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Historical Linguistic Analysis of Traditional English Christmas Carols.

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Historical Linguistic Analysis of Traditional English Christmas Carols

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by

Tami L. Baker

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ABSTRACT

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by

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Through the process of historical linguistics it is possible to determine approximate dates of authorship and meaning that establish the conventions of a particular genre. To accomplish such a study, elements of phonology, morphology, and syntax are compared and the results create a field of descriptors representative of a style of writing of a period.

By using the method on eight well-known Christmas carols, four were determined to have been written prior to the dates previously speculated, possibly originating in the Middle Ages. The remaining four were written based on the conventions set by the earlier medieval carols.

DEDICATION

       With all of my heart and from the depth of my soul, I dedicate this work to my mother and father, my wonderful husband, and our two beautiful children. If not for their guidance, love, and infinite patience, this thesis would never have been possible. Believe me when I say here, for the world to see, that I appreciate all that you do for me and wonder every day how I could have ever been so blessed.

ACKNOWLEGDMENTS

It is with deepest gratitude that I thank all of the scholars whose works both challenged and inspired my research. Without the immense pool of communal knowledge that I have accessed, I would have been at a loss. Mere credit in the bibliography would not have done your assistance justice.

To my committee, who accepted what very easily could have been dismissed as a strange topic with enthusiasm and creativity, you have my most heart-felt appreciation. Thank you for your time and attention. I hope to someday follow your example in my own teaching career.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Originally a song associated with a specific type of dance, the carol has wound its way

through history retaining elements of each language and locality it has touched to stand with

many modern people as a beloved tradition of the Christmas season. As an institution, it has

been extolled and reviled, used and banned by the likes of such historical figures as St.

Augustine, St. Francis of Assisi, and Oliver Cromwell. This history of longevity, and tradition of

use for any given purpose, makes the subject of Christmas carols especially appropriate for a

historical linguistic study. The focus of this research has been to show how historical linguistic

techniques are used to analyze and classify texts within a genre.

Historical linguistics is a science of language that makes use of comparative methodology

to study evidence of language change in both diachronic and synchronic patterns. Identification

of patterns and similarities helps linguists to make judgments about the ways we use, and are

affected by, language. The evidence of our constantly changing means of communication exists

in many forms. It can be phonological when we identify changing sounds, morphological when

we find changes evidenced by differences in meaning, and syntactic when we see changes of

word order and the structure of communication. All of these changes appear both diachronically,

or across a span of time, and synchronically, within a specific time period.

As an extension of the study of historical linguistics, I reviewed the body of criticism

involving history and was intrigued by a number or theories. Linguistics, which proved to be

applicable to all aspects of language, but vague on the subject of textual analysis, was

substantiated by critical theory. Especially useful was the concept of historically connected

communal information that is part of the environment from which an artist of any type creates a work. This idea is fundamental to my research and helped me to categorize the carols according to the linguistic evidence.

To support the communal knowledge concept, it is necessary to reconstruct as much of the relevant information as possible. I have provided this background to prove its importance in light of the linguistic facts I have assembled in reference to each carol. Most carols now considered traditional according to popular standards did not appear in any written form until the folk-song and carol revival of the early to mid 18th century when concerned scholars such as William Sandys, Davies Gilbert, and the founders of the Folksong Society of England scoured the English countryside to produce written records of carols and folk-songs before they were lost for future generations. Some carols and their music had appeared in broadsides and lyric sheets, largely hymns in the case of the lyric sheets, but most scholarly work done with carols since the mid 18th century has been based on the previously mentioned collections.

Throughout my research I have occasionally referred to the music attributed to certain carols as it pertains to the dating of the carol by musical scholars. Because I am not claiming any specific musical scholarship of my own and would be hard pressed to form my own opinions on the comparison and contrast of the music in differing time periods, I have limited these references to a minimum. I tried to keep the research as strictly to the linguistic elements of the carols as possible

Based on those linguistic elements the eight carols I chose to analyze broke into two categories based on approximate date of origin. The carols that belong to the period before the English Parliament ban on Christmas I have designated as medieval in semantics and style. Including "The Holly and the Ivy," "The First Nowell," "God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen," and

"The Wassail Song," none of the carols in this category has a clearly identified author or date of origin, although generally all assumed to have been written between the 16th and 17th centuries. In this distinction I conflicted with the common dating of these four carols, but I have provided ample linguistic facts to support my hypothesis. It was important to make the parameters of this category clear because I used them as a base for comparison to establish the second category.

The second set of carols, "Hark! How All the Welkin Rings," "Good King Wenceslas," "The Twelve Days of Christmas," and "Deck the Halls," represent what I have referred to in this paper as carols of the medieval style. They differ in authorship and date of origin, but I believe they are a cohesive unit in that they were all composed with the medieval carols that went before them in mind. For the authors, identifiable or otherwise, of this second category of carols the conventions of carol writing were established by the songs that preceded their work. In order to prove this I have gathered linguistic evidence that places them in one time period inconsistent with medieval elements of the carols. The reasoning of the individual authors in adopting this style is explained in that section as it is specific to each case I discussed.

In making sweeping generalizations about Christmas carols as a genre there are certain dangers of which I have been aware throughout my research. Carols in many cases are not the product of only one author, but various singers who have altered their lyrics, intentionally or not, over the life of the carol. When ultimately transcribed, those lyrics that had been common knowledge for centuries were often given a static form only in one version subject to the discretion of the person holding the pen. The synchronic variations found between texts of carol collectors of the early 1900s, whether due to regional differences, miscommunications, or writer preferences, may very well have been only a sample of the true number of variations. It is possible that the written representations of the older carols are as distorted from their original

forms as distant images through frosted glass. The problem of limited source texts is acknowledged by all researchers interested in language change, as well as those interested in devaluing such a study that would question the good of applying solid scientific techniques to such an inconsistent subject.

In response to the these questions in my own mind, I remind myself that as unreliable as any written work may be in relation to its author's original intentions and the power of the words to communicate that message, we are forced to rely on that text as the only physical evidence of that communication. In that respect, the techniques of historical linguistic analysis may not completely reconstruct the author's intentions or the original reader's, or in this case singer's, response, but it can help to clarify the picture. At the very least the combination of historical and linguistic information provide us with insight into the effect of language change on a work normally transmitted orally and the place of that work in history, as well as one perspective of the work's overall meaning.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL LIGUISTICS

      The research that provided the theoretical backbone for this study of Christmas carols came from an eclectic group of readings that may at first glance seem too dissimilar to be brought together in one bibliography. However, upon reflection each added a necessary piece to the puzzle, and I am indebted to each of the scholars whose work I found both insightful and inspirational. Having chosen carols as my medium, after finding more questions than answers in their lyrics, I sought to emulate the work of such professionals as Winfred Lehmann (1973), Walter W. Skeat (1970), and Roger Fowler (1986), each an authority in his linguistic and/or critical specialization. It is this blending of linguistics and critical theory that I found to be both a challenge and a path of infinite discovery as I sought not only to practice but to analyze the field of study I had chosen for this thesis.

      Although my initial quest for recent historical linguistic research focusing on Christmas carols proved less than fruitful, I did find one article specific to the topic I had chosen, "Polish Christmas Carols and their Cultural Context" by Jerzy Bartminski. Unfortunately because I was unable to obtain more than the extended citation for that work, I pulled together as much as I could about historical linguistics and its application to specific texts pertaining to other topics of research. Inspired by the work of Gloria T. Delamar, Mother Goose: From Nursery to Literature, in which she discussed the origins of nursery rhymes in the context of their etymological components, I found that linguistic study provided an objective, scientific approach to the texts of the carols. Further research into historical linguistics itself supported this initial impression.

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Beginning with the work of Otto Jespersen, specifically his <u>Growth and Structure of the English Language</u> reprinted in 1982 from his 1938 book, I strengthened my linguistic foundations while searching for the ideas that led to the fundamental concepts of historical linguistics. Introductory materials proved helpful in defining the comparative method and means of language reconstruction. Anthony Arlotto, Erwin A. Esper, and Raimo Anttila, whose introductory books were all published in 1972 and 1973 during a particularly popular period for historical linguistic study, provided adequate background into the field and its application to language but little in the way of specific application to texts. Even in the more recent historical linguistic work of Lyle Campbell and Roger Lass, language was the focus; the application of theory, although discussed to clarify their arguments, received a cursory mention at best.

It was in the introductory book by Winfred P. Lehmann that I was to find the first solid lead to the textual studies applications of historical linguistics. In <u>Historical Linguistics: An Introduction</u>, Lehmann supported historical linguistic theory by using the example of Shakespeare's Sonnet XI to show language change (1). The evidence of the change, precluded by our lack of understanding as modern readers, was found through a scientific analysis of the sonnet's phonology, morphology, and syntax. This supported the research I wanted to do on carols in theory. Because it was possible to use phonological, morphological, and syntactic evidence to show language change when the date of the text is known, then by extension if we were to remove one of the variables, such as the date of the text, it would be possible to estimate that date from the degree of language change. This concept was instrumental to my argument, but as yet I had been unable to find a specific case study that supported this theory.

What I felt had to be possible was to apply the principles of linguistics in a descriptive method to uncover previous meanings of specific terms that would provide a clearer picture of

the original intention behind the entire work. I will discuss the value of such a study once I have explained where my search for specific examples of the linguistic influence on the dating and use of terms led me next. The study of etymology proved to be an inexhaustible stream of individual research challenging the meanings and dates of use of a variety of words in the English language. It was to the etymologists that I turned for examples of the comparative method used to define words in context.

Through the research of etymology and semantics, I found more of the close associations between language and culture than were discussed in historical linguistics. The fact that language and culture are intertwined was acknowledged in historical linguistics, but speculations are directed toward the language for its own sake rather than the meaning of specific texts. In etymology and semantics, the change in word meaning is the focus, and these changes are often culturally directed. According to Leo Spitzer in his 1948 book, Essays in Historical Semantics, "meaning is the most sensitive barometer of cultural climate"(32).   But here again I found myself working backwards from the written theory because my intention was to derive meaning from the cultural climate or history of the period when the text was written, or suspected to have been written.

The Reverend Walter W. Skeat published two books at the beginning of the linguistically productive 1970s, Principles of English Etymology and The Science of Etymology, which provided background information and instruction closer to the direction I expected my research to follow. Using linguistic clues, Skeat traced the meanings of words to their most probable roots while also making use of historical and cultural evidence. With this technique as a model, I looked for similar examples of current research and was able to find several from the last decade.

Articles by Andrew Breeze and Robert McColl Millar dispute common etymologies of words in current dictionaries using both cultural and linguistic evidence obtained by the use of the words in context. In two separate articles, Breeze relates words that had been attributed to French origin back to Celtic terms, which makes more sense in light of historical events and relations between the contributing groups of people. Millar also points to logical problems in the background of words of Scottish origin, which could be explained if dialect differences are taken into account. In a slightly different vein, Manfred Gorlach compares two editions of the same book, <u>The Kalendre of the Newe Legende of Englande</u>, in order to provide a synchronic example of language change and its effect on the meanings of words. The combination of these elements expanded the possibilities of linguistics in my Christmas carol research but left some areas of the puzzle open.

Still unanswered were the questions that referred to the text itself and what type of meaning I hoped to gain from it. I remained focused on the origins of the lyrics, what could have been their intended message and how language change had affected the information they now conveyed. These are controversial issues involving the relationship between the intent of the author, whether or not that is truly discernable or even important, and the comprehension of the reader, or in this case often the hearer. In order to clarify my intention in this research and explain it in the most concrete terms possible, I had to delve into the study of historical criticism.

Historical linguistics evaded much of the controversy that developed surrounding historical criticism by focusing so strictly on the language and the comparative method using the text simply as an example of the language. There does not seem to be the opposition to Lehmann, Campbell, and Lass in the way that the works of Northrop Frye, D. W. Robertson, and Stephen Greenblatt are compared and contrasted to one another. Time could also play a large

part in my view of this issue however because it seems that I have missed the heyday of Historicism and even New Historicism. According to J. R. Jackson, these schools of thought have become "something of an intellectual backwater" destined to "sink into unlamented oblivion" (3). However, I believe, as he demonstrates through the rest of his book, that there is an inevitability of inclusion of history into the study of texts.

A review of the various schools of thought in historical criticism led me to the following conclusions. Northrop Frye would have us reject our modern point of view in favor of the stand point of the audience of a particular period, which is a sentiment that D. W. Robertson, Jr. would agree aids in our understanding of the text. The difficulty inherent in this position is best discussed again from the linguistic point of view. Because misinterpretation is a given possibility to a linguist who accepts it as a dangerous but unavoidable side effect of our business of language, the only information we can rely on is the way each word in the text was used at the time it was printed. Only by weaving these pieces back together are we able to begin to see a work through a reconstructed context similar to those readers of its original period. I say reconstructed because we cannot hope to get the whole picture exactly as it was. Time has altered both the language and the perspective too much to reproduce any period exactly. In the same way that people attending recreations of Renaissance fairs arrive in cars, we arrive at a text with a modern point of view that cannot be completely expunged even for the sake of research.

Confident that I was on the right track and that criticism could provide the necessary perspective on the text as a whole, I consulted books on textual studies and criticism written by a variety of authors over the past thirty years. The overview was enlightening and I was reassured by the number of opposing opinions that certainly left room for mine. Semantics, Linguistics, and Criticism by William H. Youngren influenced me greatly in that Youngren incorporates the

fundamental aspects of linguistics into his applications of critical theory. The questions posed by the science of language acquisition and communication may prevent us from ever knowing the true intentions of an author with whom we cannot communicate first hand. During this period of my research I also consulted works involving psychological aspects of communication such as <u>When Words Lose Their Meaning</u> by James Boyd White, <u>Language and Human Behavior</u> by Derek Bickerton, and <u>Sociocultural Dimensions of Language Change</u> edited by Ben G. Blount and Mary Sanches to gain additional perspective.

While surveying the landscape of Historicism and New Historicism, I came into contact with the ideas of Stephen Greenblatt whose concept of the communal nature of history helped to solidify some of the disjointed feelings I still had concerning my research. The manner in which Greenblatt pursued his path of reasoning by establishing a historical set of conditions or a concept known to be in existence during a specific period and then revealing connections to one or more written works in accordance with the background information I found particularly helpful. It was through this concept of a community pool of information from which the authors dipped that I developed the idea that the conventions of carol creation could function in a similar manner. If existing carols, which formed a basis of carol conventions, could be established then authors, writing during a later period, may have used them as a reference for a variety of different reasons. The only missing link was a similar method of research that also incorporated linguistic elements as evidence.

<u>Linguistic Criticism</u> by Roger Fowler provided the final piece of the puzzle in grand fashion. Not only did Fowler discuss the science of language known as linguistics in reference to literary texts but also explained the value of this technique in the world of literary criticism. If language is the medium for the information we are given then it only make sense to analyze the

information in the context of our understanding of that means of communication. This practice should follow naturally as an extension of both linguistics and criticism and in fact some of the same techniques had been in use previously without such a designation. In reference to history, Fowler states that, "History, social structure, and ideology are major sources of knowledge and hypotheses in the framework of linguistic criticism" (12). History is also necessary to understanding in the context of linguistic criticism based on a fundamental component of discourse. Because communication is meant to be understood and our understanding is based on context clues, it is important to establish as much of the original context of the communication as possible to promote clear communication. If pieces of the puzzle are missing then the message can still be deciphered from the remaining context clues, but the communication is less reliable.

The pursuit of linguistic criticism, with a solid foundation in historical linguistics and the variety of historical criticism, presents challenges as appealing as the puzzles posed in well-written mystery novels. Facts exist in a wealth of sources from manuscripts and historical documents to the sociological, political, and economic aspects of a period that when placed against the backdrop of the human psychological condition can produce an accurate picture of the causes of language change and influence the interpretation of various written materials. I have enjoyed the infinite possibilities inherent in this type of research and hope to employ it in different applications in the future. Because there is no limit to the written representations of the language to be analyzed, constantly affected by language change, I am sure this will continue to be a valuable line of research.

CHAPTER 3

CAROL HISTORY

In order to place the carols and their linguistic elements in their appropriate historical context, it is necessary to have some background information about the history and traditions associated with the Christmas season. Much of this information is repeated in a variety of forms, subject to the purpose of the author, throughout the multitude of texts on the subject of Christmas.

Given that the actual birth date of Jesus Christ was and is the subject of much conjecture and controversy, a mutually agreeable date had to be chosen. Because most learned men at the time placed the date of the event as the 25th day of a debatable month, the decision came down to a time of year for the celebration. Although the birth was largely believed to have taken place in the spring, because according to the traditional facts shepherds and their flocks were in open fields at the time of the announcement, December was chosen in an attempt to supplant the pagan holidays of Bacchanalia or Saturnalia still celebrated by much of the populace at the time (Dawson 13). This practice of substitution for the purposes of inclusion and eventual conversion of pagan peoples to Christianity was to be a mainstay of the Catholic Church and a precursor of the conversion of the Anglo Saxons of the British Isles.

Many of the pagan people marked for conversion celebrated the longest night of the year and, having survived that night, the reaffirmation of the power of the sun. The Roman festival of Saturnalia was marked by drinking, games, and singing filling all with feelings of goodwill. To support the concept that all men were equal during this celebration, masters waited on their servants, great gifts of food and money were bestowed on the poor, and a mock king was

empowered to preside over the festival. Until its end, cooks and bakers were the only household staff allowed to work in order to keep the tide of food flowing (Miles 166).

In the same vein was the Roman festival of the Kalends, a New Year's celebration. During this holiday, new consuls were inducted into office and houses decorated with lights and greenery. Strenae, or gifts, were exchanged as well. The Mithraic religion, an early competitor to Christianity whose central figure was also purported to have been born on December 25th, celebrated the time of the winter solstice as the Birthday of the Unconquered Sun which was well established with its followers as early as 350 C.E. (Coffin 100).

Similar rituals existed throughout the British Isles prior to the introduction of Christianity. The Celts celebrated Samhain, a festival of the new year held in what is now November and marked by animal sacrifice, commemoration of the dead, and the creation of omens and charms to secure good luck for the coming year. Food and other gifts were set out as goodwill gestures toward "supernatural beings" believed to hold great power during this time of year.

The Anglo Saxons passed what they called Halig-monath, or holy month, with great zeal. There were meetings to be attended regarding the affairs of state while peoples of distant areas were brought together for the holiday, but once the matters of the ruling class were settled more festive events could take place. There was a great deal of mead and ale during many field sports matches as well as tests of skill and chance such as chess, backgammon and dice. Into this celebration was mixed the Druid tradition of reverence for natural elements as symbols for force of life beyond their control such as the holly and the ivy.

Christmas, introduced as a special feast in Rome by the middle of the fourth century can be traced in written Old English to the words "Cristes Masse" in 1038. Christ and Thor were

worshiped side by side for at least 150 years after the introduction of Christianity (Gregory 26).

The establishment of Christianity in pagan Britain was a slow process and was intended to be so.

The direction given to St. Augustine by Pope Gregory instructed him to invite the continuation of

existing rituals and traditions while gradually changing the focus of those practices to Christ

(Dawson 28). This condition extended to the music of the season, for although hymns that were

introduced to the Western Church by St. Ambrose in the fourth century (Keyte xvii) could have

their content strictly controlled within the church, the carols reflected the changing nature of the

people who created and sung them.

The distinction between carol and hymn should be discussed at this point. Carols could

contain both spiritual themes and secular content while hymns, the earliest often in Latin,

supported the serious, religious message of the church. The word *carol* either descends from the

Old French *carole* meaning "a choral song" or possibly from the Latin *corolla* meaning "little

crown or garland" because the first use recorded use of the word referred to a dance in a ring

accompanied by singing. I have chosen to focus on the carols that seem to have greater variations

than the hymns and therefore much more linguistic information to study.

By the fifteenth century, the traditions of the Christmas season were well established and

the functioning as the unifying factor that the church had meant them to be. There were

standardized holy days that were celebrated such as the feast of the Circumcision of Christ and

the feasts of the Virgin Mary each of which had its own rituals and songs as did each day of the

Octave, or the eight-day celebration culminating with the New Year festivities on January first.

The secular celebrations of the holidays also continued but were subject to local norms and

traditions in ways that at this time did not affect the practices of the church. This situation was

soon to change.

Beginning in the sixteenth century, the fragmentation of the church brought about by the Reformation created a difference in the celebration and acceptance of Christmas traditions. Although the attitude of the Lutheran faction toward carols and hymns remained positive due to Martin Luther's strong respect for the power of song in religious service, the English Church was influenced by other beliefs. The Puritans regarded the pagan overtones associated with the celebration of Christmas to be inseparable from the religious aspects. To them the entire holiday had become far too secular and they were not without high-ranking support. In 1644, Parliament banned Christmas and proclaimed that any shop owners not open for business on Christmas Day would be punished. The ban continued in England until 1660 and in Puritan Massachusetts until 1681.

Although not strictly adhered to by the general populace, the restriction of holiday celebration certainly put a damper on the spread and development of carols. Old carols continued to be passed in broadsides and chapbooks, but there were fewer and fewer songs of the quality to add and fuel the tradition. New songs that were created followed the hymn traditions approved by the church and gradually gained more acceptance for use in church services as the effects of the ban wore thin. The tide had turned and brought with it a wave of popularity for Christmas and its carols during the eighteenth century in England.

The Victorians breathed new life into Christmas at the same time embracing all of its old traditions. The catalyst for the change in attitude toward the holiday was the use of song in the Wesleyan Church. Music and song were essential elements in the Methodist spiritual practices that gradually gave credibility to the use of traditional carols within the walls of the church. The demand for such carols was fueled by a rise in medieval romanticism and a longing for the warmth of a season that seemed to have been on the verge of extinction.

An interesting modification in traditional Christmas philosophy brought about by the Victorians is the change in the communal nature of Christmas celebrations to an event that focused on individual families. The medieval feasts that benefited numerous families and peasant tenants required a group effort in materials, food, and work, adding to the spirit of goodwill normally associated with the season. This gathering of resources during the most difficult time of the year made the dark, harsh winters survivable both physically and mentally. The Victorians saw this as an inspiration, but those in a position of affluence did not need to look beyond their own home for a means of surviving the winter months. They transferred the feelings of communal goodwill largely to their own family circle, and that change is evident in the carols created during this time period.

The demand for medieval carols resulted in an explosion in texts by scholars combing the countryside for remnants of nearly forgotten songs. Often the carols varied from text to text reflecting the regional differences and preserving those lyrics without regard to the work of other carol recorders. The comparison of such differences can provide us with a wealth of linguistic information. Current carol scholars owe a great deal to the work of such people as Lucy E. Broadwood and Jane Byrd Radcliffe-Whitehead without whom many of the carols we now call traditional would have been lost. Through their diligence, we have a photograph of the state of carol singing during the second half of the 19th century, and the inspiration for many of the researchers who have followed them.

The original source materials consulted most often for scholarly work on carols are William Sandys' <u>Christmas Carols, Ancient and Modern</u> or Richard L. Greene's <u>The Early English Carols</u>. Both are credible sources of historical information as well as lyrics but this was not always the case in collected books of carols during this period. In many cases scholarship

was subject to the religious bias of the author with respect to tune and lyric selection. Carols of common origin and content, such as songs that included drinking and gaming references, were considered to have little moral or spiritual value and not likely to be included. It seems that often in the need to save the carol from extinction a priority in scholarship developed through which carols based in theology were deemed as worthy of rescue while "party songs" were not. This is a hindrance to the linguistic scholar who depends on many sources of materials to make comparisons and judgments as to the causes of change both synchronic and diachronic.

Another problem with carol scholarship is that some of the best sources of linguistic evidence are difficult to obtain. Many of the texts appeared only in their original printings and a broad search is necessary in order to lay hands on a copy. I was fortunate to find both Lucy E. Broadwood's English Traditional Songs and Carols published in 1908 and Edith Rickert's Ancient English Christmas Carols MCCCC to MDCC published in 1928. These texts and others such as The Laurel Unison Book by M. Teresa Armitage published in 1917 and The Concord Junior Song and Chorus Book (Boys and Girls) for Unison and Part Singing compiled by Archibald T. Davidson, Thomas Whitney Surette, and Augustus D. Zanzig added depth to my research by providing synchronic examples proving that some variations occurred simultaneously and were not products of each other over the course of time.

The texts I was unable to obtain in a physical hard copy were still present in spirit due to the constant reliance by previous researchers on the same materials for study. This was also true for some of the texts I did review. In the case of Joseph Ritson's Ancient Songs and Ballads, so much of his information had already been referenced in the scholarship I had previously read that except for confirming that information for myself, it hardly seemed necessary to open Mr. Ritson's book at all. Valuable collections such as Some Ancient Christmas Carols (1822) by

Davies Gilbert and <u>Songs of the Nativity</u> (1864) by William Henry Husk were referenced often in later works so that although I did not review them personally, I was able to benefit from their body of information. The repetition in scholarship did make at least the lyrics of some books less than illuminating once the source of the lyrics could be determined if it was not stated upfront. <u>The Oxford Book of Carols</u> (1928) may be considered by some to have been an influential text in carol study if those persons had not already read source materials used for the text.

The most current and critically well-received volume of Christmas carols including historical notations and references to original source materials is <u>The New Oxford Book of Carols</u>, edited by Hugh Keyte and Andrew Parrott, and published in 1998. The intention of the editors is to provide carolers with an "essential 'core' repertory of popular Christmas carols and hymns" (xi), but because their work is a combination of the original source materials and the current popular versions of the carols with notations on the difference between the two, it is a solid base text from which to begin diachronic research on the linguistic changes in the carols. It also contains a brief overview of the history of carol singing from which perspective can be gained as to the generally accepted background of carols and the cultural tides which shaped their existence.

Like many carol books, <u>The New Oxford Book of Carols</u> separates carols into two areas based on dating the lyrics and the music and further defines them based on distinguishing between geographic origins. The dates that they give for both the composed and traditional carols have been consistent with those given by other scholars I researched. The composed carols are those dated by the first printing by a known creator. The carols that have no known

author and whose actual date of origin can only be estimated are classified as traditional carols. I have made use of both types in this paper for reasons of determining defining factors.

In the interest of cataloguing variations in carols, I reviewed as many carol texts as possible. I tried to get an objective sampling by finding at least two from each decade between 1900 and 2000. Mostly songbooks for schools such as The Laurel Unison Book, Student's Edition by M. Teresa Armitage or for musical instrument instruction such as Piano Adventures – Christmas by Nancy and Randall Faber, these texts provided variations not present in the scholarly editions. The variations represented the analogous changes that have occurred in the lyrics often written from memory rather than from resource materials.

Aside from Sandys and Greene, who also provided a great deal in the background of Christmas and the history of carol singing, there were several texts that were repeatedly referenced by all the authors whose works I reviewed for my research. Not surprisingly they were all originally published during the late 19th and early 20th century carol revival when such information was in great demand. Christmas: Its Origin and Associations (1902) by W.F. Dawson, The Story of the Carol (1911) by Edmondstoune Duncan, and Christmas in Ritual and Tradition Christian and Pagan (1912) by Clement A. Miles traced the Christmas holiday from its earliest beginnings and provided valuable insight into the influences in the language that could have affected changes in the carols.

The last fifty years have seen another surge of texts on the history of Christmas and its music. The three previously mentioned texts were all reprinted in 1968, possibly in the wake of another extremely well written carol text that gave high praise to its predecessors. Erik Routley's The English Carol published in 1958 accurately brought together the prior scholarship on Christmas carols and presented it in an interesting and entertaining fashion without theologically moralistic overtones. Routley managed to put the joy of the season into a work

supported by sound factual information. Most recently the work of William Studwell has followed the same pattern. Studwell's <u>Christmas Carol Reader,</u> published in 1995, gives the modern beginning carol scholar insightful information with the appropriate references to source materials in an objective tone. Criticism is given to common myths that spread false information and theological issues are left to the students of religion. It is the perfect time to review the linguistic evidence with a careful eye and a mind open to all possibilities.

CHAPTER 4

MEDIEVAL CAROLS

The eight carols that I chose to study contained many of the same elements, such as

archaic language and theme, which indicated to me that they could have originated during the

Old English (OE) or Middle English (ME) linguistic periods. An air of mystery in a few cases

also proved irresistible as I sought to clarify terms that may have become incomprehensible over

time. As I worked with the carols I was able to divide them into two categories based on the

1644 ban on Christmas imposed by the English Parliament. I believe that the four carols that

existed prior to the ban, which I have labeled medieval carols, influenced the creation of the four

that followed, which are discussed in the next chapter as the carols in the medieval style.

The first of the carols I have researched, which I believe to be older than currently

postulated, is "The Holly and The Ivy." Most modern scholars have dated the carol after the

lifting of the ban on Christmas in England, but given the subject matter, phonology, and

etymology of the lyrics, I would surmise that the original date of creation would be closer to the

Middle English period.

The first known printing of the lyrics was in Cecil Sharp's <u>English Folk Carols</u> (1911)

reportedly from a broadside, a copy of which has never come to light, dated 1710. Because the

lyrics have remained unchanged in each successive reprint, it is safe to say that Sharp's book is

the source of the modern lyrics and that the oral tradition that I believe had carried the carol to

the 1710 broadside had not maintained it much beyond that point. As evidenced from the carols

I have researched, the same popularity that keeps a carol alive in the public imagination, allows

its words to be subjected to the whims of language change. The variations result from the constant handling by singers in differing areas with different interpretations of the lyrics.

The subject matter of the carol, the leaves of the holly bush and the ivy vine, has been the basis for numerous songs, riddles, and rhymes since the Romans and was especially popular as a metaphor for the medieval household. The holly, representing the male, and the ivy, representing the female, were the subject of many mock battles for power mimicking the power struggle inherent in the common situation of the male control of the tenants of the estate and the female control of the household staff. Although the use of both forms of greenery as decoration can be traced to the Roman festival of Kalends, or New Year, and the rituals of the Druids, neither of these traditions has shed any light on the origins of the lyrics of this carol.

Accepting that the carol is an allusion to the medieval battle of the sexes is not enough to place its origin in the Middle Ages. The convention of this personification has carried on much longer than the situation from which it was spawned. So it is to the linguistic analysis of the words that we turn for further proof. The syntax of the lyrics is simplistic and except for the location of the first line, has little implication in this case. The opening line, "The holly and the ivy," seems to have been positioned before the phrases "When they are full grown," and "Of all the trees that are in the wood," for emphasis which would be consistent with Old English (OE) syntax. Poetic license being what it is however, and having also been valid since before the OE period, it is just as possible that the author needed this positioning to achieve the desired rhyme as to conform with the conventions of OE or Middle English (ME) grammar.

The etymology of the lyrics provides for the possibility that the carol could have been dated in the Middle Ages. The words that form the basis of the lyrics are of early Germanic, Old French, and Old Norse origins. Although the spellings would have varied greatly at the time

they originated, the meanings would have been consistent with those of Modern English (MnE). The word *organ* (See Appendix A), which was used to refer to a wind instrument during the ME period, does not seem out of place to a modern reader who would make the assumption that a pipe or electric organ is being played. The use of *Christmas day* in the fifth verse could have easily been the modern replacement for *Yuletide*, which would have not only been true to the ME time period but also easier to sing than the current name for the day. The oral tradition would have carried the carol to the period when it was first recorded at a time when the spellings of the words had stabilized and the words would not have appeared archaic.

It is the phonological study of the lyrics that proves the most intriguing. Of the words essential to the lyrics, it is the words that rhyme which normally form the backbone of a song and give evidence of the creator's art. Normally these words would appear to be the least changed from the original formation of the song, because to alter them would change the intended meaning. However, in the case of the lyrics of "The Holly and the Ivy," the meanings of these simple, basic words have endured, but time has altered the pronunciations. Only two of the rhyming pairs, *thorn/morn* and *gall/all,* still rhyme in MnE, even taking British pronunciation into account. The pronunciations of the ME period best fit the words to reconstruct the rhyme scheme as it was intended.

The combination of this information may not be wholly conclusive, but it certainly does give one opportunity for discussion. If no oral tradition transmitted this carol and we accept its creation in the late 17th – early 18th century, then I find it difficult to explain both the author's use of holly and ivy as subjects and the ME pronunciations in the rhyme scheme. In the discussion of second grouping of carols, I will explain what I believe to be the rationale for the creation of

carols in the medieval style in the 18th and 19th centuries, but I do not believe that to be the case in the carol, "The Holly and the Ivy."

Another carol, which I believe could have easily originated well prior to the commonly held time period of its creation, is "The First Nowell." The word *nowell* itself has both helped clarify and muddy the etymological waters in the history of this extremely popular carol. Most scholars place the origin of the carol in 16th century England after the lifting of the ban on Christmas based largely on the etymological background of the word *nowell*. A variation of either the French word for Christmas "Noel", or the French word for new "nouvelle", the ME word *nowell* meaning Christmas existed in the language by the 14th century as evidenced by Chaucer's use of it in the Canterbury Tales. Even the use of the words *deep* in the sense of a profound feeling and *intent* in its noun form taken from Old French, could have been in common usage by the mid 1300s, although not in the current spellings.

Appearance of the key words of the carol as early as the 14th century, however interesting, is not enough to push back the date of creation without more information. That information comes in the form of variations in the carol, even in its first written forms. The carol was first published in a form still accessible to modern readers in Some Ancient Christmas Carols (1823) by Davies Gilbert and derived from the Hutchens manuscript. It is possible to trace modern versions of the lyrics to the Gilbert version if they contain the word *certain* in reference to the shepherds of the first verse. Ten years later, William Sandy's Christmas Carols, Ancient and Modern (1833) was published and Sandy's version of "The First Nowell" contains the number *three* distinguishing the shepherds instead of *certain*. This variation could have developed in the ten-year span between the two printings, or could be explained if the carol had

been originally written in the 17th century, but another theory involving the carol is not as easy to explain.

The lyrics, as well as the tune, have been called choppy, inconsistent, and difficult. They are not the easiest to sing, nor does the story told by the words entirely make sense. The second verse refers to the shepherds looking to the east to see the star of Bethlehem, when according to the story of Christ's birth, the three wise men would have been in such a position (Studwell 64). It has been proposed that what has survived is in fact a fragment of the original carol with the verses that fill in the story and notes to even out the tune lost in the passage of time (Routley 96). Although the placement of the origin of the carol in the 16th century would allow approximately three hundred years for the carol to be spread and elements lost, I believe it is much more probable that the carol existed prior to the ban on Christmas in 1644. The resulting lag in Christmas season enthusiasm between the ascension to the throne of Charles II and the surge of interest in Christmas during the time of the Oxford Movement and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood would be enough time for an older carol to lose verses and meaning across generations.

Since its printing in 1823, the carol has been attached erroneously to France indirectly through the word *nowell*. In the 1930s, the carol began to be published under the title "The First Noel" in popular songbooks. Scholarly texts still kept the ME spelling, but the myth that the carol was of French origin began to gain ground. I attribute its spread largely to word of mouth because there was little written to support the idea, but this situation points to an interesting (problem) with carol research. Because the carols seem so familiar to the general public, there is seemingly very little research done when an average songbook is put together. Most of the popular carol books, especially since the 1950s, did not contain one reference to previous books

consulted to verify the lyrics, much less an actual bibliography. Editors take great liberties to

change words or verses for their texts without a notation as to the source. Yet at the same time

that such information would be interesting to the historical linguistic scholar, it may have been

asking too much of the editors of such texts to have shown this level of linguistic aptitude. Such

an awareness may have led them to research the lyrics more thoroughly, looking for a "correct"

version, and thereby depriving us of the rich linguistic history that their record of variations has

left us.

  If "The First Nowell" is the most popular English carol, then a close second in popularity

would be "God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen" (Appendix A).   "God Rest You Merry,

Gentlemen" is similar in its linguistic history. Also purported to be of the 16th century, which

some believe to be the most fertile period of carol generation, the carol has often been

misunderstood due to the difficulty in correctly conveying punctuation in song. The comma

between *merry* and *gentlemen*, over the course of time, has been left out as often as not giving an

actually very religious song the quite secular message that Christmas is the season for revelry

although the lyrics are clearly endorsing light hearts in reverence of the birth of Jesus Christ.

  The words used in "God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen", which have remained largely

unchanged since they were first printed by Sandy in 1833, are simple and traceable to very early

roots. Most are of Latin origin, but those that entered OE through Old French (OF) are plentiful

enough to keep the carol from being written prior to the Norman Conquest. The only variation in

the lyrics, the replacement of the lines "For Jesus Christ our Savior was born upon this day" with

"Remember Christ our Savior was born on Christmas day," occurred in the 18th century and both

variations are still commonly used today. One piece of phonological evidence supports the idea

that the carol originated in the early Middle Ages. The rhyming of *mind* and *find* with *wind* in

the fifth verse (Sandy) would have been common in most areas of England in the ME period. It is interesting to note that the shepherds of this carol are also referred to as *certain*, the same as the *certain shepherds* of the opening of "The First Nowell" which I believe originated from the same time period.

The reasons I believe this carol to be much older than the 16th century are the approximate dates that many of its words fell out of common usage. Not only are the words and syntax archaic today, but they have been so for more than four hundred years. Words such as *doth*, which was dropped out of use by the early 1600s, and *Jewry*, which was not used after approximately 1350, indicate that the song is a remnant of the period as much as 250 years before most scholars date the carol. I would go as far as to say that there would have had to have been a written form of this carol during the ME period, which has been lost over time, for these words to have reached us today. If these lyrics were carried by a strictly oral tradition, they could have been updated to conform to the speech and lexicon of a singer or audience prior to its being preserved by Sandy, which could have provided us many more variations.

It is also possible that the carol existed in a shorter version in an earlier form. The last verse, which makes reference to the audience themselves, has a relatively modern syntactic structure in comparison to the rest of the verses. The change in point of view does not seem to fit the rest of the carol. Although it does circle back to the listening audience it does not seem to be addressing the gentlemen of the first verse. Words such as *embrace* and *deface,* which sound more modern, would be evidence of the added verse concept if they did not come into the language with OF as a direct borrowing. *Defaute* borrowed in the case of the word *deface,* would have been modified to its modern spelling by the time it reached Sandy without having altered the original intention of the lyric. The same would have occurred with the word

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Christmas which has also existed as the ME *Cristemas* and OE *Cristes maesse* all of which are interchangeable without a loss of meaning, only a sense of place in time.

A variation to "God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen," which has affected the perception of its date of origin, has occurred in the past thirty years. During the 1970s, popular songbooks began printing the carol with the title, "God Rest *Ye* Merry, Gentlemen" and in some cases the word *merry* was spelled *merrie*. Whether the change was intended to make the carol sound older for effect or to fit with the rest of the archaic words and syntax, the word had been undisputedly *you* since it was first printed and the change at this point is curious. It has caught on and appears often in popular recordings which would indicate that the tide has turned again and as in the late 19th century the archaic is "in" especially when a part of the nostalgia of the Christmas season.

Tradition however is not enough to keep a carol together in the ever-changing realm of language. Lyrics can change radically, or in the case of carols that are widely recognized, it could take hundreds of years to modify a lyric that has not been understood for most of that time. "The Wassail Song" or "Here We Come A-Wassailing" (Appendix A) speaks of the Yule tradition of the wassail bowl that was carried from house to house on cold winter evenings to spread the joy of the season with one's neighbors. This is an extension of the pagan practice of blessing trees and fields during the winter months to ensure a good growing season for the coming year. A bowl of wassail, or highly spiced ale or wine, was poured on the roots of the trees accompanied by chanting or song. Eventually someone must have decided that this was a waste of good drink, as well as a pagan practice, and proposed saluting the neighbors instead of the foliage creating the practice of caroling and bringing the wassail along for the ride.

"The Wassail Song" is just one of a great number of carols that involve the practice of caroling. Others include the "Gloucestershire Wassail" or "Wassail, wassail All Over the Town"

and "Somerset Wassail" or "Wassail and Wassail All Over the Town," and the "Yorkshire Wassail" or "We've Been A While A-Wandering." Variations of "The Wassail Song " range from "Here We Go A-Wassailing," "Here We Come/Go A-Caroling," and even "Here We Come/Go A-Whistling." The sheer volume of these types of carols, and inestimable variations of each, should speak to the popularity and possible age of some of the wassail carols. Despite this history, "The Wassail Song" has been traced back as far as 1850, before which no printed versions of it can be found. I believe this date to be off by as much as 500 years.

The evidence I offer to support this claim can be found in the use of the words *leaves*, *ratching,* and *mouldy*. Variations in the usage of these words could take the origin of this version back to the 1300s. The use of the word *leaves*, especially green leaves which sound out of place in a Christmas carol, actually meant foliage such as that of evergreen trees used for seasonal decoration. *Ratching* was a term that referred to a type of stretched leather hence its replacement with *stretching* in later versions. The etymology involving *mouldy* is not as clear, but it is possible that because the word *mould*, meaning covered with mold spores, and *mould*, meaning form, entered the language at approximately the same time, this usage could be a confusion of the two. A *mould cheese* could have been a specific type of cheese produced in a mold, or it could be a case of repetition between variations because *mould* was used in some instances to mean cheese. This repeating of words that mean the same thing does occur in variations of the carol which use *ratching leather* when earlier versions use *ratching* alone and later variations use *leather* without the qualifier.

Supporting the case that mould cheese could have been referring to a specific type of cheese is the case of Christmas loaf. It does seem odd that it would be necessary to ask for Christmas loaf in a Christmas song and rightfully so because upon closer investigation the term

does apply to a specific type of loaf. In feudal England a wastel, or Christmas loaf, was prepared as a gift to peasant families from the lord of the manor. It was a large loaf of bread containing one bean. When the bread was broken up among the members of the family, each person carefully checked his or her piece for the bean because with it went the honor of "King for the Day" within their family unit (Gies 100). If this was the history behind Christmas loaf, it makes the possibility that *mould cheese* was a specific type of cheese, perhaps also seasonal, all the more credible.

The wassail carols fall into two specific types that can also be helpful in determining a date of origin. "Outside" carols are those in which the singers want what they ask for to be brought out to them, indicating that they did not expect to be let into the house. This type appears to stem from the earliest practices of caroling. "Inside" carols are those through which the singers are trying to gain entrance to the house as well as Christmas treats. Even though the singers of "The Wassail Song" are quick to point out that they "are not daily beggars", but "are your neighbors' children, Whom you have seen before", they still do not ask to be let in, "Bring us out a table…" The last two verses, which are often printed separately, have been called the "Goodbye" verses possibly meant to be sung at the conclusion of the visit which then only might last until the end of the song. This would keep visit time at each house short, with the business of treat collecting transpiring quickly, and the carolers moving through the neighborhood at a pace that would keep them from freezing.

The word *mouldy* is causing a new variation in modern printings of the lyrics of this very popular Christmas carol. I point to the popularity of the carol specifically because rather than the entire carol falling out of favor due to its reference to *moldy cheese*, the verse containing the cheese lyric is being printed only sporadically.

The carols I have discussed to this point have some common elements including ME pronunciation in their rhyming patterns, OE and ME meanings or usage that is not present in MnE, and OE and ME syntactic elements and phrasing. These elements used to place the origin of the carols in the ME period in this section will be used to exclude the origin of the carols from the ME in the next section.

CHAPTER 5

CAROLS IN THE MEDIEVAL STYLE

The carols in the last section contain many similarities. They are all considered by carol scholars to be traditional English carols with no formally established author or date of origin, although much speculation as to those facts exists. As I have explained previously according to the results of my research I believe the four carols that I have referred to as "medieval" to have been composed well prior to the 1600s in England. The carols, which I have designated as "in the medieval style", have distinct differences even among themselves. Two of these carols have identified composers and specified dates of origin, while one can be assigned to a vague period in time with no specific creator, and the last is a complete mystery. Even given their differences, I have used the comparative method of historical linguistics to establish that all of these carols were written with an eye on the carols that preceded them. The carols in the medieval style mimic the phonetic, morphemic, and syntactic elements of carols that were familiar and popular at the time that the later carols were created. Often these elements were ancient when they were adopted again, rejuvenated and, I believe, elevated to the status of conventions in carol creation. These conventions dominated carol styles until only this century when modern linguistic elements pervaded recent additions.

"Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" (Appendix B) is an example of one of the two carols for which we have a complete history. It is a carol that has gone through various revisions and yet essentially remained faithful to what I believe were the original intentions of its creator, Charles Wesley. The carol is thoroughly spiritual in content which is not unexpected given that the majority of the lyrics that have remained unchanged were written by one of the founders of

Methodism, but it also contains elements that were archaic at the time of its creation. I believe that these elements are as integral to the lyrics as their religious message, using the conventions of familiar carols to fulfill the expectations of his audience and give his works a sense of history. I will explain this statement in greater detail after I have provided evidence of the archaic nature of the carol.

The carol in its original form as written by Charles Wesley which was not "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" but "Hark! How All the Welkin Rings" first published in Wesley's <u>Hymns and Sacred Poems </u>(1739). Many scholars believe this to actually have been an Easter carol because it originally read, "Hark! How all the welkin rings, Glory to the King of Kings," and did not contain the references to the location of Christ's birth, "With th'angelic host proclaim Christ is born in Bethlehem," an alteration added in 1760 by Reverend Martin Madan. This completed the modifications done by George Whitefield, a close friend of Wesley's, who revised the opening lines of the carol to the more familiar modern form and left out verses eight and ten, in accordance with his Calvinist beliefs, for the publication of his 1753 book, <u>Hymns for Social Worship</u>. If Wesley had intended the carol to celebrate the Easter season, his carol was in common misuse by the late 18th century.

The phonetics of the carol present us with four rhymes out of forty that are at odds with modern English pronunciation. In verse two "Late in time behold him come" precedes "offspring of a virgin's womb" while verse four begins "Come, Desire of nations, come. Fix us in thy humble home." In trying to correlate the three pronunciations it is necessary to mix the older pronunciations of *come* and *womb* with the 18th century pronunciation of the word *home*. Similarly verse four contains the lines, "Rise, the woman's conquering *seed* Bruise in us the serpent's *head*." A slightly different problem exists in verse three and again in verse four.

Verse three begins, "Hail the heav'n-born Prince of *peace*! Hail the Sun of *righteousness*." These two words are as impossible to rhyme as those in verse four, "Now display thy saving *power*, Ruined nature now *restore*." If these words have never been rhymed pairs then two situations are possible. Either Wesley disregarded the rhyme scheme in order to complete these two lines in a manner that best fit his plan for the carol or he was following an existing pattern. That pattern would have existed in the carols that were old enough to have non-rhyming pairs due to phonological changes. If Wesley was in fact including non-rhyming pairs to follow the conventions of carols that existed during the early 18th century, then it is necessary to try to explain his motive for doing so, which I will do following a discussion of the morphology of the carol.

A discussion of word choice in "Hark! How All the Welkin Rings" centers on the word *welkin*, meaning sky or heavens in Middle English descending from *wolcen* in Old English. The rest of the carol is worded to fit the theological content and the linguistic period during which it was created. The word *welkin,* however, was considered archaic two hundred years prior to Wesley's carol, and yet he chose to not only use it but to feature it prominently in the title. He was taking a chance that the word would not even be understood by his audience when the word *heavens* could have easily been substituted. "Hark! How All the Heavens Ring" does not do the carol justice though, and I believe would have been counter productive to Wesley's purpose.

At the time that "Hark! How All the Welkin Rings" was written, Charles Wesley was spreading the ideas of his fledgling Methodism and attracting followers. Not unlike the leaders of Roman church before him who instructed their ambassadors to allow pagan elements into church practice, it is entirely possible that Wesley chose to follow the conventions of the older carols to give his followers a sense of history and familiarity. A completely new carol style may

not have had the appeal of a carol rich in religious teachings but still palpable to a public content with lyrics whose rhyme patterns and words were being left behind by an increasingly changing language. As it happened though, Wesley's choice of the word *welkin* was undone by Whitefield after which the popularity of the carol increased. An attempt was made in 1904 to restore the opening of the carol to Wesley's original lyrics, but the archaic term was laughingly dismissed (Baker 12).

Another carol whose history supports the case of an author whose choice of language and theme delve into the archaic to make an impression is "Good King Wenceslas" (Appendix B). Stylistically this carol is modern excepting for words such as *hither*, *thither,* and *thou*, which set apart the speech of the king and the page from the rest of the carol. There are none of the phonetic variations in this carol that indicate that it has been affected by the passage of time. It is the story of the real Wenceslas that the carol's creator uses as an example of seasonal goodwill and charity expecting his audience to be familiar with the background and accept the patterns of speech as indicative of its place in history.

John Mason Neale wrote the words of his carol to fit a popular piece of music that had been used repeatedly since the 14th century, adding to the medieval feeling of the piece. The story he chose to build upon this mood had been told since the 10th century, and is one of many heralding the virtues of Václav the Good, duke of Bohemia from 922 to 929. Credited with strengthening Christianity in Bohemia, Václav was praised for his piety and generosity and, after being assassinated by his brother Boleslav, he was named patron saint of Bohemia.

Although the legend of Václav's kindness naturally complimented the Christmas season, scholars and critics have been hardly complimentary when referring to Neale's lyrics. Descriptions such as "horrible" and "doggerel" (Studwell 146) have been used to convey critics'

impressions of Neale's version of a story fraught with logical fallacies. For instance, if the

peasant lives "right against the forest fence by St. Agnes' fountain", why does he need to wander

"a good league hence" in search of "winter fuel?" Given the sorry state of the weather, why did

the king order "flesh", wine, and pine logs to go when he could have invited the man into the

warmth of the feast celebration? To change these elements would have altered Neale's

progression to the main point of the story, which I believe to be the miracle of the sainted

master's footprints providing warmth to his nearly frozen servant on a mission of mercy. The

fundamental moral of the carol is repeated for emphasis in the last lines of the final stanza,

"Therefore, Christian men, be sure, wealth or rank possessing, Ye who now will bless the poor

shall yourselves find blessing" (Radcliffe-Whitehead 181.)

Connotative evidence of this theme that exists in the carol but is often lost on modern

singers and audiences are the references to the feast of Stephen and St. Agnes' fountain. The

feast of Stephen is still celebrated in the United Kingdom and Canada as Boxing Day on

December 26th and retains some of its original meaning. St. Stephen, canonized in 304 A. D.,

was known for his charity and protection of the poor, especially widows and children. This

would have been known to Václav as well as Neale's 19th century audience and the significance

of the events transpiring on the feast of Stephen would not have been lost on them. The

reference to St. Agnes could have been an allusion to a number of women, specifically St. Anges

of Rome, but only one that would add to Neale's construction of his theme. St. Agnes of

Bohemia, who was accepted as a saint shortly after her death in 1278, was also a champion of the

poor but holds historical significance as nearly escaping marriage to Václav's brother Boleslav

before devoting her life to church and charity. The fountain to which Neale makes reference

could have been any of the numerous spa towns in the Czech Republic that lie among the

mountains and have been known to have curative properties since the early medieval period. The use of the realistic and the familiar added to the credibility of Neale's carol while fostering the sense of its belonging to the body of medieval lyric.

The use of Middle English words such as pronouns and terms of address were a means of fitting the language to the medieval theme. It was not necessary that the words be historically accurate, only that they convey the feeling of antiquity. The word *league* for instance may have been used in the form *leuca* as a unit of distance by the Celts but was never actually used as a formal English unit of measure. It developed in the 17th century as a poetical or rhetorical reference to distance usually found in romantic, historical works.

Neale's choice of archaic words and syntax in the speech of the king and the page would seem to be a means of authenticating both the events of the story to support the theme and the song as a carol according to popular carol conventions. But here again we find a mix of the archaic and modern that on closer scrutiny points to the carol as a product of the 19th century. If Neale had intended this dialogue to be historically accurate, it would have been a variation of Old German and therefore unintelligible to most of his audience.

"Good King Wenceslas" is a perfect example of a carol intentionally written in the medieval style. It is possible to analyze this carol using the classic triangle of means, opportunity and motive to determine action. The means would be the knowledge of at least some archaic language, the opportunity would be the existence of true medieval carols to use as popular examples, and the motive would be to achieve that type of popularity. Neale capitalized doubly in his carol by also incorporating the medieval theme and authentic 14th century music to create an enduring, if at times confusing, carol.

Like "Good King Wenceslas," "The Twelve Days of Christmas" (Appendix B) is a product of a specific place and time. This provides evidence as to the motive for its creation. Although the name of the author, or authors, is unknown, enough is known about the story of the carol's background to provide an accurate picture of at least the situation responsible for this carol. The use of medieval style in this case is part of the duality of this carol intended to keep its true purpose a secret.

Scholars are also divided as to the nature of this carol. On the one hand, there are those who believe that it is another in the list of carols that make little sense to us now and perhaps were never meant to make sense. Keyte points to the *golden rings* as a derivation of *goldspinks* which are goldfinches in Scottish dialect and cites various song games that make use of numeric patterns as evidence that the song may be of Gallic origin (469), but I believe this to be a misinterpretation. The use of the names of types of birds does not continue throughout the lyrics so it is not likely that *gold* and *ring*, two terms that have come to modern use virtually unchanged from Old English, are a replacement of something unfamiliar, and no version of this carol exists with a variation of *golden rings* in this verse. The phrase "partridge in a pear tree" has also been connected to different meanings that do not come together to give a rational explanation of the carol as a whole. Whether pear tree is related to the French *perdrix* for partridge or as an allusion to a sheaf of corn, the Virgin Mary's hiding place from Herod (Keyte 469), the single bits of information lack any cohesion that would make them believable in the presentation of the entire carol.

A second explanation provides us with a better picture of the carol as product of history but is lacking in supporting evidence. According to several sources, the carol was created as a means of teaching the catechism to Catholic children during a period of Protestant and Anglican

rule in England. During this time, beginning with the reign of Elizabeth I who ascended the

throne in 1558, English subjects were prohibited from practicing the Catholic faith and

punishments were severe for those who were caught. Secrecy was important if the teachings

were to be kept alive and passed to the next generation. It is believed that the carol was written as

a mnemonic code to help children of Catholics acquire and retain the fundamentals of their

religion.

As there are variations in religious practice, there are also some variations in the

interpretations of the symbolism of the gifts of the carol. In order for the carol to be understood

in this context, the recipient is seen as a member of the faithful and his/her "true love" is God

providing the believer with the gifts of the teachings of Catholicism. Some of the principals the

gifts symbolize are the *six geese* representing the six days of creation, the *ten lords* as the Ten

Commandments, and the *eleven pipers* signifying the eleven faithful apostles. Variations include

the *two turtledoves* representative of either Joseph and Mary or the Old and New Testaments,

and the *three French hens* symbolizing the gifts of the Magi or the theological virtues of faith,

hope, and charity. The partridge is the symbol for Jesus Christ because both would protect those

in their care to the death.

There is as little significance attached to the verbs of the second half of the carol, as there

is to the choice of specific birds in the first half. The conventions of numeric carols such as "The

Seven Joys of Mary" go back to prayers remembered by their number and order connected to the

devotions of the Virgin Mary which were a larger part of the practices of the medieval church.

Our inability to decipher why the lords would be leaping is a distraction from the number that

would have been the true focus of the mnemonic device of the lyrics.

The choice of the numbered list suits the purpose of conveying the information of the carol covertly but also serves to blend the carol into the mix of songs of its time. Morphemic conventions typical of established, older carols such as "The Wassail Song," which has the *a-prefix* before the verb as in *a-wassailing*, were followed resulting in *a-laying* and *a-milking*. The use of *cally-* or *collybirds* to mean blackbirds, which has since become *calling* or as in one case *cawing* birds, would have been in common use during the 16th and 17th centuries. The use of both carol convention and familiar terms served an important purpose. It would have been counter productive if the carol stood out as a new song thereby calling attention to it unnecessarily and inviting the possibility of its true purpose being discovered.

The lack of concrete background information in the case of "The Twelve Days of Christmas" is a byproduct of the secrecy inherent in its creation. Written proof of the origin of this carol could have been deadly at the time the lyrics were devised, so its existence would be surprising, and we are left with an unsubstantiated story. None of the sources that relate the background information as I have explained it provide primary sources of its acquisition. However, if forced to choose between a rumor that explains many of the facts of the case and very loosely related elements that do not, I find more credibility in the former supported by linguistic evidence.

In the same way that the creator of the "Twelve Days of Christmas" used medieval conventions to hide the purpose of his carol, the creator of "Deck the Halls" (Appendix B) used the same conventions to flaunt his intentions. Written by an unknown author and first appearing in 1881, "Deck the Halls" was the first unabashedly nonreligious Christmas party song in centuries. Gone are the references to the blessed virgin and the birth of Christ, and in are the

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dancing, the mead, and the excess of the season unlike anything seen since *halig-monath* was celebrated.

The tune had been used previously as a Welsh New Year's carol under the title "Nos Galan" or "Soon the hoar old year will leave us," but this new addition held little in common with that song except the chorus. Traditionally used if instruments were not present the *fa la la la la* chorus helped to keep time for the dancers. Given the energy and joyous nature of this carol, it was definitely meant to be a dancing song.

The medieval elements of the carol give the impression that it is much older than it is. The word *hall* is a reference to the great rooms of the castles of feudal England that would have been decorated with holly and other greenery to celebrate the season. *Mead* would have also been central to the party in cups, barrels, and overflowing bowls. To *troll* is an allusion to the cyclical nature of the songs and dances that often extolled the virtues of "beauty's treasure." The use of the pronoun *ye*, archaic since the 17th century adds to the acceptance of this as an older carol, as does the internal reference to "the ancient Christmas carol."

While the morphology may be ostensively medieval, the syntax and phonology tell the tale. There are no phonological variations in key elements of the lyrics that would be unusual in a song descended from even three hundred years prior to its first written version, let alone the time period to which this carol is allying itself. As important as that bit of information is the modern nature of the syntax. The word order of these lyrics is definitely indicative of the Modern English period. An example of this would be the nesting of the phrases "with boughs of holly" and "while I tell of beauty's treasure," which follow the stricter word order of Modern English syntax.

"Deck the Halls" has undergone many interesting changes since its first printing. Between its initial publication in 1881 and a subsequent printing in 1924, after Prohibition began by law in the United States in 1920, a new version became popular containing none of its former references to mead and its consumption. Even a reference to romance, "beauty's treasure" was deleted. The substituted information contains an allusion to the *Yule* log and the term *Yuletide*, words that had been considered archaic one hundred years before this revision. The modifications continued to follow in the tradition of the carol's original writer by including the verb *don*, a word that had fallen out of common use by the mid 16th century.

More modern variations have been based on phonological misinterpretations such as "Yuletide pleasure" replacing "Yuletide treasure" in some versions but a morphological change may prove to be the catalyst that alters the course of this carol again. Since 1935 and growing in popularity in the 1950s, the use of the word *gay* as a slang term meaning homosexual is beginning to affect the frequency of this carol's use. In order to avoid the originally unintended reference, carolers are dropping the song altogether from their repertoire. This is ironic given that the revision was intended to save the carol by making it "politically correct" for its time. An alternative has presented itself however in the New Oxford Book of Christmas Carols, which is quickly becoming the standard reference book for carolers, providing those who want to sing the carol with the British version which retains the original mead lyrics and no "Don we now our gay apparel." It will be interesting to see which will prove to be more offensive to the general public, the word *gay* or the drinking of mead.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Although in my initial research into the prior scholarship on my topic I delved into the areas of historical linguistic criticism and the nature of communication for support, it is firmly in the area of historical linguistics that my research was planted. It was necessary to justify the background of the web of knowledge from which we all work because that background was central to my argument by providing previous examples of the use of historical linguistics in criticism and etymology. Once the methodology was established as it applied to different subject areas, I created the field of historical information during which the carols had been written to relate it to the case of each carol individually.

Based on thematic issues and historical events, the carols of the medieval section belong to the period of English history prior to 1644, despite the dates attributed to the written examples on which the scholarship rests. The linguistic evidence provided by etymological analysis of the terms instrumental to the lyrics attests to the possibility of the existence of these four carols as early as the 1300s in England. This is confirmed by the phonology and syntax of the lyrics.

The length of time these carols existed is important to the establishment of a base of common knowledge about Christmas carols that would have been known to the writers of the second section of carols. The fact that the medieval carols existed prior to 1644, many in various forms, and managed to survive to the present day is a testimonial to their popularity and recognition among vast numbers of people over a great period of time. Acknowledgement of the medieval style as familiar, perhaps even expected in Christmas carols, is a keystone of the reasoning in grouping the carols written later as carols in the medieval style.

Carols written during and after the English Parliament ban on Christmas celebrations in 1644 exhibited elements of Modern and Middle, even Old, English language. In light of many cases by different authors, it is not rational to conclude that the use of archaic terms was

unintentional. It is more reasonable to assume that they adopted the style intentionally and look for evidence to prove that hypothesis. After establishing linguistic evidence of the archaic terms used in each carol, I turned to the historic evidence to find possible reasons for the use of this style. I feel confident of the conclusions I have drawn as to author intent based on the relationship between the terminology of the carols, the overall message of the lyrics, and the time, authenticated or speculated, during which the carol was written.

In my introduction I discussed the problems with the use of the carol texts as a source of linguistic study. Inherent in the texts, especially those of unknown authorship, is a sense of unreliability in the words that transfers to the question of the value of their analysis. By establishing the etymological background of those words in relation to their context in history, I believe that questionable nature is nullified and the document is useful as synchronic evidence of the language, especially when combined with carols also of the same time period. The similarities create a solid, objective basis from which to make judgments about that time period as well as its language.

Every piece of information we can establish about our language and its history has value. It is also cyclical in nature. As our knowledge of our language and its functions increases, so does our understanding of its application to written works. The expansion of our search for the meaning of textual information in turn adds to our understanding of our language. It is this process that makes unintentional linguists of every critic and critics of every linguistic scholar who opens a book.

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APPENDIX A

MEDIEVAL CAROL LYRICS

"<u>The Holly and the Ivy</u>"

The holly and the ivy,
When they are both full grown,
Of all the trees that are in the wood,
The holly bears the crown.

O the rising of the sun,
And the running of the deer,
The playing of the merry organ,
Sweet singing in the choir.

The holly bears a blossom
As white as lily flower;
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
To be our sweet Savior.

The holly bears a berry
As red as any blood;
Any Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
To do poor sinners good.

The holly bears a prickle
As sharp as any thorn;
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
On Christmas day in the morn.

The holly bears a bark
As bitter as any gall;
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
For to redeem us all.

The holly and the ivy,
When they are both full grown,
Of all the trees that are in the wood,
The holly bears the crown.

"The First Nowell"

The first Nowell, the angel did say,
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;
In fields where they lay keeping their sheep,
On a cold winter's night that was so deep.
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,
Born is the King of Israel.

They looked up and saw a star
Shining in the the East, beyond them far;
And to the earth it gave great light,
And so it continued both day and night.
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,
Born is the King of Israel.

And by the light of that same star,
Three wise men came from country far;
To seek for a King was their intent,
And to follow the star wherever it went.
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,
Born is the King of Israel.

This star drew nigh to the northwest,
O'er Bethlehem it took its rest;
And there it did both stop and stay,
Right over the place where Jesus lay.
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,
Born is the King of Israel.

Then entered in those wise men three,
Full reverently upon their knee;
And offered there in his presence,
Their gold, and myrrh, and frankincense.
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell
Born is the King of Israel.

<u>"God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen"</u>

God rest you merry, gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay,
Remember Christ our Savior
Was born on Christmas day,
To save us all from Satan's pow'r
When we were gone astray;

O tidings of comfort and joy,
Comfort and joy,
O tidings of comfort and joy.

In Bethlehem, in Jewry,
This blessed Babe was born,
And laid within a manger,
Upon this blessed morn;
The which His mother Mary
Did nothing take in scorn:

O tidings of comfort and joy,
Comfort and joy,
O tidings of comfort and joy.

From God our heavenly Father
A blessed angel came.
And unto certain shepherds
Brought tidings of the same,
How that in Bethlehem was born
The Son of God by name:

O tidings of comfort and joy,
Comfort and joy,
O tidings of comfort and joy.

"Fear not," then said the angel,
"Let nothing you affright,
This day is born a Savior,
Of virtue, power, and might;
So frequently to vanquish all
The friends of Satan quite";

O tidings of comfort and joy,
Comfort and joy,
O tidings of comfort and joy.

The shepherds at those tidings
Rejoiced much in mind,

And left their flocks a-feeding,
In tempest, storm, and wind,
And went to Bethlehem straightway
This blessed babe to find:

O tidings of comfort and joy,
Comfort and joy,
O tidings of comfort and joy.

But when to Bethlehem they came,
Whereat this infant lay

They found him in a manger,
Where oxen feed on hay;
His mother Mary kneeling,
Unto the Lord did pray:

O tidings of comfort and joy,
Comfort and joy,
O tidings of comfort and joy.

Now to the Lord sing praises,
All you within this place,
And with true love and brotherhood
Each other now embrace;
This holy tide of Christmas
All others doth deface:

O tidings of comfort and joy,
Comfort and joy,
O tidings of comfort and joy.

"The Wassail Song"

Here we come a-wassailing
Among the leaves so green,
Here we come a wand'ring,
So fair to be seen.

Chorus

Love and joy come to you,
And to your wassail too,
And God bless you and send you a happy new year,
And God send you a happy new year.

We are not daily beggars
Who beg from door to door,
But we are neighbor's children
Whom you have seen before.

Chorus

Call up the butler of this house,
Put on his golden ring;
Let him bring us up a glass of beer,
And the better we shall sing.

Chorus

We have a little purse
Made of ratching leather skin;
We want some of your small change
To line it well within.

Chorus

Bring us out a table,
And spread it with a cloth;
Bring us out some mouldy cheese,
And some of your Christmas loaf.

Chorus

God bless the Master of this house,
Likewise the Mistress too;
And all the little children
That round the table go.

APPENDIX B

CAROLS IN THE MEDIEVAL STYLE

<u>"Hark! How All the Welkin Rings"</u>

Hark! How all the welkin rings, -
"Glory to the King of Kings!
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled."
Joyful, all ye nations, rise,
Join the triumph of the skies;
With th' angelic host proclaim,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem."
Hark! How all the welkin rings,
"Glory to the King of Kings!

Christ, by highest heav'n adored:
Christ, the everlasting Lord;
Late in time behold him come,
Offspring of the favored one.
Veil'd in flesh, the Godhead see;
Hail, th'incarnate Deity:
Pleased, as man, with men to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel!
Hark! How all the welkin rings,
"Glory to the King of Kings!

Hail! the heav'n-born Prince of peace!
Hail! the Son of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,
Risen with healing in his wings
Mild he lays his glory by,
Born that man no more may die:
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth.
Hark! How all the welkin rings,
"Glory to the King of Kings!

"Good King Wenceslas"

Good King Wenceslas looked out,
On the Feast of Stephen,
When the snow lay round about,
Deep and crisp and even;
Brightly shone the moon that night,
Tho' the frost was cruel,
When a poor man came in sight,
Gath'ring winter fuel.

"Hither, page, and stand by me,
If thou know'st it, telling,
Yonder peasant, who is he?
Where and what his dwelling?"
"Sire, he lives a good league hence,
Underneath the mountain;
Right against the forest fence,
By Saint Agnes' fountain."

"Bring me flesh, and bring me wine,
Bring me pine logs hither:
Thou and I will see him dine,
When we bear them thither."
Page and monarch, forth they went,
Forth they went together;
Thro' the rude wind's wild lament
And the bitter weather.

"Sire, the night is darker now,
And the wind blows stronger;
Fails my heart, I know not how,
I can go no longer."
Mark my footsteps, good my page;
Tread thou in them boldly:
Thou shalt find the winter's rage
Freeze thy blood less coldly."

In his master's steps he trod,
Where the snow lay dinted;
Heat was in the very sod
Which the saint had printed.
Therefore, Christian men, be sure,
Wealth or rank possessing,
Ye who now will bless the poor,
Shall yourselves find blessing.

"The Twelve Days Of Christmas"

On the first day of Christmas, my true love sent to me

A partridge in a pear tree.

On the second day of Christmas, my true love sent to me

Two turtle doves

and a partridge in a pear tree.

On the third day of Christmas, my true love sent to me

Three French hens, two turtle doves

And a partridge in a pear tree.

On the fourth day of Christmas, my true love sent to me

Four calling birds, three French hens, two turtle doves

And a partridge in a pear tree.

On the fifth day of Christmas, my true love sent to me

Five golden rings. four calling birds,

Three French hens, two turtle doves

And a partridge in a pear tree.

On the sixth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me

Six geese a-laying, five golden rings.

Four calling birds, three French hens, two turtle doves

And a partridge in a pear tree.

On the seventh day of Christmas, my true love gave to me

Seven swans a-swimming, six geese a-laying,

Five golden rings. four calling birds,

Three French hens, two turtle doves

And a partridge in a pear tree.

On the eighth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me

Eight maids a-milking, seven swans a-swimming, six geese a-laying,

Five golden rings.

Four calling birds, three French hens, two turtle doves

And a partridge in a pear tree.

On the ninth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me

Nine ladies dancing, eight maids a-milking, seven swans a-swimming, six geese a-laying,

Five golden rings.

Four calling birds, three French hens, two turtle doves

And a partridge in a pear tree.

On the tenth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me

Ten lords a-leaping, nine ladies dancing, eight maids a-milking, seven swans a-swi'mmi'ng, six

geese a-laying,

Five golden rings.

Fou'r calling birds, three French hens, two turtle doves

And a partridge in a pear tree.

On the eleventh day of Christmas, my true love gave to me

Eleven pipers piping, ten lords a-leaping, nine ladies dancing, eight maids a-milking, seven

swans a-swimming, six geese a-laying,

Five golden rings.

Four calling birds, three French hens, two turtle doves And a partridge in a pear tree.

On the twelfth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me

Twelve drummers drumming,

eleven pipers piping, ten lords a-leaping,

nine ladies dancing, eight maids a-milking,

seven swans a-swimming, six geese a-laying,

Five golden rings.

Four calling birds,

three French hens,

two turtle doves

And a partridge in a pear tree.

"Deck the Halls" (1881 Version)

Deck the halls with boughs of holly

Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la

'Tis the season to be jolly

Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la

Fill the mead cup, drain the barrel,

Fa-la-la, la-la-la, la-la-la.

Troll the ancient Christmas carol

Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la.

See the flowing bowl before us!

Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la

Strike the harp and join the chorus.

Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la

Follow me in merry measure.

Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la

While I tell of beauty's treasure.

Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la

Fast away the old year passes.

Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la

Hail the new, ye lads and lasses

Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la

Laughing, quaffing, all together.

Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la

heedless of the wind and weather.

Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la

(Version After 1924)

Deck the halls with boughs of holly

Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la

'Tis the season to be jolly

Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la

Don we now our gay apparel

Fa-la-la, la-la-la, la-la-la.

Troll the ancient Yule-tide carol

Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la.

See the blazing Yule before us.

Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la

Strike the harp and join the chorus.

Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la

Follow me in merry measure.

Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la

While I tell of Yule-tide treasure.

Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la

Fast away the old year passes.

Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la

Hail the new year, lads and lasses

Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la

Sing we joyous, all together.

Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la

heedless of the wind and weather.

Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la

VITA

TAMI L. BAKER

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Education: Public Schools, Pennsville, New Jersey
                  Rowan University, Glassboro, New Jersey
                      English, B.A., 1990
                  East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee;
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Professional
Experience: Retail Management, 1991-1999
                  Graduate Assistant, East Tennessee State University, College of
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                  Graduate Assistant, East Tennessee State University, College of
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                  Kappa Delta Pi Educational Honor Society
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