

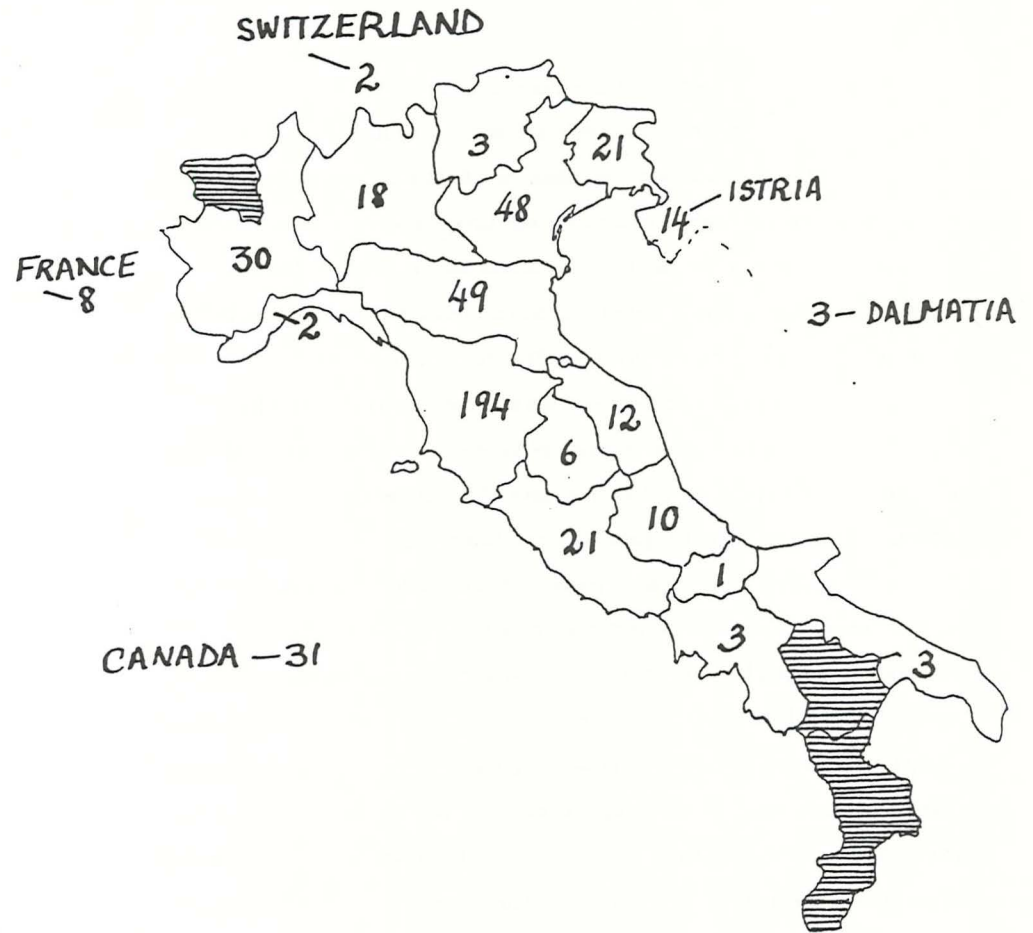
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Variation or 'contamination'?
Narrative instability in the Italian song tradition of
Donna lombarda, 1840-1980

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This paper arises out of my doctoral research (Barwick 1985), which examined a large sample of documented versions of the Italian traditional narrative song (or 'ballad', to adopt the term by which such strophic narrative songs are generally known elsewhere in Europe), Donna lombarda (Nigra 1). In this sample of 479, 120 of which were accompanied by musical information, no two versions were exactly alike. It became increasingly clear to me in the course of my research that neither melodic, metrical, formulaic nor narrative analysis would yield a stable definition of the song; indeed, such detailed analysis forced me to confront the impossibility of reducing the song to a neat abstraction of any kind. Instead of talking of the 'song' Donna lombarda, I suggested we should rather discuss it as a 'song tradition'. The overall picture of narrative change given by the examination of narrative variation in the Italian versions of Donna lombarda supports a view of the song tradition as an inherently unstable process that can no more be defined in terms of a particular plot than in terms of a particular textual or melodic realisation; rather it is a temporal process, whose realisation is contingent upon the conditions of its performance. What are some of the implications of this perspective for consideration of the interaction of one song tradition with another, in other words, for the consideration of what has been in the past conceived as 'contamination' of two (presumably pure) essential songs? I will approach this point via a brief demonstration of the inherent instability of the narrative of the Donna lombarda song tradition (henceforth DL) as revealed in the documents analysed.

As is always the case with documents from a still living tradition, my sample could make no claim to exhaustiveness. However, it was sufficient, I believe, to identify some of the main types of variation found in the Italian repertoire of orally transmitted ballads.



Map 1
Distribution of the sample of 479 versions of Donna lombarda, showing the number of versions for each region of peninsular Italy and for each other country in which French or Italian language versions have been documented.

Map 1 shows the geographical distribution of the sample. The ballad genre is characteristic of Northern Italy with a significant presence in Central Italy (Leydi 1973, Sorce Keller 1991), and this sample does indeed show that the DL song tradition has been sparsely documented in Southern regions. The very large number of versions documented in Tuscany (194) comes in the main from the Raccolta Barbi at the Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, an as yet unpublished collection assembled between 1880 and 1939 by the philologist Michele Barbi (for details see Barwick 1986, Giusti 1990). I have no doubt that had similarly wide-ranging collection efforts been undertaken in Northern Italian regions, similar, or perhaps greater, numbers of documents would have been produced. I will refer later in this paper to significant narrative differences between Northern Italian versions (ie those coming from Liguria, Piedmont, Lombardy, Veneto, Emilia, Friuli-Venezia Giulia and the Italian-speaking people of Istria and Dalmatia) and the Central and Southern versions (ie those whose performers came from the regions of Tuscany, Romagna, Le Marche, Lazio, Umbria, Abruzzo, Molise, Campania and Puglia).

Outside of Italy, apart from the already mentioned Istrian and Dalmatian versions, I was able to locate only a very few south-western French versions, all documented in the nineteenth century. However, significant documents in French Canada (first collected by Marius Barbeau in 1916 and brought to the attention of Italian scholars by Bernardy 1936) suggest that there must once have been a flourishing tradition of the song across large areas of France, since almost all French Canadian settlers emigrated from the north-east of France. The two Swiss versions seem to have been performed by Italian emigrés. (See Child 1965 vol I:156-7, 499; vol II:499; vol III:499; vol IV:449; vol V:208, 286; and Barwick 1985:Appendix 4C for references to other European poisoning ballads with possibly related plots.) Unfortunately space precludes further discussion of Italian documentary practice (Barwick 1988/89) or performance practice (Barwick 1992).

Before going on to discuss two versions from the song tradition in more detail, I will give a brief outline of the narrative based on the 364 narratively complete Italian

versions in the sample (the large number - 80 - of fragmentary versions is due to documentary practices, such as presenting only a single strophe from a longer performance, rather than to a tradition of fragmentary performances). I want to stress that this schema is not intended as a representation of the essential narrative structure of the song tradition, but rather as a useful framework within which to discuss the very considerable variation within this narrative, which recounts the tale of a married woman (usually called 'Donna lombarda' - woman from Lombardy) persuaded by a seducer to attempt to kill her husband. The narrative framework may be divided into five scenes, each consisting of a number of episodes. Not every scene, or every episode, is present in every version of the song tradition, and indeed the presence or absence of certain narrative scenes and episodes, and the verbal formulae used in their expression, may be characteristic of certain areas (figure 1).

Figure 1

Narrative framework of Donna lombarda.

Scene 1: the intrigue

Characters present: seducer and woman; omitted only once in 364 versions.

episode 1.1: the seducer's proposition to the married woman

-usually made up of two strophes, containing respectively the seducer's (sexual) proposition (which uses various interrelated formulaic openings) and the woman's reply establishing that she is married.

episode 1.2: seducer's suggestion to kill the husband

-sometimes modelled closely on the suggestion and reply found in episode 1.1

episode 1.3: seducer's recipe for preparation of the poison

-much variation in detail, but almost always involves grinding the head of a snake and putting it in wine

-in duration this episode often balances the lengths of episodes 1.1 and 1.2 combined

Scene 2: the husband's homecoming

Characters present: the husband and the woman; omitted 15 times in 364 versions.

episode 2.1: the husband's return (narrative voice)

-sometimes the same information is expressed by the seducer during the poison recipe episode 1.3

episode 2.2: husband's request for a drink

-sometimes this episode is in syntactic parallel with the seducer's proposition and the woman's reply in episode 1.1

-the husband's thirst is often mentioned

episode 2.3: woman's reaction to the request (up to the offer of poisoned wine)

-rarely included in Veneto versions

-in Piedmont and Lombardy, the woman usually tells the husband where to find the wine rather than serving it to him herself, which may reflect differences in cultural practices in this area.

Scene 3: revelation

Characters present: husband, woman and sometimes their child; omitted 6 times in 364 versions. This scene is the focal point of many Southern versions, which often end here. One or other of the two episodes are omitted in 149 cases (both present in 209), indicating that the two episodes almost function as alternative expressions of the revelation.

episode 3.1: husband notices something wrong with wine

-usually murkiness; if the woman replies, it is often to blame the weather for having made the wine go off.

episode 3.2: child warns of the poison

-omitted in many Veneto and Istrian versions

Scene 4: reversal

Characters present: husband and woman. The structuring of this scene is less rigid, and a variety of significant narrative variation occurs at this point. Omitted in 60 versions, mainly Southern ones. Of the Southern versions that do contain this scene, episodes 4.1 and 4.2 are often omitted. This scene is the focal point of the narrative in many Northern versions.

episode 4.1: husband orders wife to drink

-almost always structured in syntactic parallel with episode 1.1; in the Northern versions, these two episodes are among the most stable elements in the song tradition; the syntactic parallel highlights the neatness of the reversal, which appears to be the focal point of the narrative in many Northern versions

episode 4.2: woman's refusal to drink

-usually with the excuse that she is not thirsty; cf episode 2.2

episode 4.3: husband's threat to kill woman by other means

-if episodes 4.1 and 4.2 present, the husband usually threatens to cut off the woman's head if she doesn't drink; in Southern versions he often moves immediately to this stage, which is perhaps felt to be a more appropriate vengeance of his honour.

episode 4.4: woman's agreement to drink and die

-the woman's acceptance of her fate often includes mention of the King of France as her lover

Scene 5: finale

Present in only 169 of 364 versions; both episodes in only 23. This scene may be integrated with the reversal and is frequently omitted altogether.

episode 5.1: the woman's last words as she drinks the poison

-often a list of the stages of her death as she drinks the poison drop by drop; on metrical evidence, this episode probably Emilian in origin

episode 5.2: moral

-of one of two sorts: emphasising reversal ("she wanted to kill others but killed herself instead" - more common in North), or emphasising punitive aspect of narrative ("this is what happens to tyrannous women who betray their husbands" - more common in South)

-frequent along Adriatic coast (Veneto, Romagna, Marche, Abruzzo, Molise, Puglia), rare in other Central and Southern regions

Within the sample, there is an enormous amount of textual and melodic variation, perhaps more than in other Italian song traditions; for example, Donna lombarda has been cited by Sorce Keller (1991:139) as particularly melodically variable in the Trentino regional tradition with which he was concerned. As in many other orally transmitted ballads, both in Italy and elsewhere, no textual or melodic element is stable or unique (cf. Bronson 1951

and Bayard 1950). I will illustrate this instability of the song tradition by comparing two solo performances by Piedmontese women of a similar age and social background and living only a few kilometres apart.

The first, Dona bianca, was performed by Teresa Viarengo Amerio and recorded by Roberto Leydi at Asti, Piedmont, in 1964 (reproduced on the recording Leydi & Coggiola n.d.; see also Bone [Barwick] 1980 for discussion and analysis of this and other songs in the repertoire of Teresa Viarengo Amerio).

Version 1: Dona bianca

Scene 1: the intrigue

episode 1.1: the seducer's proposition

1 O vös-tu mni o dona bianca
o vös-tu mni al ballo cun mi
o vös-tu mni al ballo cun mi

*Do you want to come, dona bianca
do you want to come to the ball with
me?(x2)*

2 O sì sì sì che mi na mnivia
ma j'ò' paùra da mio mari

*O yes yes yes I would come
but I am afraid of my husband*

(episode 1.2: suggestion to kill husband) [absent]

episode 1.3: poison recipe

3 Va 'nt' el giardin del mio galante
la j'è la testa del serpentin
la j'è la testa del serpentin

*Go into the garden of my gallant
there is the head of a serpent (x2)*

4 E ti t'la piji t'la pisti in pulver
e pòi t'la бүti 'nt' in bicer d'vin

*You take it and grind it into dust
and then put it into a glass of wine*

Scene 2: homecoming

episode 2.1: the husband's return

5 E so mari 'l ven cà da la casa

Her husband returns from the hunt

episode 2.2: request for a drink

o dona bianca j'ò' tanta sei

o dona bianca I am very thirsty

episode 2.3: reaction to the request

6 Ma va di là ant el butegliera
la j'è 'n bicer del vin pù bun

*Go over there, in the wine cellar
there is a glass of the best wine*

Scene 3: revelation

(episode 3.1: husband notices sth wrong with wine) [absent]

episode 3.2: child warns of the plot

7 E 'l pcit anfan ch'a j'era 'nt' la cūna
papà papà beiv pa lu-li
che la mamina vól fé-ti murì

*The little child that was in the cradle
daddy, daddy don't drink it
for mummy wants to kill you*

Scene 4: reversal

episode 4.1: order to drink

8 O beiv-lu ti o dona bianca

O drink it yourself o dona bianca

(episode 4.2: woman's refusal) [absent]

episode 4.3: coercion

se no t'lu fas beivi a fil da spà
se no t'lu fas beivi a fil da spà

*or else I'll make you drink it at sword
point (x2)*

episode 4.4: agreement

9 O sì sì sì che mi lu beivria
ma j'ò' paùra d'le mie maznà
ma j'ò' paùra d'le mie maznà

(Scene 5: finale [absenti])

[insert transcription 1]

The melody, the second half of which may repeated (strophe 1), is basically in compound triple metre, with significant departures from this being associated with the taking of breaths and the prolongation of the long notes marking the ends of text lines. The sequence of pitches performed is by contrast quite stable. As is typical of Northern Italian ballad performances, there is almost no expressive variation by means of alterations to tempo, volume or voice quality.

The second version, Dona lumbarda, sung in Alessandria, Piedmont, by an unknown woman performer, born 1894, was recorded by Franco Castelli in 1968 and is reproduced on the recording Il Nigra cantato (Coggiola [1969]). Text and music are given in the booklet accompanying the recording on pages 40-41 and 54 respectively. As can be seen from the transcription, the singer's daughter and grand-daughter were present, and sometimes intervened, offering an interesting example of the negotiation of text and melody in performance.

Version 2: Dona lumbarda

Scene 1: the intrigue

episode 1.1: the seducer's proposition

A v'dagh el buongiorno, dona lumbarda ... *I wish you good-day, DL*

Singer's daughter: No no no

Singer: No no no, è sbagliato [no no no, it's wrong]

Daughter: [sings]

V'dagh el buongiorno ...

I wish you good-day ...

Daughter (cont): No. Tu, dilla che la sai [No. You say [sing] it, you know it]

Singer's grand-daughter: [sings]

I Vi dagh el bongiorno dona Lumbarda
spusemi mi spusemi mi

*I wish you good-day dona Lumbarda
marry me, marry me*

Singer: Ah ecco, eh, hai ragione. [oh, that's it, you're right]
[continues the song]

2 O se vi digo o signor conte
j'ò me mari a j'ò me mari

*I say to you sir count
I have a husband, I have a husband*

episode 1.2: suggestion to kill husband

3 O se vi digo dona lumbarda
voster mari 'l faruma muri

*I say to you dona Lumbarda
we will kill your husband*

Dona bianca [=Donna lombarda]

transcription 1

Teresa Viarengo Amerio, Asti, Piemonte, 1964

recording: Roberto Leydi

transcription: Linda Barwick 1991

1. O vò-s-tù mni o do - na bian-ca, o vò - s-tù mni al bal-lo cun mi,

o vòs-tù mni al bal-lo cun mi

2. O sì sì sì ca mi na mni - vi - a, ma j'ò' pa-ù-ra da mi - o mari

3. Va 'nt el giar - din del mi - o galan - te, là j'è la te - sta del ser - pen-tin,

là j'è la testa del ser - pen - tin.

episode 1.3: poison recipe

4 Ant' el giardin del mio padre
s'u j'è la testa di serpentén

5 La pijeruma la pisteruma
i la biteruma 'nt' in bicer d'vin

*In the garden of my father
there is a serpent's head
We will take it, we will grind it
we will put it into a glass of wine*

Scene 2: homecomingepisode 2.1: the husband's return

6 U i vén a ca' u so mari d'an
campagna

*Her husband comes home from the
country*

episode 2.2: request for a drink

dona lumbarda j'ò tanta sei

dona lumbarda I am very thirsty

episode 2.3: reaction to the request

7 O guardé 'n po' ant' i quell'armari
ch'u j'è 'n bicer du noster vén bun

*Have a look in that cabinet
there is a glass of our good wine*

Scene 3: revelation(episode 3.1: husband notices sth wrong with wine). [absent]episode 3.2: child warns of the plot

8 U i sòuta sù l'anfan d'ant' la cūnha
caro papà o bevilu nén

*The child jumps up from the cradle
dear father don't drink it*

Scene 4: reversalepisode 4.1: order to drink

9 O se vi digo dona lumbarda
bevilu vui o bevilu vui

*I say to you dona lumbarda
drink it yourself, drink it yourself*

episode 4.2: woman's refusal

10 Caro maritu j'ò nén tan séju ...

Dear husband, I am not very thirsty

[pause; daughter begins second line, singer joins in during second word]

caro marito j'ò nén tan séi

dear husband I am not very thirsty

Singer: Due volte, questa si dice, ecco così [this one is said [sung] twice, like this]

episode 4.3: coercion

11 A cun la punta dla me spadēnha
dona lumbarda t'lu biverréi

*By the point of my sword
dona lumbarda you will drink it*

(episode 4.4: agreement: absent)Scene 5: finaleepisode 5.1: woman drinks

12 La prima gutta che ha bevuto
l'è vnija gialda cume 'n sūchén

*The first drop that she drank
she turned yellow like a squash*

[Daughter, and then singer, laughs]

13 La sgunda gutta che la beveva
caro marito sto cuor a l'è mort

*The second drop that she drank
dear husband this heart is dead*

episode 5.2: moral

14 Così si fanno a le donne belle
ch'voru 'ngané u so pover mari

*This is what is done to beautiful won
who want to deceive their poor
husbands*

Singer: basta [that's enough]

[insert transcription 2]

As can be seen from my transcription, the first strophe is in 6/8, with a different melodic outline from that subsequently adopted, corrected after intervention from the singer's daughter and grand-daughter to 3/4 for most of the remainder of the performance, thus

Dona lumbarda

Unknown woman performer, b.1894, Alessandria, Piemonte, 1968

recording: Franco Castelli
transcription: Linda Barwick 1991



1 A v'dagh el buon-gior - no, do-nalum - bar - da...



3 O se vi di - go dona lum - bar - da, vo-ster ma - ri 'l fa - ru - ma mu - ri



6 Ui ven a cà so ma - ri d'an cam - pa - gna, dona lum - bar - da j'ò tan-ta sei



8 Ui sou - ta sù l'an-fan d'ant la cū - nha, ca-ro pa - pà o bevi - lu nen



13 La sgon - da gut - ta che la be - vi - va, ca-ro ma - ri - to sto cuor a l'è mort

transcription 3

La bevanda sonnifera (Nigra 77)

Teresa Viarengo Amerio, Asti, Piemonte, 1964

recording: Franco Coggiola

transcription: Linda Barwick 1991

giving duple rather than triple groupings of the usual syllabic value of a quaver. As I have discussed extensively in Barwick 1985:125-8, the usual speech stresses of the text often fit better with 6/8 rather than 3/4 metre, and to accommodate these and to fit in extra syllables this singer sometimes uses triple rather than duple groupings (as in strophes 6, 8 and 13 of the transcription). As in the previous example, the sequence of pitches performed remains relatively stable, and expressive or dynamic variation is absent.

It will be observed that the two melodies used are not particularly similar, and the loose association of a particular sequence of pitches with a particular song tradition can be further illustrated by considering another ballad performed by Teresa Viarengo Amerio (the singer of version 1), *La bevanda sonnifera* (henceforth BS) which is musically very similar to that of DL version 2 above, although there is considerably more melodic variation, including an elaboration of the melody to cover four hemistiches (strophe 4) rather than the normal two.

[insert transcription 3]

This performance and DL version 2 use almost identical rhythmic settings (in 3/4) of the ten-syllable hemistich. If we compare the most usual sequence of pitches used in the two-hemistich version of this melody with those used in DL version 2, it will be seen that the melodic relationship is also close.

[insert transcription 4]

On the basis of textual phrasing and melodic relationship, the melody can be segmented as follows: with the exception of some initial and final notes, the two melodies move in thirds for the first and fourth segments (corresponding to the first phrase of the first hemistich and the second phrase of the second hemistich), and in unison for the second and third segments (corresponding to the second phrase of the first hemistich and the first phrase of the second hemistich). This type of melodic relationship is directly related to the performance of ballads as both solo and choral items in Northern Italian repertoires. The

♩ = 110 ca.

1. E'n - da - zend a la fun - ta - ne - la 'n sur ca va - lier a s'sun ri - scun - tré.
1. Going to the fountain, [the girl] and sir knight met each other.

2. O sen - tí sen - tí bela Pi - no - ta, o sen - tí sen - tí cu - za a'v vói dí.
2. O listen, listen beautiful Pinota, o listen listen to what I want to tell you.

4. O sí sí sí o sur ca - va - lie - re, a mi - a mam - ma a i lu vagh a dí,
4. O yes yes yes o sir knight, my mother I'll go and tell,

o ma sí sí sur cava - lie - re, a la mi - a mam - ma a i lu vagh a dí.
o but yes yes sir knight, my mother I'll go and tell.

12. Mi vi da - rí - a due cen - to scu - di, d'ü - na not - te a dör - mi cun mi.
12. I would give you 200 scudi for one night's sleeping with me.

13. O no no no o sur ca - va - lie - re.
13. O no no no o sir knight

Comparison of most common strophic melodies of Donna lombarda
version 2 and La bevanda sonnifera as performed
by Teresa Viarengo Amerio

segment 1 segment 2 segment 3 segment 4

hemistich 1 hemistich 2

o = pitches performed in most common strophic melody of Donna Lombarda
version 2
x = pitches performed in most common strophic melody of La bevanda sonnifera
as sung by Teresa Viarengo Amerio

most usual choral performance style involves harmonisation by thirds with occasional empty fifths; in rendering such melodies in solo form, singers may swap from one choral part to another in different phrases (sometimes, but by no means always, because of difficulties with the tessitura). Marcello Sorce Keller has also identified this phenomenon in his comparison of popular melodies used in the Trentino-Alto Adige region (1991:88-9; see also Sassu 1983:161) and notes the importance of such continual reformulation of melodic material in choral and solo forms for the generation of melodic change (1991:89; for discussion of this phenomenon with regard to Donna lombarda see also Pratella 1935, Barwick 1985:chapter 3). In the ballad repertoire, then, the association of a song text with a particular sequence of pitches is generally quite loose (the only instances in my sample of exact reproduction of the same melody in different performance contexts appeared when musical documentation had been part of the process of transmission, as in 'revival' versions of an original field recording). Conversely, there is a high level of shared melodic material between different song traditions in the repertoire; in this respect, it is apparent that song traditions whose texts are constructed on a similar metrical model (like the ten-syllable hemistich of Donna lombarda and La bevanda sonnifera) are particularly liable to interact melodically. In summary, although a particular performer tends to reproduce a similar melodic outline in performance of consecutive strophes within one performance, there is strong evidence of both rhythmic and melodic instability between performances and performers.

Let us return to the question of narrative variation in the DL song tradition. In other performances of DL, singers of both versions 1 and 2 produced significantly different versions by omitting or including strophes and by varying the formulaic composition of some strophes. For example, another recorded performance by Teresa Viarengo Amerio includes three hemistiches dealing with episode 1.2 (suggestion to kill the husband) that are omitted from version 1 above, and in episode 4.4 (agreement) substitutes the words basta ch'a m'guardi le mie maznà (so long as someone looks after my children) for ma j'ò' paùra

d'le mie maznà (but I am afraid for my children - strophe 9 of version 1 above). Bearing this variability in mind, it is nevertheless instructive to briefly compare the narrative and formulaic structures of versions 1 and 2.

Figure 2

Comparison of narrative structures of versions 1 and 2.

Figures show the number of discrete hemistiches used to express the episode (a strophe being usually made up of 2 hemistiches). The repetition of a hemistich is indicated by an additional figure - thus 4+1 indicates 4 different hemistiches, one of which is repeated.

	Version 1	Version 2
Scene 1: intrigue		
Episode 1.1	4+1	4
Episode 1.2	-	2
Episode 1.3	4+1	4
Scene 2: husband's return		
Episode 2.1	1	1
Episode 2.2	1	1
Episode 2.3	2	2
Scene 3: revelation		
Episode 3.1	-	-
Episode 3.2	3	2
Scene 4: reversal		
Episode 4.1	1	2
Episode 4.2	-	1+1
Episode 4.3	1+1	2
Episode 4.4	2+1	-
Scene 5: moral		
Episode 5.1	-	4
Episode 5.2	-	2

It is in scenes 2 and 3 that the two versions are most alike, being identical in strophic composition and very similar in formulaic expression: compare for example, the two realisations of episode 2.2 (request for a drink) - o dona bianca j'ò tanta sei (version 1), and dona lumbarda j'ò tanta sei (version 2). Even here, there are significant differences both major (realisation of the five-syllable vocative formula as either o dona bianca or dona lumbarda) and apparently minor (dialectal differences in the vowel quality of the first person singular of the verb 'have' - j'ò versus j'ò). Examination of the complete corpus reveals that differences of these types are widespread and indexical of two of a limited number of procedures for formulaic variation (these procedures will be discussed more fully below). Although in this case the formulaic relationship between the two versions is

readily apparent, it is important to realise that in other circumstances the same processes of formulaic variation, continually re-applied in fresh performances, can lead to apparently unrelated expressions. For example these two performances have what may seem entirely different expressions of the seducer's proposition (episode 1.1) as Q vòs-tu mnì o dona bianca / o vòs-tu mnì al ballo con mi (version 1) and as Vi dagh el bongiorno dona lumbarda / spusemi mi spusemi mi (version 2). It is, however, possible to demonstrate their interrelationship through situating them within the context of the sample as a whole (see figure 3).

[insert figure 3]

Sources of examples used in figure 3

Example 1. Most common Northern version, extensively documented 1840s on throughout Northern Italy (eg Nigra 1974 versions 1A, B, D, J, K, L, M).

Example 2. Version 2 (Alessandria, Piedmont, 1968); spusemi mi formula first documented in Alessandria province pre-1858 (Nigra 1974 version 1E).

Example 3. Novara province, Piedmont, pre-1888 (Nigra 1974 version 1G).

Example 4. Novara province, Piedmont, pre-1858 (Nigra 1974 version 1F); venire a spasso formula first documented 1840 (Nigra 1974 version 1A3).

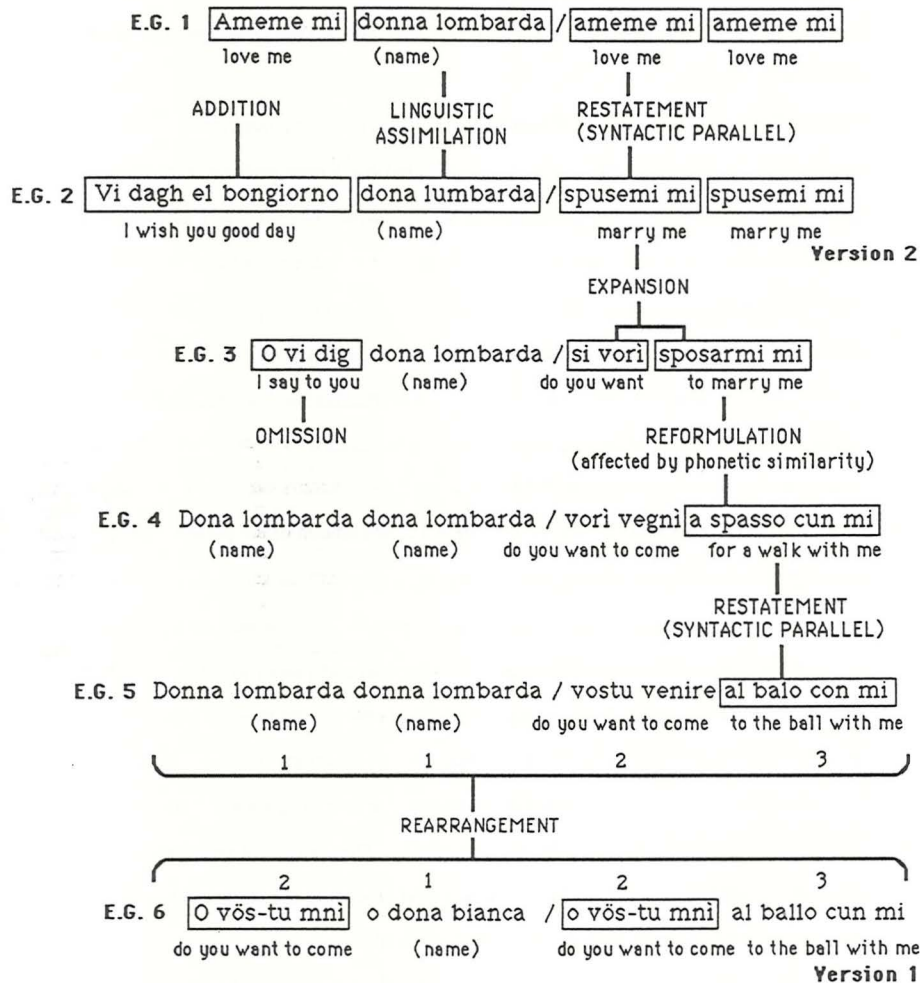
Example 5. Mantova province, Lombardy, 1914-18; venire al ballo formula first documented in Lombardy pre-1870 (Nigra 1974 version 1H).

Example 6. Version 1 (Asti, Piedmont, 1964); dona bianca formula first documented in Torino province, Piedmont, 1840 (Nigra 1974 version 1A3).

The four 3- to 6-syllable 'slots' making up the usual metrical structure of the text line (see Barwick 1985:chapter 4 for extensive discussion of the metrical and formulaic composition of DL) may be occupied by from two to four distinct formulae, in other words the same formula may occur in more than one metrical slot within a text line. The following processes of textual variation can be frequently identified in the sample, and will be illustrated with reference to figure 2, showing how the expression of the seducer's proposition in the two versions under discussion can be related to each other and to the most common expression of this idea in Northern versions of the song tradition.

*re-ordering: the expression of the same formulae in a different order (eg examples 5 and 6 display re-arrangement of the same three formulae from the order 1123 to 2123).

EXPRESSION OF THE NARRATIVE ELEMENT
"SEDUCER'S PROPOSITION"



***elaboration**: the two main types are addition of new material and expansion of a one-phrase formula to cover two phrases, both of which usually displace an existing repetition. For example, the commonplace ballad formula Vi dagh el bongiorno (I wish you good-day - example 2) fills the metrical slot commonly occupied by a subsequently repeated formula in other versions (see examples 1, 4, 5, 6); while the two-phrase formula si vori sposarmi mi (do you want to marry me - example 3) is an expansion of the repeated one-phrase formula spusemi mi (marry me - example 2).

***condensation**: the two main types are the omission of a formula, or the contraction of a two-phrase formula to one phrase; the vacant metrical slot thus created may either be filled by a repeat (as in the first line of example 4 when compared with that of example 3) or by new material, perhaps as part of a larger-scale telescoping of two strophes into one.

***restatement**:

a) the reformulation of a concept, for example the recasting of si vori sposarmi mi (do you want to marry me - example 3) as vori vegni a spasso con mi (do you want to come for a walk with me - example 4); such reformulations often appear to be affected by phonetic similarity between the formulae concerned, and in this case would also have been conditioned by the presence of a venire a spasso con me formula in other song traditions in the repertoire such as Il taglione (Nigra 81);

b) **linguistic assimilation**, the restatement of a formula in a different linguistic register (usually involving the change from Italian to dialect or vice versa), for example the articulation of the conventional Italian words donna lombarda in Piedmontese dialect form as dona lumbarda in example 2;

c) **innovation by syntactic parallel**, for example the formation of spusemi mi (marry me - example 2) on the analogy of ameme mi (love me - example 1); or the appearance of venire al ballo (come to the ball - examples 5 and 6) in the place of venire a spasso (come for a walk - example 4).

There may be some overlap in the above three subcategories of the restatement process, for example, the considerable linguistic differences between Northern and Central/Southern dialects mean that it is often impossible for lexical or grammatical reasons to easily transfer formulae from a Northern dialect to a Southern one by minimal processes of linguistic assimilation such as the phonetic change illustrated above; this difficulty may then motivate a more large-scale reformulation of a concept, perhaps retaining some syntactic parallels - such processes appear to be at work when in many Tuscan versions of the ballad we observe the Northern formula ameme mi replaced by vogliami bene (both meaning 'love me').

Similar variation processes to those found at the level of the formula can also be identified at the level of narrative composition, although here the formal context is less restrictive. Nevertheless, there are clear formal principles operating: on the level of scene disposition, there is a clear tendency for each version to be composed of scenes of roughly equal length, and similar tendencies to form balancing groups are discernible in the combinations of episodes to make up the scene, and in the combinations of groups of two or three strophes to make up the episodes (Buchan 1972 refers to the latter level as binary and ternary architectonic structuring). Each performance in the song tradition has its own narrative logic, despite being made up of scenes and episodes shared with other versions.

***re-ordering and permutation:** The same material may serve different functions in different versions: for example, scene 3, the revelation, is the climax of many Central-Southern versions, while in some Northern versions the revelation, together with the preceding homecoming scene functions rather as a section of mounting dramatic suspense before the climax is reached in scene 4, the reversal. The re-ordering of episodes within a scene (eg the reversal of the order of episodes 3.1 and 3.2 in the revelation scene of one Trentino version) generates a significant narrative change by altering the internal relationships of the episodes, so that the same basic material takes on a different meaning within the syntax of the narrative. A related form of variation occurs when the same

formulae are spoken by different characters, especially when they stand in opposition to each other: for example, although the words used are almost identical, major narrative variation is found in some versions when the husband, and not the wife, agrees to drink and die in episode 4.4.

***condensation, elaboration and restatement:** I have already mentioned that non-essential narrative material may be omitted or included in different performances by the same singer; such might apply for example to scene 5, which functions as a non-essential addendum to the story, or to episode 1.2, the suggestion to kill the husband, which is implicit in the ensuing episode 1.3, the recipe for preparation of the poison. Other than this, significant examples of narrative elaboration concern the addition of 'new' material, which may be generated in a number of ways. These include incorporation of new material according to formulaic procedures common to the whole genre, such as the introduction of a question and answer format into an episode usually more simply expressed by a single character (this not infrequently occurs in episode 1.3 preparation of the poison); and the adaptation of material from another part of the narrative, usually by syntactic parallel (eg there are frequent parallels in expression between episodes 1.1 - the seducer's proposition, 2.2 - the husband's request for a drink, and 4.1 - the husband's order to drink). The latter type of construction contributes to a sense of balance between scenes within the narrative, and often emphasises oppositions between situations or characters; for example, the opposition between the seducer's illegitimate request for love in episode 1.1 and the husband's legitimate request for a drink in episode 2.2. The creation of new formulae on the model of old by syntactic parallel is thus a central procedure in interstrophic narrative elaboration as well as in restatement of existing material.

The existence in the repertoire of other metrically and situationally similar song traditions provides another source of material for narrative adaptation and innovation. Such material ranges from a single formula (eg the formula il re di Francia, which occurs in the song traditions La moglie uccisa (Nigra 29), La barbiera francese (Nigra 33), and L'amante

del prigioniero (Nigra 57) as well as in Donna lombarda to an entire episode (eg in one Tuscan version the revelation scene is expanded to three episodes by the addition of the testing for poison motif commonly found in the song tradition of the Testamento dell'avvelenato (Nigra 26 - Lord Randal). I argue, however, that innovation by interaction with another song tradition forms a continuum with both innovation by adaptation of material from other parts of the same narrative and innovation by incorporation of new material using formulaic procedures common to the ballad genre. The evidence offered by the analysis of narrative variation in Donna lombarda leads me to consider all three as part of the same process of variation.

Firstly, all three types of innovation take place within a context in which song performances are flexible expressions of the performers' relationship to their cultural heritage, every aspect of the performance being open to recreation and adaptation. Narrative variation is just as inevitable and normal a consequence of such a process of production as formulaic and melodic variation; consequently, the performer is not constrained from introducing narrative elaboration and innovation (from whatever source) by a sense of having to reproduce a fixed opus.

Secondly, all three types of innovation involve the formal adaptation of ideas to fit both the metrical and the narrative context. In the case of adapting material from other parts of the same narrative, formulaic and metrical changes are usually minimal (a change of verb conjugation may be all that is needed to adapt the formula to its new context): the casting of 'original' ideas in appropriate metrical form represents the other end of the spectrum, while the adaptation of already metred material from other song traditions falls somewhere between these two poles.

Thirdly, all three types of innovation are constrained by cultural definitions of appropriate narrative development; for appropriate causal connection to be made between successive narrative stages, any narrative innovation must satisfy recognised possibilities of the situation including a sense of appropriate behaviour within culturally defined norms.

It is as inconceivable in these terms for the roles of the woman and the seducer to be reversed (even though the narrative material might be readily adapted in this way) as it is for Donna lombarda to suggest divorcing her husband, or for the ending of an inappropriate ballad to be borrowed (for example, it is theoretically possible that the woman might borrow the husband's sword and kill him instead, as happens in the song tradition Un'eroina - Nigra 13).

Figure 4
Interaction of Donna lombarda with other song traditions, showing the number of song traditions interacting at each episode of the narrative framework and listing these by title as given in Nigra 1974 if included (common alternative titles shown in square brackets).

Scene 1: the intrigue		
episode 1.1: the seducer's proposition		5
	<u>Il marito giustiziere</u> (Nigra 30); <u>Margherita</u> (Nigra 32); <u>La barbiera francese</u> (Nigra 33); <u>Il taglione</u> (Nigra 81) [<u>L'infedeltà ricambiata</u>]; <u>Padre Scarpazza</u>	
episode 1.2: suggestion to kill husband		3
	<u>La barbiera francese</u> (Nigra 33); <u>La prova</u> (Nigra 54); <u>Padre Scarpazza</u>	
episode 1.3: poison recipe		1
	<u>Strano vocero</u> (Nigra 84)	
Scene 2: homecoming		
episode 2.1: the husband's return		3
	<u>Marito giustiziere</u> (Nigra 30); <u>Convegno notturno</u> (Nigra 76); <u>Mal del convento</u> (Conati 1976:191, n.47)	
episode 2.2: request for a drink		2
	<u>Fior di Tomba</u> (Nigra 19); <u>La vedova di Borgomasino</u> (Nigra 117)	
episode 2.3: reaction to the request		1
	some <i>cantastorie</i> influence	
Scene 3: revelation		
episode 3.1: husband notices sth wrong with wine		0
episode 3.2: child warns of the plot		2
	<u>Il testamento dell'avvelenato</u> (Nigra 26); <u>La monaca sposa</u> (Nigra 80)	
Scene 4: reversal		
episode 4.1: order to drink		0
episode 4.2: woman's refusal		0
episode 4.3: coercion		5
	<u>Marito giustiziere</u> , (Nigra 30); <u>Margherita</u> (Nigra 32); <u>La barbiera francese</u> (Nigra 33); <u>Il taglione</u> (Nigra 81); <u>Padre Scarpazza</u>	
episode 4.4: agreement		3
	<u>La moglie uccisa</u> (Nigra 29); <u>La barbiera francese</u> (Nigra 33); <u>L'amante del prigioniero</u> (Nigra 57)	
Scene 5: finale		
episode 5.1: woman drinks		1
	<u>La barbiera francese</u> (Nigra 33)	
episode 5.2: moral		3
	<u>Un'eroina</u> (Nigra 13) E; <u>Fior di tomba</u> (Nigra 19); <u>Strano vocero</u> (Nigra 81)	

Both interaction with other song traditions and generation of new narrative possibilities are most common at the beginning and at the ending of the narrative (see figure 4), partly because the initial scenario of a sexual proposition and the final scenario of violent punishment of an unfaithful wife are among the most common situations in the ballad genre in Italy. What is particular to Donna lombarda is the mode of evolution of the first scenario into the second, that is, the conspiracy and its discovery, and in this part of the song instances of significant narrative variation are rare; most interaction with other song traditions is confined to the level of formulaic expression.

If we did not know the origin of the 'test for poison' motif discussed earlier as imported from the song tradition Testamento dell'avvelenato, there is no mark of Cain, nothing essential in its expression, that would allow us to identify it as contaminating 'alien' to the DL song tradition. In style, expression and form this variation is just as much part of the DL song tradition as any other narrative innovation. I am not suggesting that the knowledge of its presence in another song tradition is unimportant (indeed, it is essential to realise that song traditions interact): but rather that such processes of interaction must be assessed in the context of our understanding of the wider processes of production of oral performances, for which the cultural context provides not only a pool of material shared with other song traditions, but also a procedural framework within which new material may be generated. It is impossible to acknowledge the complexity of such interaction between song traditions if we are content to characterise it as 'contamination', a process apart from 'normal' variation. Like so much of the ideological baggage of nineteenth century philology, the use of the term 'contamination' reflects Western literary bias towards the search for origins, at the cost, I suggest, of an understanding of the process of production of song in performance.

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