Irish American Vernacular English

The Secret Irish Traveller Bain-Fhile (Woman-Poet) of "Whoopie Ti Yi Yo, Git Along Little Dogies" by Daniel Cassidy copyright 2005

In 1910 John Lomax concluded the first edition of his now canonical *Cowboy Songs and Frontier Ballads* with a song he called "the quintessential cowboy song, unlike others known to have been imported and adapted in the West," *Whoopie Ti Yi Yo, Git Along Little Doggies*.

The enigmatic phonetic lyrics of this world-famous, foundational American cowboy song have puzzled scholars and American folklorists for a century.

**WHOOPIE TI YI YO, GIT ALONG LITTLE DOGIES**

As I was a-walkin' one morning for pleasure,  
Il spied a cow puncher a-ridin' along,  
His hat was throw'd back and his spurs were a-jinglin',  
As he approached me a-singin' this song...

Whoopie Ti Yi Yo, Git' along little dogies  
It's your misfortune and none of my own;  
Whoopie Ti Yi Yo, Git' along little dogies  
For you know Wyoming will be your new home.

*Lomax* wrote that "(t)he tune of this song was given to me at the Texas cattleman's Convention, Fort Worth, Texas, 1910, by Mrs. Trantham, a wandering gypsy minstrel."

Years later, in an expanded edition of *Cowboy Songs,* Professor Lomax characterized the enigmatic lyrics and haunting air of *Whoopie Ti Yi Yo* as being "touched by the style of the Irish traveling folk." In fact, the mysterious "gypsy" minstrel Mrs. Trantham was not a Romany Gypsy but an *American Irish Traveller.* (CSFB, Lomax, pp. xxvi-xxviii, p. 4.)
The American Irish Travellers, or "Irish Tinkers," an inaccurate moniker they barely tolerate, are a scattered Diaspora of itinerant Irish and Gammon speaking clans that have flourished in the United States for centuries. They are "cousins" of the Irish Travellers of Ireland and the most invisible Irish Americans.

The Irish Travellers live and work in sizeable numbers throughout the south and west and have lived in Fort Worth, Texas, where Mrs. Trantham first sang the song to John Lomax, for at least 150 years.

Whoopie Ti Yo's enigmatic language puzzled John and his son the late folklorist Alan Lomax for their entire lives; especially the source of the word "dogie" for the runty, orphaned, hard to fatten calves in the herd.

"Dogie - A scrubby calf that has not wintered well and is anemic from the scant food of the cold weather...also a dogey. It is in the language of the cowboy a calf who has lost his mammy and whose daddy has run off with another cow. Ramon F. Adams, "Dictionary of the American West," Univ. of Oklahoma, 1968, p. 96

Some scholars speculated that the term "dogie" derived from the Mexican term "dogal" for a calves' halter. Others asserted that "dogies," said to be pronounced more like "doughy" by the cowboys, may have derived from the phrase "dough-guts" and described the bloated look of the hard to feed, motherless calves, too young or anemic to eat scrub grass. But all agreed that the cowboys themselves defined the "dogies" as runty orphans.

Despite the fact that the song was first "given" to John Lomax by a Texas Irish Traveller female bard, or that his son Alan, in a lifelong quest for the song's origins, and the source of the word dogie, traced the melody of Whoopie Ti Yi Yo to Ireland in the 1960s, and an Irish lullaby about an orphan child in an old man's arms; no one sought the source of the song's strange words - and the word "dogie" in particular -- in the Irish language.

I believe the mysterious word "dogie" is merely the English phonetic representation of the Irish word do-thóigthe.

(Pron. do-(t)hóig(t)he - aspirated "th" = "h")
Do-thóigthe, p.a., hard to rear; hard to fatten (as a calf.) (Dineen, p. 361.)
Do-thóigthe fits perfectly the definition and phonetics of "Dogie." I also believe the rest of the songs phonetic chorus might be reracinated into Irish as follows.

Lomax's phonetic word "Whoopie" may conceal the Irish word "Uimhir," meaning "a number" and would sound like "Whoovie" to a Harvard Professor's English speaking ears.

The three-syllable phonetic phrase "Ti Yi Yo" may hide the Irish compound-participle, "dí-áireamh," (pron. Di-Ire-Ohh) -- as in the "countless number" of the vast cattle herds of the Old Chisolm Trail.

Whoopie Ti Yi Yo may then merely be the Anglo-Saxonist Harvard English professor's phonetic spelling of the Irish phrase, "di-áireamh" meaning "a countless number."

In this re-translated Irish version of Mrs. Trantham's lyric the singing buckaroos (bocaí rua, wild bucks or playboys) urge the anemic ládáil, do-thóigthe (hard-to-fatten cargo) to céadlongadh (pron. gyett-longah; "dh" = "h") or break fast on the sparse prairie grass. The haunting Gaelic air soothes the hungry herd that will soon meet their "misfortune" in the slaughter houses at the end of the Old Chisholm Trail.

Here's what I believe to be Mrs. Trantham's Irish version of the songs eerie B flat chorus - with an English re-translation.
Whoopie Ty Yi Yo, git along, little doggies
Uimhir di-áireamh céadlongadh ládáil do-thóigthe
Countless number break fast, hard-to-feed cargo,
It's your misfortune and none of my own

In 1910, the American Irish Traveller bard, Mrs. Trantham, caoins (keens, cries) not only for the numberless herds, on their way to the fattening pens and slaughter houses at the end of the Chisholm trail, but for her human family, the vast "orphan cargo" of 19th century Europe, who famished or fled in numberless numbers a mere sixty years before, in a starving Ireland, so full of misfortune.

“Paddy Works On The Erie” by Anon. (ca..1835)

Daniel Cassidy 3.17.05 San Francisco
Carl Sandburg, American Song Bag, pp. 356-357

This foundational American work-song goes back to New York State in the 1830s and '40s.

This is the first time its famous refrain has been re-translated back into its linguistic root in the Irish language. Prior to this it was thought the language of the chorus of Paddy Works on The Erie was made up of nothing but “nonsense syllables.” For five hundred years Irish has been one of the secret tongues of the working classes and poor of North America.

Paddy Works On The Erie
Fil-i-me-o-re-i-re-ay

In eighteen hundred and forty-wan
I put me cord'roy breeches on
I put me cord'roy breeches on
I put me cord'roy breeches on
To work upon the railway

Fil-i-me-o-re-i-re-ay
Fil-i-me-o-re-i-re-ay
Fil-i-me-o-re-i-re-ay
To work upon the railway.

In eighteen hundred and forty-two
I left the old world for the new
Bad cess to the luck that brought me through,
To work upon the railway.

Fil-i-me-o-re-i-re-ay
Filleadh mé uair éirithe (pron. Filleh-may-o-re-eer-ee-ay, "dh" and "th" = "h")
(Literal translation) The hour of rising I return (or "I go back")
To work upon the railway.

When we left Ireland to come here,
And spend out latter days in cheer,
Our bosses they did drink strong beer,
And Pat worked on the railway.

Fil-i-me-o-re-i-re-ay
Filleadh mé uair éirithe
The hour of rising I go back
To work upon the railway
Our contractor's name it was Tom King
He kept a store to rob the men,
A Yankee clerk with ink and pen,
To cheat Pat on the railroad.

Fil-i-me-o-o-re-i-re-ay
Filleadh mé uair éirithe
The hour of rising I go back
To work upon the railway.

In eighteen hundred and forty-three
'Twas then I met sweet Biddy Magee,
And an inlygant wife she's been to me,
While workin' on the railway.

The hour of rising I go back
The hour of rising I go back
The hour of rising I go back
To work upon the railway.

In eighteen hundred and forty-seven
Sweet Biddy Magee, she went to heaven,
If she left one child, she left eleven,
To work upon the railroad.

Fil-i-me-o-o-re-i-re-ay
Filleadh mé uair éirithe
The hour of rising I go back
To work upon the railway.

In eighteen hundred and forty-eight
I learned to take my whiskey straight,
'Tis an inlygant drink and can't be bate
For working on a railway.

Filleadh mé uair éirithe
Filleadh mé uair éirithe
The hour of rising I go back
To work upon the railway.

The voice of the hybrid Irish-American working class is not balbh (mute) in America.