eighth Symphony* is because social practices allow for the author only to specify the performance rules by scoring it in the Western classical tradition. Based on this analysis, I would like to propose the term *anchoring* to refer to the way a work's identity conditions are specified.

Friedell gives an example for works that may have performances without having sound structures, e.g. Cage's "Child of Tree," where the only instruction is that the work be played using the ten preselected instruments that are plants or made from plant materials (6). So, just as Bruckner anchors his work by scoring it within the classical tradition, Cage anchors his by fixing the instrumentation. These mechanisms—score,

instrumentation, performance conventions—serve to anchor a work. Importantly, the anchor is not identical with the work. The score is not the work itself; rather, it encodes the structure to which performances must be faithful. Similarly, the jazz standard is not the work; it is a flexible frame around which the work is created through improvisation, and so on. The anchor determines what counts as a legitimate token of the work, but it is not the work itself.

What determines the anchor? The anchor is determined by social practices, not by the author alone. Even when an author appears to establish the anchor (e.g., by writing a score), it is ultimately the norms of a musical tradition or community that determine what counts as an anchor, what role it plays, and how binding it is. An author can propose an anchor (a score, or an instrumentation rule) but whether that element functions as an anchor depends on whether the relevant community recognizes it as identity-fixing. For example, Bruckner's score serves as an anchor because Western classical music culture treats the score as definitive. If someone else wrote a score outside that tradition, and no one took it seriously, it wouldn't function as an anchor—regardless of the author's intent. The author can introduce an anchoring candidate, but only social practices determine whether it sticks as an anchor.

What anchors the folk song, then? In folk music, there is no author to propose an anchor. Instead, anchoring emerges from communal practices over time: oral and aural transmission, regional variants, and shared expectations of continuity. The anchor isn't

chosen or designed, but instead retrospectively identified by ethnomusicologists or practitioners as the feature that preserves the song's identity. This means that what explains the song’s recognizability across generations, namely genealogy, is the anchor.

One thing we should remember is that folk songs are not entirely dependent on commercial media. That research fails to disclose the author or origin of many folk songs suggest that they have survived via noncommercial means. The ability to survive in the oral tradition explains how genealogy is the only available ontological anchor for the folk song. The genealogy fixes the folk song like how notation fixes the classical composition, or like how the record fixes the work in rock music. It is not a weaker ontological ground than an abstract structure, it is just the one appropriate to the folk tradition and its medium. Nobody else but Bruckner could make any changes to Bruckner’s Eighth Symphony, because the work is anchored by the author’s notation, and the social practices that determine the rules of Western classical music forbid us from making a legitimate change. In contrast it is not only welcome but expected by the performers that partake in the folk tradition to make changes in the song’s properties.

Even in jazz, a genre known for change and improvisation, where performers usually make radical alterations to the work they are improvising on/interpreting, the standard still functions as an anchoring device; it provides the framework or harmonic structure around which improvisation takes place. The standard is not the work—it merely anchors performances that participate in that tradition.In contrast, folk songs are not

anchored by such a stable paradigm. The variations of the folk song do not happen for innovation's sake, or as deliberate artistic deviation from a paradigm standard. Instead, the changes that happen are shaped communally, within a region and over a period of time. In the case of the folk song, a single paradigmatic version or textual anchor is absent; this implies a mode of anchoring that is rooted in historical contextual properties. To strip a folk song of its genealogy would be to sever the anchor that sustains its status as a folk work. In this sense, the ontology of the folk song cannot be defined apart from the history, practices, and communities that sustain it

CHAPTER 3

VIEWS ON THE ONTOLOGY OF MUSIC

Views about the ontology of musical works vary greatly. Works of music,[5] unlike some other works of art, are repeatable objects; they can be instantiated in multiple performances. Depending on one's view of the ontology of a musical work, some elements can be viewed as essential or inessential; for example, Julian Dodd (2007) argues that only the sound structure is essential to a musical work, whereas Levinson (1980) contends that the historical context of the work is also essential. Broadly, the division could be made between Platonists and nominalists (Kania 2024). Kania divides Platonists into two groups: simple Platonists (such as Dodd 2007, and Kivy 1983, 1987) and complex Platonists (Ingarden 1986, Thomasson 1996, Levinson 1980, and S. Davies 2001). The difference is this: simple Platonism holds that musical works are abstract objects that are eternal, cannot be created, and do not exist in space and time, whereas

[5] A musical "work" in the intended sense here is the object of critical attention and aesthetic appreciation.

complex Platonism take musical works to be abstract objects that are created and can have essentially historical properties.

Nominalist views take musical works to be concrete rather than abstract objects. Nominalists may hold that a musical work is a set of correct performances (Goodman 1968), a fusion of performances (Caplan & Matheson 2006), or is co-located with its concrete manifestations, such as performances or recordings (Tillman 2011). Other views suggest that musical works are historical individuals (Rohrbaugh 2003) or "completed ideas for musical manifestation" (Cray & Matheson 2017). All of these theories have some advantages and disadvantages; Platonists argue that they can account for the repeatability and audibility of musical works, and those who oppose Platonism, such as Rohrbaugh, suggest that their view explains the temporality (the ability to come into and go out of existence), modal flexibility (that it could be some other way), and temporal flexibility (undergoing genuine change over time) of musical works.

These accounts of the ontology of musical works provide valuable theoretical distinctions, but they also raise questions about their scope. Much of the debate has been framed with reference to traditions in which the concept of a musical work is tied to notated scores and definitive authorship, a framework that aligns closely with classical music. This orientation has the advantage of analytical clarity, but it may also obscure the ways in which music is practiced in other traditions. A more comprehensive ontology of musical works, then, would need to test the adequacy of existing ontological theories

against a more diverse set of musical practices, rather than assuming that what works for classical music is the default framework.

Andrew Kania (2024) divides the ontology of musical works into two planes: fundamentalist debates and higher-order ontology. The fundamentalist debate is about the nature of musical works in general. Higher-order ontology, on the other hand, deals with the relationship between a work and its instances within a particular tradition, such as jazz or rock music.[6] I will draw on examples of these debates about different genres in order to argue that the ontology of folk music deserves similar attention in the following section.

3.1 Ontological Diversity

When we take a work of classical music as an example, the object of our attention will be the work as determined by its score. The performance, improvisation, recording and other aspects of the work are evaluated with reference to the score in the classical tradition. Philip Alperson (2009) observes that the examples that are used in philosophical discussions of music are mostly from "baroque, classical, and romantic music composed between 1600 and 1900 in Europe," and argues that it would be a mistake to conflate this tradition with the diverse ways music is practiced in other

[6] Brown (2011) thinks that this division rests on a mistake: he argues that the concepts that higher-order ontologists deal with, such as *the work* of jazz music, or of rock etc. play no real role in musical discourse. Therefore, "they constitute nothing to be either descriptionist or revisionist about" (181). For the purposes of this thesis I treat this distinction as meaningful.

traditions and that philosophy of music would benefit from considering musical practices that are outside of this tradition (94).

For example, a popular debate in the philosophy of music concerns what counts as an authentic performance of a work. Some argue that producing the right melody in the right order is enough, and some think it is necessary that the instruments specified by the score be used in order to produce an authentic performance. Julian Dodd thinks that there are two things that the performance may aim to do: comply with the score or "be true to the music's overall integrity or point," and if we have to choose one over the other, "interpretive authenticity trumps score-compliance authenticity" (2002, 136, 147). But the issue over how much variation is compatible with interpretative authenticity is still not very clear.

Kania thinks Dodd's restriction of differences in the work's score to "minor" departures poses a problem in classical music, given that small changes in score can result in important changes in the meaning of the work. If important change in the meaning is allowed, then why isn't interpretive authenticity compatible with radical departure from the score? Kania says this theory does not allow us to explain cases where minor departures preclude the performance from being an authentic one. Some performances seem to convey something that the work does not possess—for example, Karajan's performances of Beethoven's 5th symphony with the Berlin Philharmonic, where he directs the horns to play a fanfare that Beethoven scored for the bassoons. According to

Kania, Karajan's renditions are inauthentic performances of Beethoven's 5th symphony; he proposes that we can think of these as "performances of a *distinct work* very similar to Beethoven's symphony," or "performances of *almost all* of Beethoven's work" (2025, 11).

Now, Kania restricts himself to classical music in this paper, but whatever theory of folk music we end up having ought to be able to account for an authentic performance differently than this view, because there is no performance that is a performance of a distinct work similar to "Matty Groves" or a performance of almost all of "Matty Groves." We don't have any means nor any reason to distinguish performances of "Matty Groves" by this metric. This framework completely misses the important features of the works that belong to the folk tradition. The intentional or unintentional variation in the shape of a folk song is not in reference to a particular artist's vision for the work, it is part of the practice of performing folk songs, so the identity of the original composer is irrelevant to the identity of the work.

This example shows us that accounting for change in a musical work depends on which properties of the work we think are essential. In the classical tradition, the score is extremely binding; even the slightest deviation from the score can result in a legitimate claim that the work has changed. However, that is not how change is treated in the folk tradition. No particular version of "Matty Groves" is the definitive one, because authorship is not a measure for authenticity in the folk tradition. Therefore, the

variations of “Matty Groves,” however radical, are not going to stop being versions of "Matty Groves,” like Karajan’s renditions produced a distinct work, according to Kania. We need a theory that does not anchor the identity of a work in notated scores and definitive authorship, because they are not essential to the folk tradition.

Beyond the differences between classical and folk traditions, we can also see that different musical practices give rise to different ontological accounts. Theodore Gracyk (1996) argues that the object of our critical attention in rock music is the recording of the song. In rock music we treat the particular recorded performance as the ultimate object, rather than the work determined by its score like in classical music. This theory is mostly supported by his belief that we cannot rely on auditory qualities alone when we’re classifying a musical work. His reasoning is that categorizing music into genres is a matter of genealogy, and in trying to determine whether a musical work is a work of rock, we should take the recording as the object of critical attention. Gracyk gives examples of the same tune being interpreted by jazz and rock singers and cases where the same composition has both rock and non-rock performances. However, a record cannot be both rock and non-rock at the same time (5).

Davies (2001) disagrees with the track-centered view of Gracyk, and argues that works of rock music are songs created for studio performance. Because there are more groups who play rock music than there are recorded performances of rock music, he views the work as a *work-for-studio-performance* that is instantiated in a studio performance.

Kania (2006) somewhat marries the two insights of Davies and Gracyk, namely that the primary work is the recording and that rock is a performance art; he thinks of songs as a basic framework that may be instantiated as an audio track or manifested in live performance, but the legitimate musical work is still the track and not the performance. Dan Burkett (2015) on the other hand, thinks that selecting one kind as a work does not reflect the practice of rock music properly, and instead argues for a pluralist ontology; he holds that songs, tracks and performances are all works in the rock tradition.

Improvisation is a central part of jazz, and this presents novel difficulties for musical ontology. Many jazz works share the same harmonic structure but are differentiated by other elements, such as improvisation. This makes it difficult to think of works of jazz as of the same nature as classical music, only ontologically thinner, because improvisation in jazz determines the identity of the work in a way that it does not in classical music. This has led some philosophers to think of the performance as the work itself in jazz (S. Davies 2001, 16–19).

Andrew Kania (2011) thinks about jazz as a tradition with no works, only performances, because the performances are the object of critical attention, and they are not enduring entities; so performances are not works of art. One of the reasons Kania thinks that jazz has no works is that we judge the aesthetic value of a performance by referring to other performances of the song, not to the standard. Some jazz performances share very little

of the sound structure of the standard and yet they are thought to be authentic performances and held in high esteem.

Improvisation is employed in almost all traditions, including classical music. In some works there are “gaps” in which the soloist is supposed to improvise, or in baroque compositions we see continuo parts where only the melody, bass line, and harmonies are determined. Of course the level of improvisation allowed varies greatly from tradition to tradition. Kania’s definition of improvisation is as follows: “an improvisation is a performance event guided by decisions about that event made by the performer shortly before the event takes place” (395). There are differences in how traditions approach improvisation. In folk music, improvisation is not a token of technical mastery like it is in classical music. Kania’s example of Karajan’s rendition of Beethoven’s 5th symphony shows a distinct case of improvisation: the conductor intends to highlight a possible interpretation of the work and makes the choice of altering the score to achieve it. He makes the executive decision to portray an interpretation *he* deems worthy of expressing. Kania’s definition allows more spontaneous cases of improvisation too, as frequently seen in jazz performances. There, the experimentation appears to justify itself, likely rooted in the values of the tradition.

In both jazz and classical music, it appears that improvisation mainly functions as a tool that allows individual expression, and this individual expression is evaluated by referring to the original composer’s vision in classical music, while in jazz the reference

is to other renditions of the same song and technical skills of other performers. As I have said before, the interpretation of the song that expresses a particular individual's vision is not a usual practice of folk performance, and the original composer's intentions for the song are irrelevant. Improvisation is an organic feature of the practice, which is uniquely participatory. Improvisation in a folk song is not a set of changes made in the original song by the performer to present to an audience; instead, the improvisation lives on the character and habits of people who belong to that tradition.

Given how special features of musical works in different traditions result in varying accounts of their ontology, I think that a closer look into the ontology of folk music is warranted. Just as philosophical attention has been directed toward classical, jazz, and rock music, the ontology of folk music merits further attention. If the identity of a folk song is understood to depend on its genealogy rather than on a fixed score or canonical version, then familiar ontological frameworks require adjustment. The special features of folk songs highlight the limitations of Platonist accounts, which treat works as immutable, eternal objects.

Before I turn to a critique of simple Platonism, I will briefly discuss my reasons for not accepting musical works as material objects. Materialist or nominalist views identify musical works with concrete physical entities or aggregates (sets of performances,[7] or fusions of performances[8]). To capture the fact that a folk song can survive drastic

[7] Goodman (1968)
[8] Caplan & Matheson (2006)

changes in melody, lyrics, instrumentation, etc., a materialist must either radically relax the criteria by which physical objects are individuated—thereby allowing physically dissimilar events to count as instances of “the same” work (i.e. conflate the performance of a traditional folk song and the same tune being used for commercial purposes) or incorporate historical facts into the identity conditions of the work. The first strategy amounts to abandoning any principled, physical individuation of the song tied to a tradition. The second strategy dilutes materialism by acknowledging that historical aspects are not reducible to the physical substrate, even if they depend on it. For these reasons, I think these materialist accounts are not preferable for folk songs.

CHAPTER 4

AGAINST SIMPLE PLATONISM

If we expect some explanatory function from the ontology of musical works (folk songs in particular), our theory must remain accountable to the realities of the practice. Folk songs are marked by their hybrid form, salience of historical properties, and temporal flexibility, and they are incompatible with the assumption that musical works are fixed entities awaiting discovery in some abstract realm. To take the artistic practices of the folk tradition as ontologically salient is therefore necessary, and doing so reveals the fault lines that will be central to the critique of simple Platonism that follows. The main claims of simple Platonism are

1) Musical works are abstract and timeless objects

2) They are not created but rather discovered

3) The sound structure is essential, therefore any deviation in the structure means a different work

4) Performances are instances of a fixed work and the work's identity depends on fidelity to the abstract type

I argue that simple Platonism cannot give an adequate account of folk songs because 1) they have hybrid form, 2) their historical properties are essential to them, and 3) they are temporally flexible.

4.1 Hybrid Form

We know that folk songs have a tune, and lyrics. Research shows that a few tunes were used for many texts, and it was also common for the performer to use a different tune if she didn't know the original tune to the song. Folk scholar Samuel Bayard has mapped about fifty five tune families that he believes most of the songs in the Anglo-American tradition descended from. Bruno Nettl (1976) points out that this shows that communal re-creation of these few original tunes into a number of variants that are "almost unlimited and constantly increasing" has been of great benefit to American folk tradition (79). If we were to identify the work with its sound structure, we would have to lump thousands of songs into a much smaller list of works. But this is not how folk scholars and the people who partake in the tradition treat these songs.

For example, Bronson (1976) identifies four distinct tune families for “Barbara Allen,” A-D. (221-228). Bronson looks at scale/mode, meter, cadence types and melodic phrase structure when identifying these tune groups. According to his research, there are tune families that are largely autonomous from their texts. These tune groups are not confined to the versions of “Barbara Allen,” as in *The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads* Bronson annotates these melodic cross-uses with other ballads. Bronson has identified “Binorie," "The Cruel Mother,” “Geordie," “Yarrow,” and "Tifty's Annie” as having tunes from the same tune group as “Barbara Allen,” namely group B (221). Now if the work is the sound structure and lyrics are not essential to the work’s identity, this would suggest that these songs and some versions of “Barbara Allen” are identical, whereas versions of “Barbara Allen” that use different tune groups are distinct works. This is unintuitive. The narrative content of the song “Barbara Allen” is not only an aesthetic property of the work, it is also what makes the genealogy of the song traceable. It is necessary for the performers and the audience to identify, remember and experience the song. Thinking of the folk song as identical with its sound structure does not reflect how folk songs are identified in the folk tradition, and we should consider their lyrics as well.

Given that lyrics are essential to the identity of a folk song, we are faced with the question of what kinds of thing lyrics are. Discussions of what makes a musical work what it is often leave out lyrics out of the picture; the focus tends to fall on sonic or performative elements. In many genres, lyrics do much more than adorn music, and yet the ontological significance of lyrical content hasn’t received much attention. Lyrics are linguistic expressions designed to be integrated with music in some way. The first thing

we need to unpack is the idea that lyrics are "linguistic expressions,"i.e. they are made up of words. Can words be eternal? Could we say that they are discovered rather than created? David Kaplan (1990) argues against the notion that "a word has some fixed and perfect Platonic form" (100). According to Kaplan, words cannot be understood as eternal types, because a) they evolve over time and b) they are created (100-111). Irmak (2018) argues that words are abstract artifacts, like musical works, fictional characters and computer programs, in contrast to eternal abstract objects like numbers or sets. They are abstract because although located in time, they aren't located in space, and they are artifacts because they are created by a linguistic community with a purpose (1139). Words are not Platonic entities, or types (if we take types to lack spatiotemporal location) (1145). The artifactual nature of words is apparent considering it is very difficult to imagine that communication is not purposeful. Communication requires a mutual understanding, and this implies a collective intentionality that is "required for the creation and survival of new words" (1147). Words are purposeful and intentional, hence they are artifacts.

The words we encounter in folk songs usually tell some story that contains historically-bound concepts, such as land ownership, arranged marriage, duties of kinship etc. which shows that these lyrics are created, altered and embedded in culture and history. They are words that make sense in a community that recognizes them. The claim that these concepts are eternal concept-types waiting to be instantiated in folk songs is implausible.

The second component of the definition of lyrics is that “designed to be integrated with music.” To exist as intended, words need to be coupled with not only particular tunes, but also performative and formal aspects (such as rhyme, meter, and stress) that vary across languages, musical styles, and historical periods. These are not purely semantic properties, but instead poetic devices. They are created patterns that exist only as long as human language and culture that recognizes them exist. They’re not eternal laws of nature like gravity, but recurring tools in poetry across time and cultures, and each one is shaped by the linguistic and artistic conventions of its era.

It is also very common to find nonsense refrains in traditional ballads, such as the many versions of “The Elfin Knight”(Child 2): “Redio-tedio, toddle-bod-bedio/ Fum-a-lum-a-link, sup-a-loo-my-nee,” or refrains like “Parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme,” which are unrelated to the narrative content of the song (Bronson 1976, 7-12). In some oral variants, these refrains are one of the few consistent elements. They are bound by time, voice, and place; it is implausible to think that they are eternal.

In sum, Platonism cannot account for the metaphysics of lyrics in folk music. The words that constitute them are historically situated, created and sustained by linguistic communities. Their prosodic features—rhyme, meter, stress—are likewise contingent constructions, varying with language, style, and tradition. Even the seemingly nonsensical refrains that often persist across versions are inseparable from the performative contexts and relation to the phonetic aspect of the language they exist in

that give them life. Far from being timeless entities awaiting discovery, lyrics seem to be inseparable from the social and historical conditions of their creation and transmission.

Early collectors of folk music (such as Francis James Child) treated folk songs, mainly ballads, as literature and items of folklore rather than works of music. This notion changed in the years that followed and scholars traced the history and shape of the musical components of the folk songs with equal diligence. However, it is clear that the story makes the song what it is. Considering that lyrics and the stories they express play such a big role in the identity of a folk work, our account should explain what kind of a place the narrative content of lyrics has in the ontology of folk songs.

Simple Platonism would require that we treat the narrative content of the folk song as eternal and immutable, and the story as discovered rather than created. We still need a theory that allows us to account for different versions of the same story because that is how the stories in the folk songs are treated. Cray (2019) tries to salvage the traditional narratological idea that there is a distinction between a story and its telling, from Smut's criticism of previous ontologies of stories (Chatman's complete account, strict theory, type theory) which fail to respect the distinction. The complete account and strict theory take stories to be sets of some sort, and the type theory takes stories to be types, all of which are abstracta. Cray argues that thinking about stories as concreta is better for explaining how they are creatable, causal, and spatiotemporally traceable entities (150-152).

For Cray, a story is a *concrete idea for narrative manifestation* (153). By that they mean they take ideas to be "fusions of causally and historically interrelated token mental states which all share content" (152). If we take mental states to be physical states, i.e. concrete, then ideas as fusions of mental states will also be concrete. A telling is that narrative manifestation of that story. A story must contain enough content (events, characters, setting, perhaps theme or form) to plausibly support a telling, but can vary in how detailed or vague that content is. There are two types of tellings: versional and generative. In the versional tellings, the story already exists, and the telling is an attempt to manifest that idea. Its success depends on whether the telling displays enough of the story's content. Generative telling, on the other hand, is when the story comes into being with the telling (154-155).

Cray distinguishes between story-types and stories. For example, because of their distinct content and causal history, *Maid in Manhattan* and Disney's *Cinderella* are different stories, but they bear sufficient similarity in their content that they still could be grouped as tokens of Cinderella story-type: "The distinction between story and story-type, then, is just an instance of the more general distinction between idea and idea-type" (154). In different tellings, the content of the story might differ —the ship carpenter might turn into the house carpenter, for example— but that doesn't necessarily mean they tell different stories, if they both display the same underlying idea. But if they diverge too far, they might count as different stories, even if they belong to the same story-type.

What does this mean for folk songs? Let's look at an example. The story of "Matty Groves" could be this: a nobleman's wife has an affair with a lower-class man, and when the nobleman discovers it he punishes them. In some versions, or tellings, the name of the protagonist is Matty, in others it is Little Musgrave; the lord may challenge Matty to a duel, or kill him in bed; in the end the lord might lament the affair, or he might kill his wife too. These are all tellings of the same story. As long as the sequence of betrayal, discovery and punishment, and the character dynamics are preserved, the changes in character names, tone, or moral framing do not necessarily change the story. However, if someone were to rewrite the song with the wife escaping and Matty surviving, that might be a new story, created by generative telling.

We don't need to commit to the idea that folk songs are concrete rather than abstract, or that they are types, but we need to have a theory that gives us the tools to distinguish different stories from each other while still being able to group versions of a song under the same name. In order to postulate that folk songs are eternal abstract objects we would need to think about their narrative content as eternal and discovered rather than created, which is not compatible with how folk songs are treated. This idea does not account for adaptation across time and region, where the folk song is retold in different details but the core idea persists. In the folk practice, the same story can legitimately exist in many different, equally valid forms. Thus, simple Platonism is inadequate as an ontology of folk songs for two reasons: first, because lyrics are essential to their identity, and they cannot be accounted for by sound structure alone; and second, because how

they are created, transmitted and recognized in the context of tradition do not align with the idea of an eternal abstract object. A more nuanced framework should be able to explain the necessary role of lyrics and the genealogy of the song as part of the folk song's ontology.

4.2 Historical Properties are Essential

Arthur Danto (1981) argues that two paintings that are perceptually indiscernible could differ in their ontological status as an artwork if they have different histories. He says that "to see something as art at all demands nothing less than […] an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art" (135). The aesthetic elements of an object alone are not sufficient for its ontological status as an artwork.

> [I]t is essential to our study that we understand the nature of an art theory, which is so powerful a thing as to detach objects from the real world and make them part of a different world, an art world, a world of interpreted things. What these considerations show is that there is an internal connection between the status of an artwork and the language with which artworks are identified as such, inasmuch as nothing is an artwork without an interpretation that constitutes it as such (135).

How an object becomes an artwork is through this transfiguration; it is an ontological shift that is grounded in history and theoretical framework. Similarly, the difference between revivalist folk and traditional folk is established this way; recall the example of a Bob Dylan song and a traditional folk song from §1 of this paper. If a song is not traceable to a particular tradition it might resemble a folk song aesthetically but ontologically it is different. The song is a "transfigured" sound event in this sense, it means what it does because of the tradition it is in, not only because of how it sounds.

Folk song indexes use a combination of criteria to identify a song. They look at the core narrative, motifs, refrains or set phrases, and melodic line/tune to tell that a particular recording is a version of a particular song and not the other. For example, in the two versions of the song "Daemon Lover" to "The House Carpenter," there are significant changes to the narrative structure of the song, but it is categorized under the same number. In the version labeled 243 A in Child's anthology, the earlier version, the opening line "well met, well met, my own true love" is absent, despite overall being used to identify the song's later versions. The version labeled as 243 B is different in its narrative structure and motifs as well: the names of the main characters Jane Reynolds and James Harris are abandoned, there is no mention of former vows, the spirit from the sea in the former version has become a mortal man, whose material wealth is now part of the story, etc. The secularization of the story by changing the spirit to a mortal former lover signifies a change in motif and plot elements — themes of sin and divine providence are replaced by law and order (Atkinson & Roud 2014, 208).

This example poses problems for claims that the sound structure is essential, and that the identity of the work depends on fidelity to an abstract type. The practice of folk music categorization shows that 243A and 243B are treated as versions of the same work, despite significant deviation. These deviations aren't enough to consider these two versions as distinct works, because the historical continuity remains. A change in the historical/contextual elements of a classical work (such as the discovery of the true

author) may not change its ontological status, but for a work to be correctly identified as belonging to a folk tradition we must be able to trace its genealogy.

4.3 Temporal Flexibility

To say that artworks are temporally flexible means that “they are susceptible to change in their qualities over time” (Rohrbaugh 2003, 178). One of Jerrold Levinson’s arguments in objection to musical Platonism is that works cannot be identical to sound, because other elements such as historical/contextual properties are essential to them. For example, the “Mannheim rockets,” loud ascending scale figures for unison strings, are one of the many devices used in Johann Stamitz’s works. This device heard in Stamitz’s works in the context of his earlier works, the works of his contemporary Mozart, and the Napoleonic wars makes it novel and exciting. In today’s musical landscape it would only be “funny,” according to Levinson (1980, 12).

In response, Peter Kivy gives the example of works formerly thought as early works of J. S. Bach, but have since turned out to be mature works of J. C. Bach. Kivy says that this new historical information does change the context of the works, but it does not damage the Platonist intuition that contextual elements are inessential, because we think of the discovered works not as a new works, but the same works with a different history (1987: 246). In this example of course the historical/contextual elements of the work

don’t enter into the work itself. However, the folk song poses a challenge for this view, because the changes in the context of a song can manifest in its content.

The changes in folk songs can be either functional or unintentional. For example, the ballad “Lady Margaret” has been sung in the Ozarks as “Liddy Margaret,” or “Lydia Margaret” because the aristocratic title lady no longer made sense to the singers and audience, therefore resulting in a functional change in the content of the work. As for the unintentional changes, there is the concept of a mondegreen: a mispronunciation of a word or a phrase caused by mishearing, resulting in a new meaning. This term was coined by American writer Sylvia Wright, when she recounted mishearing a line in an old English ballad “laid him on the green” as “Lady Mondegreen.” For example, in the song “Twelve Days of Christmas,” the earliest known print has “four colly birds,” (colly meant black, referring to blackbirds), but as we see in Frederic Austin’s 1909 arrangement of *The Twelve Days of Christmas* replaced “four colly birds” with “four calling birds.” The changes to the lyrics and the narrative content of the song therefore happen in virtue of what makes sense to that community. If the title “lady” doesn’t have a place in that community’s vocabulary it is changed with another word that does, or if a word is mistaken for another, so long as the changed meaning isn’t incoherent for the community it isn’t corrected but instead replaces the previous word. In this way what makes sense for the community determines what kind of changes can occur with lyrics.

It appears that over time, the contextual changes surrounding the folk song can alter its content as well. Julian Dodd (2007) argues that we can explain putative temporal flexibility in works by “redescribing the putative cases in which works change as cases in which there really exist a series of (inflexible) works that differ in their intrinsic properties” (87). According to this Platonist view, it makes more sense to think of different versions as distinct works. Another point that Dodd makes is that when the lyrics of a song change, the previous lyrics are still available to us. For a work to undergo genuine change, the pre-change version should not be available anymore, but this would not be the case in folk music. So, why not think that “The House Carpenter” and “The Daemon Lover” are two distinct works? Why think that cultural memory and genealogy are ontologically significant?

To say that structurally distinct versions of a song are different works ignore the mode of existence for folk songs. Ethnomusicologists, archivists, scholars and folk performers treat versions not as different works but as versions of the same song. This practice includes tracing the versions genealogically and classifying field recordings or collections of broadsides etc. under a common identifier (such as the Roud index). I argue that this practice of categorization is ontologically salient. When we give an ontology of entities such as money, legal objects, games, or languages etc., we factor in the intuition that these entities exist in virtue of institutions and practices that recognize them. For example, we accept that the nature of money is not determined by an intrinsic feature of a coin or a bill but instead by the practices, institutions, and conventions that surround it.

CHAPTER 5

FOLK SONGS AS STRATIFIED OBJECTS: AN INGARDENIAN ALTERNATIVE

The persistence of “Matty Groves” across centuries and geographies demonstrates that folk music cannot be understood within ontological frameworks that presuppose a fixed score, author, or canonical version. Instead, the identity of a folk song is secured through its genealogy: its survival depends on the practices of the communities that sustain it. The notion of anchoring provides a useful tool for clarifying this position. By recognizing that the anchor of a folk song is its genealogy, we gain a more accurate account of how such works persist despite continuous transformation. This not only rules out Platonism as an adequate ontological framework but also highlights the distinctive character of folk music in contrast with other genres, where canonical recordings, authoritative scores, or definitive performances often play a central role. This analysis also suggests that the ontology of folk music is best approached through a meta-

ontology that treats the ways practitioners themselves treat works in this tradition as ontologically salient. So, what view explains folk songs best?

First, it is clear that folk songs are multilayered and not monolithic. We need an ontological framework capable of distinguishing between different kinds of elements (such as musical, lyrical, and communal) that interact without collapsing them into a single essence. Second, said framework should be able to explain how a work can persist across variants while still constraining which ones count as legitimate. Finally, it should explain unity through the cooperation of heterogeneous components, showing how a work can be experienced as a coherent whole despite being built from elements that belong to different ontological categories. These points set the stage naturally for a stratified, polyphonic theory of artworks similar to Roman Ingarden's ontological framework.

Ingarden (1989) says that film is "a polyphonic work in which very different qualitative moments cooperate and lead to harmonies and disharmonies of different kinds. […] a whole produced synthetically from these heterogeneous qualities, that also embodies artistic values of its own" (323). Folk songs, I argue, share this polyphonic structure. The lyrical and musical parts of a folk song, as we noted before, are separable, and have distinct ontological structures. The strata of folk songs can be identified as 1) music 2) lyrics and 3) conscious acts of the community.

5.1 Music

An essential part of this stratified object is the music. Simple Platonism requires that we treat musical works as discovered, given that they are eternal. This produces some peculiar conclusions. Peter Kivy (1897) says that Pythagoras discovering his theorem, Mozart coming up with the allegro section of the overture to Don Giovani, and Edison thinking of putting the tungsten filament in an evacuated container are all creative achievements not different than each other (249). Dodd (2000) similarly draws an analogy between Einstein's discovery of the special theory of relativity and the composition of *In This House, On This Morning*. In his theory, "[the] sound structure has always existed, but it took a composer with a huge musical imagination and sensitive feel for the history of jazz to discover it and score it," just like the special theory of relativity required someone with the creative and imaginative qualities of Einstein (428). Now I have argued that simple Platonism fails to explain the existence of the folk song for many reasons, but we don't have to discard entirely this intuition that there is an element of discovery in musical production. We can explain it without treating the work itself as an eternal and therefore discovered object, which is another strength of Ingarden's ontological framework.

In his reply to Kivy's simple Platonism, Levinson (2011) argues that music-historical properties are essential to the work's identity.

> If we wish to stress the sense in which [the *Tristan und Isolde*] chord seems anything but simple, then we are shifting, once again, to Wagner's compositional

> appropriation of this already-available chord, and to its artistic functioning and significance in its passage, in the composition as a whole, and in the context of music history at that time. […] we may agree, and in fact insist, that the large object that consists of the notes of *Tristan und Isolde* in sequence, and which contains the famous chord a number of times, *does* preexist Wagner's compositional activity. But such an object is not yet the *work,* and Kivy cannot just *assume* that it is (220)

Ingarden (1989) distinguishes “four different pairs of opposite existential moments”(109). One of those is self sufficiency: If an object’s being “involves a necessary coexistence with some other entity […] in the unity of a whole,” that entity is existentially non-self sufficient (147). If an object’s essence does not require such a requirement, then it is self sufficient. Ingarden gives the example of “redness” and “red color.” Redness is self sufficient, whereas red color must coexist with “the moment ‘coloration’ that occurs in the same whole,” and therefore is not self sufficient.

A single sound, maybe even a chord can exist self sufficiently, compatible with the way the Platonists imagine musical works to exist. Composers can conceive of a pure sound on its own, and the sound may very well not need another thing to exist conceptually. However, a melody requires a sequence of notes in time, and the work (that is made up of many more elements than the melody) cannot be self sufficient, because it depends on the creative activity of the composer, “the compositional appropriation of the already available chord” as Levinson (2011) says. Just like a color patch on a wall, or the inside of a cup, the musical work does not exist self sufficiently but instead depends on other things, or other “moments” that occur in the same whole, to exist.

5.2 Lyrics

Ingarden (1973) argues that literary works are composed of four strata: I. Linguistic Sound Formations, II. Meaning Units, III. Represented Objects, and IV. Schematized Aspects. I will first explain what they are, and then propose that we can apply this framework on folk songs.

Ingarden starts his inquiry into I with what the linguistic formations (words, sentences, and sentence complexes) are. In each of these formations, there are two components: "a determinate *phonic material*, which is differentiated in manifold ways and variously ordered, and, on the other, the *meaning* that is 'bound up' with it" (35). The simplest one of these formations is the word, which is made up of its meaning, and its word sound. Ingarden argues that our concept of meaning is essentially connected to a particular word sound, therefore, if we eliminated this stratum, the next one (of meaning units) would disappear. From a phenomenological standpoint, when a determinate word sound is "apprehended" by the reader, this leads the reader to intend the *objectivity* corresponding to that meaning of the word, which is determined by the word sound. So the word sound is not only indispensable to what the literary work of art is and how meaning is construed, but also to the experience of it.

As for stratum II, a feature of note is that the sentence appearing as a unit is in virtue of its meaning content (given that there is no "sentence sound" that is analogous to the

word sound). The word meanings constitute this meaning content of a sentence, indicates the sentence's "intentional correlate," such as a state of affairs.[9] That brings us to stratum III, of represented objects, which constitute the world which is depicted in a literary work. These objects are things, persons, events, and so on, as well as states of affairs.

Schematized aspects exist in the represented objects and the states of affairs *projected* in the sentence. When the reader reads the work, these schematized aspects are *concretized* by the reader, who draws from the contents of formerly experienced concrete aspects and reads into the work various details, "fulfilling" the qualities in the content of the said schematized aspects. This is stratum IV of the literary work of art. Schematized aspects can also "hold in readiness" a more complex object of representation, ones that we detect in metaphors, similes, and images (265). When these aspects are concretized, they project a different object than the previously represented ones —the object is suddenly seen in a new light. Concretization also happens in "metaphysical qualities," such as the "sublime," "tragic" or "grotesque" (297).

Why is Ingarden's approach is especially desirable for folk song lyrics? First, it centers meaning at the sentence/utterance level rather than at isolated words. Folk lyrics routinely trade words that are functionally equivalent in context (e.g., "four colly birds"

[9] There is a difference between the states of affairs created by the sentence and those that exist independently of conscious acts. The sentences of a literary work are therefore "quasi-judgments," the states of affairs are not asserted to be existing in fact. This is why a literary work of art is able to form its own world, so to say, by creating an illusion of reality, which is essential to its aesthetic character.

vs “four calling birds”). Ingarden’s point that an intended word meaning is itself determined by the sentence’s role in creating a state of affairs makes those substitutions intelligible as variations that preserve the same represented objectivity. That avoids treating variants as errors or unrelated texts.

Secondly, it keeps aesthetic judgment sensitive to structure. Because Ingarden links the final “polyphonic harmony” to how strata are constituted and interwoven, critics can evaluate variations by how well their concretizations realize the work’s schematic potentials and not by strict textual identity. This maps onto how folk scholars have been viewing and categorizing folk songs. Additionally, this polyphonic harmony is also constituted by (has another stratum of) music in folk song lyrics, as opposed to other forms of literary works of art.

In sum, the four strata and their interconnectedness as we have seen give a ready vocabulary to describe how certain prosodic or melodic constraints can drive creative choices resulting in in variation, while the represented objectivity remains shared. Different versions inherit the same schematized objectivities (characters, actions, narrative). Two versions can vary on one stratum while remaining constant on another. For example, the stratum of word sound changes (different dialectal pronunciations), but the represented objectivity (the story of a lover lost in sea) stays the same. Each singer/listener, in performance, fills in indeterminate spots differently. These are distinct concretizations of the same underlying schematic formation. Another important feature

is that this schematic formation, with its spots of indeterminacy, invite improvisation, and the concretization explains how memory-based reconstructions produce plausible variants. This means that we can explain versions as partial realizations of the same schematized formation. In this sense, genealogy is the anchor because it constrains which concretizations are acceptable.

5.3 Dependence on the Conscious Acts of a Community

Ingarden (1989) argues that the existence and persistence conditions of some cultural objects are different from their physical basis. For example, a church has the physical building as its “ontic foundation,” however it continues to exist through “certain acts of consciousness and construals by mental subjects, usually by a mental community (religious, artistic, or that of a class)” (206). These cultural objects, such as flags and churches, present a challenge, namely that they appear both to be part of the physical world and also depend on minds. Thomasson (2005) argues that Ingarden foresees the “lying in too narrow an understanding of the senses in which an entity may be mind-dependent, and too narrow a set of ontological categories for entities there may be” (116). Similarly, I think Ingarden’s understanding of objects that depend on a community’s conscious acts can help us make sense of folk songs, which are very intimately connected to those acts both in content and mode of existence.

In addition to the strata of literary works and the stratum of music, folk songs also have the stratum that architectural works have, namely the conscious acts of a community. This example is important for applying Ingarden's framework to folk songs because through his analysis of objects like churches and flags we can conclude that the purely intentional object can be constituted by not just the conscious acts of an author but a community as well. Folk songs depend on the memory of a community not only because they are remembered by that community but because they are shaped and even get their place as traditional folk songs according to these conscious acts.

How do the conscious acts of a community alter the identity of the folk song? Ingarden thinks that the work of art is a "schematic formation," so it has "places of indeterminacy." In the case of classical music, for example, the score leaves some elements undetermined, and each performance fills in the indeterminacies through a performance. The work itself permits legitimate concretizations, i.e. performance, which is not identical to the work but is instead a concretized performance. In this example, as we've seen in the previous chapter, the score has the role of anchoring the work. We can understand now anchoring as the act of prescribing what a legitimate concretization of a work is. The places of indeterminacy are significantly restricted in classical music compared to folk songs. In the case of the folk song, part of "the work" is the series of concretizations that acquire an ideal unity through repeated communal performance. Its other strata (music and lyrics) are therefore fluid and ontically dependent on the genealogical continuity of performance.

CONCLUSION

Folk songs achieve their identity through the interaction of the strata of music, lyrics, and conscious acts of a community. Understood this way, each stratum of a folk song contains indeterminacies that allow for variation and improvisation, i.e. different concretizations, while the song's identity remains intact because of the constraints posed by a genealogical anchor. The result is a living work: a folk song continues to exist and evolve only through repeated communal engagement, yet its core artistic unity persists. Understanding folk songs in this way highlights how they continue to endure and adapt for centuries.

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