

“The Only Way That I Could Cry”: Woody Guthrie and the Writing of “Balladsongs”

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Woody Guthrie wrote about everything. He even coined a motto about it at the end of his most famous lyric sheet: “All you can write is what you see.”¹ And he saw just about everything there was to see of the mid-twentieth-century American experience. His famous travels took him throughout most of the then forty-eight states, and like so many Americans of his day, World War II acquainted him with life on the high seas, the coasts of Africa, and parts of Europe. As he wrote about the things he saw and the causes he came to embrace, Guthrie developed an approach to the songwriting process that he shared with anyone who would listen and even some that probably did not want his advice at all. That approach has gone on to influence generations of songwriters ever since — their legion is often dubbed “Woody’s Children.” Peers like Pete Seeger, Lee Hays, Ronnie Gilbert, and Fred Hellerman, who would go on to form the influential folk/pop group The Weavers, recorded Woody’s songs, emulated his songwriting process in their own work, and helped spark a “folk revival” that energized the 1950s and 60s. Young entertainers like Ramblin’ Jack Elliot and Bob Dylan sought out and copied Guthrie as they developed their own craft. More recently, artists like Billy Bragg, Jay Farrar, and Jonatha Brooke have counted Guthrie as a major influence and have even adapted his unpublished lyrics in some of their recordings as well as incorporating his “all you can write is what you see” mentality into their own creative processes. Guthrie’s influences on American songwriting demands a close investigation of his process and his ideas about crafting songs.

No discussion of Guthrie’s songwriting can ignore the vast scholarship investigating the themes behind his work. Folklorists Alan Lomax and John Greenway pioneered efforts to inform the world of Woody’s importance as a folk songwriter. More recently, outstanding studies that tell the history of how he developed themes in writings by distinguished scholars such as Mark Allan Jackson, Ronald D. Cohen, Will Kaufman, Greg Vandy, and John Shaw have elaborated on, improved, and continued that tradition. These writers have looked at the significance of Guthrie’s catalog, his influences, the social causes he championed in song, and the backdrop of the history of the periods in which he wrote. Even though there’s no shortage of interest in Guthrie’s life and work, investigation of his approaches to songwriting and the advice he gave to the world about making up what he liked to call “balladsongs” is still worthy of closer scrutiny.

Early on, Alan Lomax recognized the significance and scope of Woody's abilities. In a letter to Harold Spivacke, the head of the Library of Congress's music division, Lomax wrote: ". . . allow me to say that the group with which Mr. Guthrie is working is continually experimenting with the development and extension of the medium of American folk song . . ."2 Lomax correctly identified Guthrie and his collaborators in the Almanac Singers as an integral part of the continuing "folk process" and as contributors to the ever-growing catalog of American song.

Since then, others have accepted and embraced Lomax's view. A young Bob Dylan, after reading Woody's seminal memoir *Bound for Glory*, dropped out of college and moved to New York to meet Woody and learn at the feet of the master. Woody was nearly gone then, unable really to play or communicate very effectively as a result of a terrible arm injury from a fire and the onset of Huntington's disease; but he still captivated Dylan, who would go on to emulate Woody's songs and his approach to writing in his own career.

In the 1960s, as the "Folk Revival" matured, more scholars began to examine Guthrie's importance as so many giants of the revival paid homage to the master. John Greenway reflected on Woody's songwriting legacy in a 1966 article written shortly after the United States Department of the Interior announced that it was granting Guthrie its Conservation Service Award and naming a Bonneville Power Administration substation in his honor. Greenway lamented the fact that Guthrie was still relatively unknown, indeed not nearly as well recognized as his protégés like Bob Dylan, and pointed out that a recent *Newsweek* article had described Woody's son Arlo as "playing a harmonica, 'suspended Dylan-style around his neck.' O tempora! O mores! Bob Dylan learned this posture from Woody!" For Greenway, who earlier had described Guthrie as "the greatest figure in American folksong," this lack of recognition was truly tragic. He also pointed out: "The literary men tell us that every poet has his ten years. Guthrie had his decade; before 1938 he was not yet Woody Guthrie; after 1948 he was no longer Woody Guthrie." But he had his ten years. Greenway also reflected on Guthrie's process of writing songs in cyclical bursts such as *Dust Bowl Ballads* and the tremendous outpouring of work in his month-long stint writing for the Bonneville Power Administration (the songs that led to the conservation award) as demonstrating "a rush of genius poured into twenty-six songs in twenty-eight days." And he opined: "The range of subject, treatment, and mood in Guthrie's songs was as far-reaching as his own footsteps over his country."³

In recent years, scholars have begun exploring Woody's writings more closely, focusing deeply on the range of his subjects and themes. Mark Allan Jackson, in *Prophet Singer: The Voice and Vision of Woody Guthrie*, takes a bold, holistic approach to Guthrie's

writing by exploring major topics in his voluminous catalog. Jackson investigates the maturation of Guthrie’s work from his earliest efforts to his later sketches during his long hospitalization for Huntington’s disease at the end of his life. Although Jackson examines a wide range of themes, he focuses deeply on Guthrie’s efforts “to record the wrongs of which he knew and to point out the paths that he thought the nation could take in order to improve the lot of its underclass.” He sees Guthrie as not only a recorder of the inequities and injustices that he saw in his travels, but also as an optimist “looking forward to a time and a place when and where all people have homes and jobs, plenty to eat, freedom to speak their minds, and equal status under the law — regardless of race or gender or class.”⁴ For Jackson, Guthrie truly was a “prophet singer.”

Ronald D. Cohen, in *Woody Guthrie: Writing America’s Songs*, provides a broad overview of Guthrie’s themes throughout the twenty productive years of his career as well as an important assessment of his rediscovery during the Folk Revival and his influences on contemporary artists across a variety of musical styles — from Americana singer-songwriters like Jimmy LaFave to pop stars such as John Mellencamp and Bruce Springsteen to soul icons like Sharon Jones and the Dap Kings, and even international artists like Germany’s Hans Eckardt-Wenzel. From Guthrie’s friends like Pete Seeger (who once famously began a letter to Guthrie, “Dear Woody, my friend and teacher”⁵ and whose essay “Remembering Woody” is reprinted in Cohen’s book) to contemporary musician activists like Rage Against the Machine’s, Tom Morello, Cohen vividly reveals again and again Guthrie’s powerful influences on American song.⁶

Will Kaufman, in two outstanding books, *Woody Guthrie, American Radical* and *Woody Guthrie’s Modern World Blues*, delves deeply into two important aspects of Guthrie’s writings and art.⁷ In *American Radical*, Kaufman investigates Guthrie’s road from his middle-class roots to his role as an activist for labor and civil rights. He explores Woody’s “awakenings” as a youth as he came to grips with inequities growing up in Okemah, Oklahoma and Pampa, Texas, to his life on the road and visits to the labor camps that led to his seminal *Dust Bowl Ballads*. Kaufman also traces Guthrie’s long and difficult journey to come to grips with his own racist ideas as he dealt with the possible part his father Charley might have played in the lynching of the Nelson family in Okemah the year before Woody was born, through to his own witnessing of the Peekskill riots in New York State in 1949. Although Kaufman’s book explores a wide variety of topics including Guthrie’s journalistic writing, his emphasis on how the growth of radical ideas influenced Guthrie’s songwriting remains constant throughout this deeply nuanced book. From bringing the plight of the Dust Bowl migrants to light in ballads such

as "Tom Joad," to his many union songs, to his deeply moving investigation of Woody's ideas toward race in the pivotal chapter "Long Road to Peekskill," Kaufman again and again gives credence to how Guthrie's observations of American life influenced both his art and his radicalism. In the Peekskill chapter especially, he investigates what Greenway identified as Guthrie's cyclical approach to songwriting as well as how the causes he embraced influenced the art that he made.⁸

In *Modern World Blues*, Kaufman exposes the world to Woody Guthrie, the "all you can write is what you see" artist who is influenced by the modernity he encountered throughout his life, as well as arguing for his emergence as a "modernist" artist in the tradition of T. S. Eliot, Bertolt Brecht, or even his second wife Marjorie's employer, modern dancer Martha Graham. It would do violence to Kaufman's book to imply that he focused only on Guthrie's songwriting, but he nonetheless makes a strong case about how the modern world — with its radios, films, automobiles, airplanes, atomic bombs, and flying saucers — influenced Guthrie's writings, as well as how Woody fits into the modernist critiques by identifying him with his contemporaries in New York intellectual circles and within the context of the modernist scholarly theories of Thomas Crow, Regina Bendix, and, particularly, Edward Comentale.⁹

Greg Vandy, perhaps, takes the closest look at Guthrie's motivations for his songwriting in *26 Songs in 30 Days*. Like Kaufman in "Long Road to Peekskill," Vandy focuses on one of Guthrie's cyclical bursts, perhaps his most prolific one, when he penned twenty-six songs in one month as part of a commission by the Bonneville Power Authority (BPA). Initially, the bureau had sought to hire Guthrie for a year, but fears of Guthrie's leftist politics, combined with Washingtonian bureaucracy, afforded the BPA only enough money to hire him for a month in 1941. The job came along at a difficult time in Woody's life. He had left a lucrative radio job in New York and made it out to California with his first wife Mary and their three children. Roaming around California looking for work, he landed in Columbia, California where a letter from the BPA's Stephen Kahn offering the position reached the balladeer. Guthrie was broke and his wife Mary was fed up with his incessant rambling and inability to hold a job and provide for the family, so the Guthries made their way to Portland. Once there, after getting over the initial disappointment of a the one-year stint turning into a thirty day gig, Guthrie agreed to work for a month for \$266.66 to write up the songs for Kahn's film project. In true "all you can write is what you see" fashion, a man named Elmer Buehler drove Guthrie around the Columbia River Basin so he could observe the land and the plans for the BPA's building projects. Writing often at night at his home, in the offices of the BPA, and sometimes even in Buehler's car as they

drove around, Guthrie wrote one of his most beautiful and important song cycles, his Columbia River songs.¹⁰

John Shaw, in *This Land That I Love: Irving Berlin, Woody Guthrie, and the Story of Two American Anthems*, attempts to juxtapose Guthrie’s “This Land Is Your Land” with the popular song to which it was written as a critical response, Berlin’s “God Bless America,” which became a hit for singer Kate Smith in 1938. The main story of Guthrie’s “in your face” response to the hit — especially in its original form, entitled “God Blessed America,” in which Guthrie pits the poverty of the Great Depression and the excesses of capitalism against the starvation of fellow Americans — is well known. Shaw, however, also does a fine job in relating Woody’s work to the history of Anglo-American anthems such as “My Country ‘Tis of Thee” and “The Star Spangled Banner,” placing the Oklahoman in the pantheon of America’s great balladeers.¹¹

It is necessary to explore these works in any effort to engage with Woody’s songwriting process. But Woody understood his writing style better than anyone else, so in addition to surveying the work of Guthrie scholars, it is important to investigate his own writing about writing. “All you can write is what you see” speaks to several aspects of Guthrie’s approach to his craft: his own determination to explore his world, his quest for original stories and testimony, his own appreciation of the conception of “folk” as used by folklorists and anthropologists, and his methodology for writing songs.

The origins of Guthrie’s interests in music and songwriting are familiar parts of his biography. Guthrie’s childhood lacked stability. As a youngster, he lived a pretty charmed life in the quaint boomtown of Okemah, Oklahoma, where his father carved out a successful living and his mother sang him old-fashioned folk songs. But the success was short-lived. His father Charley’s fortunes declined along with his mother’s health. His sister Clara died in a tragic fire. And his mother, stricken with the Huntington’s disease that would later incapacitate Woody, ended up being committed to the Oklahoma Hospital for the Insane. A teenaged Guthrie ended up following his father to Pampa, Texas in the Dust Bowl area that was in the midst of what one historian has called “the worst hard time.” In that hardscrabble panhandle town, Guthrie learned to play music. He first learned harmonica and honed his craft with his boyhood friend and future brother-in-law, Matt Jennings, then moved on later to a variety of stringed instruments such as the mandolin, the banjo, the fiddle, and, of course, the guitar.¹²

Guthrie played for dances and parties with family members and friends, mastering his instruments and his craft. In the advent of his music career, however, he did not seem disposed at all to making original music or writing songs. Pampa’s paying audiences preferred

the popular songs of the day; the "old timey" music appealed more to the poorer members of the community.¹³ Nonetheless, during this time, Woody began to experiment with writing songs. The only previous foray into the craft is his acknowledgement that when he was about six or seven years old, he wrote a little song called "Listen to the Music." Although that led to a songwriting hiatus that would last until Woody reached his twenties, his account of how he wrote it provides a telling glimpse into the artistic mind of the future songsmith. He recalled the burst of creativity in an essay titled "High Balladry":

I REMEMBER THAT I SAW MY FIRST NEGRO MINSTREL JAZZY BAND BLOWING AND TOOTING AND POUNDING DRUMS UP AND DOWN OUR STREET AND I STOOD ON OUR BIG WEST PORCH AND MADE UP MY FIRST SONG ON THAT VERY DAY LOOKING AT THE BAND MARCH OFF AND DOWN AND AROUND A DUSTY CORNER IN UNDER SOME BIG HIGH LOCUST AND MAPLE TREES.

I WALKED BACK AND FORTH ACROST OUR FRONT PORCH AND SUNG OUT THE FIRST SONG I EVER MADE UP MY OWN SELF: IT WENT:

"LISTEN TO THE MUSIC, MUSIC, MUSIC, LISTEN TO THE MUSIC MUSIC BAND."¹⁴

Interpreting this bit of evidence, like most things associated with Guthrie, is difficult. He exaggerated mightily in his autobiographical writings. If indeed writing the song happened the way Woody tells it in "High Balladry," it reveals a disposition in his approach to writing that matches the process he used in his later, more serious efforts. He saw something, what he saw inspired him, he put what he saw and heard into a song. He wrote what he saw. Of course it is just as easy to believe that Woody's memory of this event from his early childhood was influenced by the approach to songwriting that he subsequently developed over many years of writing songs and is more a product of how he remembered the event in 1947 and 1948, when he was writing "High Balladry," than the actual memory of what happened on the porch when he was six or seven years old.

Sometime around 1934, now married and scraping by with odd jobs and the occasional musical gig, Guthrie began to jot down lyrics. His first efforts, "Flapper Fanny" and "Buckboard Wagon" (a.k.a. "Old Gray Team of Horses"), exhibit embryonic glimpses of the development of Guthrie's later, more mature, considered style. "Flapper Fanny" speaks to the popularity in the

1920s and 1930s in American popular culture and a frequent topic in the films and newspapers of the day. As a voracious newspaper reader and a lover of film, Guthrie would have been bombarded by the still new, flapper-inspired, liberated, sexy women in films with actresses such as Jean Harlow and Joan Blondell, whose characters embraced the new, liberated lifestyle. As a news junkie and a poor, young husband whose access to entertainment in a small town heavily relied on the movies, these images were a big part of his life and exposure to popular culture.¹⁵ Guthrie continued to write about modern women for the rest of his career, often inspired by what he saw in print and on film. Billy Bragg adapted one of Guthrie's previously unpublished lyrics, "Ingrid Bergman," on the Grammy-nominated 1998 *Mermaid Avenue* release. The movie *Gone with the Wind* and its beautiful star, actress Vivien Leigh, also inspired an unpublished lyric, "The Place That Is Known As Tara," a weak attempt at putting his reactions to the film into a song. At the end of the verses Guthrie revealed his ability to evaluate his own writing when jotting down a little note to no one in particular, a familiar habit of his: "I want to remark here that I don't believe this is a poem good enough to make me feel that way the picture show did . . . and if you want to see and hear a song and a ballad 'Gone With the Wind' I suppose you'll just have to look somewhere else or write one your own self."¹⁶

In "Buckboard Wagon," Woody seems to reject the pop music influences that characterized this early phase of his writing songs and the performances with his Pampa-based musical collaborators as he moves back to a topic more connected with historic Oklahoma and Texas roots than with the kind of modern music enjoyed by his contemporaries in Pampa. Over the nearly three thousand songs that he penned during his prolific career, he would return to this trope again and again with western imagery in songs such as "Billy the Kid" and "Chisholm Trail." In several instances Guthrie's notes about a song can complicate matters of the lyric's origins. In one annotation to "Buckboard Wagon" he writes:

I MADE THIS SONG UP IN THE OIL AND WHEAT AND
COWING TOWN OF PAMPA, TEXAS, WHEN I FIDDLED
AND LIVED IN THAT LITTLE OLD RACKYDOWN
SHACK BY THE SANTA FE TRACKS, AT 408 SOUTH
RUSSEL.¹⁷

Three extant versions of the "Buckboard Wagon" survive in the Woody Guthrie Archives. One of them contains Woody's inscription, "This is the first song I ever wrote," in direct contradiction to his "High Balladry" memory of writing his first song on the porch in Okemah. Complicating attempts at analysis even further, the document is signed and dated 1934; however, he was

clearly typing up these three versions sometime in the 1940s.¹⁸ Further complicating matters is the fact that Guthrie would later say that he wrote “Flapper Fanny” with his father, Charley Guthrie.¹⁹ This inconsistency would not surprise anyone familiar with Guthrie’s extant papers. He constantly made new songbooks, collecting his older songs and placing them in varied order. Early in his career, he made these songbooks to sell through the mail. Later, it seems that he often worked on compilations either to prepare for shows or before he went out on his rambling tours of the country. It is not out of the question to think that he sometimes aspired to publishing them for profit, especially in the late 1940s when his commercial prospects seemed to be diminishing. Woody also continuously edited and revised his work, and some of the songbooks seem to relate to attempts to refine his earlier work. The old adage “writing is rewriting” was not lost on Woody Guthrie. Not only do his voluminous papers contain multiple drafts of his songs, poems, and essays, but his book manuscripts — “Boomchasers,” which later became *Bound for Glory*, “Study Butte,” which ultimately became *Seeds of Man, House of Earth*, and drafts of an unpublished book on his years in the merchant marine — all exist in multiple copies. Luckily for scholars, these songbooks date back to Guthrie’s earliest efforts as a songwriter.²⁰

In April of 1935, Guthrie produced the first of his homemade songbooks, *Alonzo M. Zilch’s Own Collection of Original Songs and Ballads*. He also, thankfully, recorded the date of the writing on almost all of his works. Songwriters would take solace in the amusing “apology” with which Woody begins the book after eschewing the traditional preface. In the apology, he gives voice to the same thoughts that cross every songwriter’s mind:

At times I write these songs thinking they are actually good --- , but that is seldom. More often I know deep down in my heart that they are not good and hope that you will not think so when you hear them warbled to you by means of my smuth [sic] gentle voice which has got me where I am today.

He also expresses concerns about the lack of originality in his music: “At times I cannot decide on a tune to use with my words for a song. Woe is me! I am then forced to use some good old, family style tune that hath already gained a reputation as being liked by the people.”²¹

Scholar Mark Allan Jackson sees the *Alonzo Zilch* songs as containing embryonic examples of what would come when Guthrie began pouring out his songs during his “ten years.” Jackson argues that the *Zilch* songs “focus mainly on western-flavored tales of heartache or joy, farmers and cowboys. Yet a few of these early songs do include moments where his inchoate underclass sympathies flash

through." He points out that "Guthrie uses humor to express social criticism," arguing that "humor often ellipses the underlying political commentary in the song." The early songs, according to Jackson, are not fully fleshed out in consistent fashion. They contain at times contradictory lines. In "Old Rachel," the eponymous woman's husband, the narrator, is a farmer who at once is painting a dismal portrait of their financial prospects and the fact that the bank is about to foreclose on their farm; at the same time, it contains a line where he assures her that "Prosperity is upon us." Guthrie quickly overcame this type of clumsiness in his later writings as well as learning to "use a humorous line or ending to emphasize his message instead of diffusing it."²² The tactic became one of the most deadly darts in Guthrie's literary quiver and one of the most notable features of all of his writing including his prose, correspondence, political commentary, and dramatic writing; it can even be detected in many of his drawings and watercolors.

The overwhelming number of documents in the Woody Guthrie Archives in Tulsa, Oklahoma — most produced after this formative phase and during what Greenway called Woody's "ten years" — combine to offer a virtual master class to songwriters and music historians about what folksongs are, how they are made, and how this particular one wrote. It would be a monumental and extremely repetitive task to discuss all instances in which Guthrie discussed his approach to songwriting; however, some of the more focused attempts by Guthrie are worth exploring in detail. In several different manuscripts and letters he explained his approach to the craft. One was a letter to the Almanac Singers that Woody sent back to New York while out in Oregon for the month writing his twenty-six magnificent Bonneville Power songs. Another was an angry rant in a missive he penned to a music school graduate, Tom Scott, who had lamented that folk songs were a thing of the past in an interview in *PM*, a now-defunct leftist newspaper. Guthrie also wrote detailed essays on how he approached songwriting — essays such as "Folksongs Are on Their Way In," "How to Make Up a Ballad song and Get Away with It," and "High Balladry." Together, these musings from the master add depth to his well-known motto, "all you can write is what you see," and provide heaps of good advice for songwriters even in these more complex times.

In "Folk Songs Are on Their Way In," written at the request of Hans Rosenwald, an editor at Music News, Inc., Guthrie reminisced not only about his early forays into the field, but about how he tried to write what he saw and experienced, especially during his earliest years on the radio at KFVD in California at the very beginning of his "ten years" of productivity:

If I didn't like my uncle that week, I'd make up a song where he'd get shot, hung, swung up and drowned. If you made me like you, I'd sing your name into a song where you struck out down the rock road feelin' sorta funny an' found a big pocketbook chuck full of money. I'd do these same things with the names of people well known around town and keep the arial [sic] waves posted with the latest gossip, news, and Blues of the day . . . This was really where the first little lights dawned on me of what a folk poem, folk tale, folk ballad, folk tune really was”

Again, Guthrie validated his approach not only to write what he saw, but to take the news, the small conversations, and “Blues of the day” into his writing.²³

In the letter to some of the Almanacs — specifically members Pete Seeger, Millard Lampell, and Lee Hays — whom he teasingly called “My Beloved Talcum Powder Singers” or “Seed Catalog Singers,” Guthrie warned about getting too fancy in their musical composition, to inject modern industrial references into their songs, and to keep a sense of social justice in their work:

Boys, what I think needs to be done to old time folk songs is not to give over and inch to jazz or swing as far as the melody goes, but what we've got to do is to bring American folk songs up to date. This don't mean to complicate our music a tall, but simply to industrialize and mechanize the words. Why should we waste our time in trying to wind the calendar back? Our old standby songs were no doubt super stream lined when they first got out, and possibly that is the reason why they spread like a prairie fire. Within my first visit to New York I did not have the pleasure of coming across but a mighty few songs of the wheels, whistles, steam, boilers, shafts, cranks, operators, triggers, pulleys, engines, and all of the well known gadgets that make up a modern factory . . . I know that all of you had the jump on me concerning work songs, but this is to simply remind you that the idea is on me like a wild cat with sets of razors in each foot.

He relayed his memories of going out to the migrant camps for Dust Bowl refugees in California and noted that “it would be a sorry world if there wasn't no answer” to the *Tobacco Road* and *Grapes of Wrath* conditions they faced. He implored them to modernize their tunes while critiquing the World War II songs the Almanacs were writing at the time: “I read your war songs and like them a lot. But you ought to throw in more wheels, triggers, springs, bearings, motors, engines, boilers and factories.” The sheer number of nouns listed in this

missive revealed much about Guthrie's approach to writing. He had clearly embraced what today's songwriters call a "see it, don't say it" approach to writing lyrics. "Triggers, springs, bearings, motors, engines" all bring the mechanized word to light in vivid word pictures that any denizen of the industrialized world can visualize without explanation.²⁴ What Guthrie was getting at in this passage alludes to a central theory behind so many of his songs: if one is writing about things that are familiar to one, the things one knows best, then modern writers need to embrace modern themes in their writing. For Guthrie, urbanites writing about picking cotton or leading mules down the Erie Canal would ring hollow; but to write about the things a writer sees everyday creates the everyday authenticity that great art needs. Will Kaufman, in *Woody Guthrie's Modern World Blues*, sees this process as a part of Woody's being swept along in "the whirlwind of modernity" and as evidence of Guthrie's development as a modernist artist: for Woody, this approach was also about modernizing the folk process by embracing contemporary topics.²⁵

Triggers and springs and modern images were not the only devices Guthrie liked to employ. His voluminous notebooks and loose manuscript pages contain example after example of this type of listing of words as well as page after page of rhymes and word play on nouns and names. For example, he often took the names of people close to him and created riffs that explored various nicknames and rhymes that could possibly be incorporated into later writings. A strange manuscript in his collection dated March 26, 1948 reveals one fine example of such word play. In the manuscript titled "Arlo Drizzduff," Guthrie plastered the page with nicknames for his son Arlo. One of the most common nicknames he used for Arlo was "Zibberzee"; it appears again and again throughout Guthrie's extant papers. On this page, however, he explores a host of variations: "Drizz . . . Drizzduff . . . Drizzler." He then moves to "Puffs . . . puffles . . . Puffie Bags, Puffie Boy." Moving on, he explores words beginning with "Cocry" or "Chic," including terms like "Cocrypoodles" and "Chicapoodles," finally culminating in variations of the word "yum": "Yumm . . . Yummyboy."²⁶ Some might see this type of obsession as early signs of the compulsions linked to Huntington's disease, and that might be accurate, especially since a few months earlier Guthrie had filled a diary page with a similar type of word play full of variations on the names of his dear friend Huddie "Lead Belly" Ledbetter, with examples like "Iron Belly, Lead Belly, Gas Belly."²⁷ Guthrie had made lists like these going back to his letters to the Almanacs, and again and again throughout his writing career. He often incorporated this word play into his songs. Take the chorus of "Jiggy Jiggy Bum," for example, when he riffs on "Jiggy," "piggy," "run," and "bum": "Jiggy, Jiggy

bum, bum / Hey piggy, run, run. / Jiggy, jiggy bum bum / And a hey piggy run."²⁸

One of Woody's most revealing commentaries on songwriting exemplified his approach of looking to the news for inspiration. After reading an article about an upcoming concert at Town Hall, published in the progressive newspaper *PM* on November 7, 1946, Guthrie picked up his pen and dashed off an angry letter that detailed his approach to writing folk music. *PM* correspondent John S. Wilson had published an article titled "An Unintentional Troubadour" based on an interview with the concert artist, a classically trained singer and guitarist named Tom Scott. Wilson began the article with a paragraph that truly stuck in Guthrie's craw: "Somehow the idea has gotten around that troubadours are supposed to be dusty. Traditionally they spend vagrant youths wandering around the country, strumming their guitars and collecting folk songs from various sources. Eventually they may be discovered by the Village Vanguard or Cafe Society and end, up, scrubbed and shining, concertizing at Town Hall." In the article, Scott pointed out that he couldn't make a living as a composer and ended up doing arrangements for a glee club run by the famous bandleader and choral director Fredrick Malcolm Waring. During his time as an arranger, the ASCAP "crisis" exploded, when the agency tried to double its licensing fees, making it difficult and expensive for Waring and others to use their music. Scott got the idea to start playing old folk songs, since they were not covered by ASCAP's agreements, and found his way to Town Hall. Scott's views on folk music angered Woody. Wilson quoted Scott as saying, "The conditions that produced great folk music have, by and large, passed on Work songs are out of the question today because work is done by machines. Music is supplied to the people now and the life of a song is very short. The period of time necessary for a great folk song to develop doesn't exist. The printed page eliminates the process that goes into making a real folk song since, once a song is printed, it becomes set and is sung the same way by everybody."²⁹

In essence, Scott had described Woody Guthrie's entire approach to the folk process as a static, essentially dead artistic medium. To the man who extolled the virtues of writing folksongs about "triggers" and "springs," and who felt that his own work contributed to a bettering of society, Scott's views were not only wrongheaded, but also subversive. Guthrie dashed off an angry, detailed reply that he titled "To an Unintentional Troubadour from an Intentional One." In the letter, Guthrie pointed out every which way that Scott's ideas had missed the mark. He challenged the assertion that folk music had become static and that machines and the printed page subverted the folk process, concluding: "You have been wrong in every single word and breath. You went down swinging. You struck out bad. You did not state one truth nor one solitary fact."

Guthrie went on to chide Scott: "Until you get to knowing the history of some of our good workers out along our dusty roads, I'd advise you, Tom, to stick to your gitbox, your composing, your printed pages, and to your job of developing your personality. Don't make anymore flops like this where sensible folks can hear you, not where Twenty Million hard fighting union men and women hear you."³⁰

Guthrie then launched into a point-by-point argument that utterly demolished Scott's notion of the demise of the American folksong. Woody pointed out that the labor struggles of modern workers had "given birth every day to more and better folksongs," noting that the People's Songs organization established by Pete Seeger had thousands of such songs in their files. He celebrated the inspiration of the railroads, trucks, cars, ships and planes and their impact on contemporary songs. Guthrie preached to Scott about the ability of music to change the world. He disagreed with Scott that the conditions for writing good folk songs no longer existed and that the advent of printing had written the songs, formally transmitted orally, into stone: "I've heard a few million folks singing fighting union songs off their pages, and I never did hear any two people sing the same song alike." Guthrie turned to the relevance and importance of folk songs in a paragraph that closely parallels the response he penned to Irving Berlin's "God Bless America" in "This Land Is Your Land": "The fighting songs that win wages, hours, and honest price control, these songs are lasting and will last. The bosses shovel money out to the songsters that sing what a fine old world they've built up for us to crawl around in, not a cent for a song about slums, diseases, tenements, wrecks, death, winning a better world." Finally, after pointing out so many of Scott's shortcomings, Guthrie accused him of spreading "the gospel of lies." He concluded: "I could name you several hundred songs that slipped through your net, and still find 'time' in which to get 'refined' and to find throats and lungs and eyes and faces and spirits in which to 'exist.' They all 'exist' in the fighting sections of the trade union movement."³¹

Not all of Guthrie's writing about writing grew out of anger. On several occasions, he actually tried to document his ideas about songwriting in a more practical way. By far his most detailed discussion of his approach came in the form of his unpublished essay "How to Make Up a Balladsong and Get Away With It." Guthrie wrote the essay in longhand with two different pens on March 8, 1948, in one of the marble composition books he was famous for carrying around, although the essay was subsequently torn out of the book and is now part of an enormous collection of loose manuscript pages.³²

Guthrie begins the essay by trying to distinguish between songs, folksongs, and ballads. "So far I've not been able to tell the difference between a folk song and a ballad." But Woody was hardly

one to let logic or the truth get in the way of a writing project, so he made up his own distinction. “. . . let us say that a ballad always tells you a story about something that happens to somebody somewhere . . . A folk song might not tell you a whole story, but tells you what you think about some person, some question, or about some political issue.” He then deconstructs his own version of the traditional song “Sally Ann,” arguing that it is “partly a ballad telling you a little story, and partly a folk song telling you what’s going on in my head.” And further complicating his nomenclature: “You’ll run into all kinds of songs and ballads which are fullblood, halfbreed, one quarter breed, 8th, 16th, 32nd, and all down the line,” conceding, “There’s not any more real difference between a folk song and pure ballad than there is between a street and an avenue . . . I’ve always called a song a song.”³³

Guthrie continues by explaining that he got many of his ideas from books and the news. He advises budding songwriters: “Always keep your pencil and paper handy to jot down the little & big ideas.” He then goes on to discuss “The Biggest Thing that Man Has Ever Done,” noting that he got so many ideas out of the news: “Any event which takes away the lives of human beings I try to write a song about what caused it to happen and how we can all try to keep such a thing from happening again.” He demonstrates how he did through deconstructions of “Centralia,” “The Sinking of the Reuben James,” and “The Ballad of Isaac Woodward [sic],” noting how they came about after he had read newspaper accounts of the explosion in the Centralia mines, the loss of the Reuben James, and the blinding of African American World War II veteran Isaac Woodard by racist policemen in South Carolina.³⁴

Guthrie then recounts the story of how he wrote “Union Maid” in Bob and Ina Wood’s office in Oklahoma City after he and Pete Seeger had played at a rally at the Tenant Farmer’s Union Hall. He unabashedly notes that he set the words to the tune of the 1907 popular hit “Red Wing,” which was itself an adaptation of Robert Schumann’s 1848 composition, “The Happy Farmer, Returning from Work.” Guthrie wrote the song after hearing stories about attempts by anti-union thugs to physically intimidate women workers — particularly Annie Mae Meriwether — in order to prevent them from joining the union.³⁵

Woody also emphasises to his readers the point that writers *read*: “A good writer of good songs ought to read all kinds of books . . . you ought to read good books.” He particularly plugs Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*, noting: “I’ve wrote lots of songs that go to show you that the germs, plasms, bugs, bees, birds, monkeys, all work, fight and make love and breed, and have big wars and peace dances just like us humans do.”³⁶ Indeed, Guthrie read voraciously throughout his life. Former Almanac singer Bess

Lomax Hawes felt that he possessed a “carefully hidden hyper-literacy.” Although sophistication and “hyper-literacy” contrasts with the cornpone, Okie persona that Guthrie often assumed when it suited his aims — a sophistication also noted by Al Richmond, the editor of the *People’s World*, which hosted his “Woody Sez” column³⁷ — Guthrie’s commitment to reading important books clearly influenced his approach to songwriting.

Pondering the human condition and his childhood memories of his father’s enthusiasm for boxing and barroom brawls, Guthrie extols the virtue of fights, especially those involving lovers, as fodder for songs. He follows that advice with a list of 150 songs to demonstrate the possibilities for writing about a variety of topics. He also points out that titles are themselves invaluable: “Just the idea of the title for your song is more than half of the battle to catch your ballad . . . I’ve got thousands of titles laid away like postal savings bonds, I spend hours and hours just writing down my ideas for titles to my songs.” Any songwriter who has searched for a topic for a new song can understand Guthrie’s point that a good title, one that frames the narrative of the song, represents half the battle of finding inspiration.³⁸

Guthrie follows his remarks about titles with three lyrics related to ballads, offsetting the lyrics with the inscription “-30-” (a notation he learned in teletype school while in the United States Army Air Corps during World War II: the number “30” indicates a change in topic or a new story). After the second “-30-” Woody changes pens, likely indicating that he had done something else for a while before turning his attention back to the essay. He confesses that he has often jumped out of bed late at night to scribble down ideas, even noting that he would work on song ideas “that hit me several beds ago . . . You’ve got to be financially able to pay for a large number of beds if you have the least notion of ever being any kind of a folkballadsong maker.”³⁹

Woody talks about how he was looking out of his window and watching a worker use a posthole digger. Not only could the scene become a song, but he notes, “you can use any kind of a rythm [sic] beat from a fast song boogy beat on over to a slower kind of spiritual hoping song about the womban he’s got or about the one that he keeps looking for.” In essence, he explains that “all you can write is what you see” applies even to the ordinary sights one glimpses from a window.⁴⁰

Guthrie describes the discipline necessary to be a songwriter, arguing that songs “will be just as good as the number of days and months and weeks and years you put in as a ballad maker . . . You are always on the job.” He confesses that he often talks to people to get ideas and to “get them to tell me (by hook or crook)” what he needs for his material.⁴¹

By the time he wrote “How to Make Up a Balladsong” Woody had gained the attention of the F.B.I. for his political songs and activities and confessed that he tried to write “when no privvy Eyed FBI can see me.” At that point, Guthrie advised writers of political songs to stand up and be unafraid: “. . . learn how to tell the F.B.I folks to go straight to hell and never be so afraid of them”⁴²

When writing, Woody liked to find a melody first: “I decide on which mixture of a tune to use and then I find it about a dozen times easier to herd my words into my tune.” Guthrie rarely wrote his own music, though, and was utterly unapologetic about his approach. He would try, however, to adapt the tune and change it to suit his own needs: “There are ten million ways of changing any tune around to make it sound like my own.” Normally, he would substitute a “high note instead of a low note or a harmony note for a melody note.” Sometimes he’d “shuffle my rests and pauses” to distinguish his songs from the tunes he had copied.⁴³ Although Woody did not write his own music, he not only adapted tunes in this way to fit his lyrics, but he also worked hard on developing his instrumental skills. In a letter to Marjorie during his stint in the Army in 1945 he wrote that he was practicing his guitar playing, working on an open tuning and learning how to use a slide, so he could sound more like his friends “Leadbelly, Josh, Pete, [and] Brownie.” In another missive from the road, he spoke about developing his chops on the fiddle by sitting in with musicians in various bars in the towns that he visited.⁴⁴

Guthrie wanted to speak his mind through his songs: “I love most, I guess, and confess to find my own ways in my own balladsongs to speak up, to speak out what’s rambling around in my own mind.” He also wanted to speak out for social justice: “I love to protest about things that I see needs protesting against.”⁴⁵

Whether he was writing about a buckboard wagon, a factory, a ship, or the many industrial gizmos that fascinated him, Guthrie strove to use his songs as part of an anthropological quest. Like the folklorist Alan Lomax, arguably the man responsible for introducing Woody to the world, Guthrie’s notion that “all you can write is what you see” must be understood beyond the simple quest of an artist to “write what you know” or to chronicle the world around him. Guthrie’s approach was not only a part of his artistic mission to tell important stories, to chronicle the history of his times, and to change the world. Sometimes Guthrie’s observations of life took on the nature of an anthropologist’s or a folklorist’s. For instance, when he served in the Merchant Marines during World War II, he liked to observe the language and patterns of his fellow seamen:

The lingo sailors talk is a high form of art. There are not so many words. Not very fancy words to worry about. Their language stands like two naked statues. They talk a sort of

truth they are familiar with. But their speech is always naked. As a general rule it strips life naked. They wear very few clothes when out to sea and also very few words . . . The old timers show the newcomers how tough they are and the new hands act as tough as they can to show the old ones they can take it.⁴⁶

He elaborated on this aspect of his writing in an essay about driving in New York City: "I am a folklore collector and a professional observer. I gather in, I assort, I sift, I weigh the things that folks do, say, think, and sing. I go see, I drive and take a look, I'm a roller poet, and a mobile folklorist."⁴⁷

All artists are drawn to their art for personal reasons. For some, it is a way to express their inner thoughts, desires, and feelings. For others it can be the tonic for their personal pain. Sometimes it can be both or even for a host of other more complicated reasons. Guthrie was no exception; he wrote for a variety of reasons and in many different voices, all constructed with his desired audience in mind. Although the sheer number of letters that he sent to Moses Asch and Marian Distler at Folkways Records, all written in a phoney, cornpone, "aw shucks, I'm Woody the Okie" register, speak to Guthrie's desire to commercialize and profit from his songwriting,⁴⁸ he also wrote regardless of whether his songs would be purchased or earn money. This point is especially true of his union songs that he penned from a clear, well documented commitment to social justice. One deeply nuanced discussion of his reasons for writing, however, reveals the personal need for the Guthrie as an artist to write to fulfil his own sense of humanity.

Guthrie set down this most personal and telling discussion of his approach to writing in a beautiful poetic essay titled "The People I Owe," written in 1946. It contains some of Guthrie's best writing about the people he met throughout his life and whose stories gave him inspiration for his songs. Guthrie sets the scene in a compelling way that draws the reader into his world, woos them with humor, and elicits their empathy by talking about his loneliness and disappointment. Once in, he shifts the story and explains in great detail why he writes what he writes and expresses his profound gratitude toward the people that inspired his art. The essay is worthy of a close examination.⁴⁹

In the opening section, he tells the reader that he's walking the floor in his Mermaid Avenue apartment, drinking "a glass of grapefruit juice, half vodka," because he is lonely and feeling a bit disappointed. He's lonesome because his wife Marjorie is off on a five-week tour with the Martha Graham dance company. His disappointment stems from his listening to a mock up of his new album, *Ballads from the Dust Bowl*, a reissue of *Dust Bowl Ballads*,

in production at Asch's Folkways label. Although Guthrie doesn't note it in the essay, some of that disappointment must have stemmed from fact that the smaller label was reissuing the record because Victor Records had informed Woody that they were dropping it from their catalog. Guthrie, however, focused on his displeasure with the cover art. After noting his respect for the artist, David Stone Martin, he explains that he felt that the cover could be clearer and more identifiable. An acclaimed artist known for his covers of many albums across many genres of music, Martin's cover was indeed problematical. Set against a yellow background, there's a drawing in black ink. A man is viewed from the back, reclining behind the steering wheel of a convertible with his hands clasped behind his head, looking over the windshield at a dam. The name "Woody Guthrie" is set in white, with the title *Ballads from the Dust Bowl* superimposed over it in black ink. It is not clear that the man in the painting is Woody and his name is somewhat obscured. Guthrie felt that his name could have been "plainer, easier to see." His loneliness and disappointment is palpable. Then he uses the comedic device he pioneered in "Old Rachel," and lets the reader know that he's pouring another vodka and mixing it with pineapple juice because he's run out of grapefruit, then adds, "the grapefruit juice and vodka plays through my blood, it will be several hours yet before the pineapple juice and vodka comes into play." In the next sentence Guthrie combines the comedic with the profound and identifies the central theme of the essay: "I sip the scientific juices and think back through my life to everybody that I owe . . . I know that I owe these folks, and that they owe some other people, these are in debt to others, and all of us owe everybody. The amount that we owe is all that we have got."⁵⁰

In this telling essay, Guthrie reveals much about his approach to songwriting, but unlike the letters to the Almanacs and Tom Scott, or most of his other essays on songwriting, he focuses not only on the writing process, but also on his reasons for writing songs. "The People I Owe" is almost a love song to his subjects. Guthrie is clearly admitting that he writes about people to establish his own human connection with the world. He thanks his subjects: "The only way I can pay back all of you good walkers and talkers is to work and let my work help you to get work . . . your labor has always helped me." In addition to his gratitude, he expresses his "all you can write is what you see" philosophy in a personal way: "But, I did keep my eyes on you, and kept my ears open when you came close to me. I saw the lines chopped across your face by the troubles in time and space . . . I hear your voice in its own loose words like it spoke when I heard it." He talks about witnessing their pain: "And even when you kept quiet I could see your wants on your face . . . You patted your hands while I danced, and held my head in your lap while I cried. But I am thirty-four now, and in these past years I haven't cried much."

After that telling confession, he strikes right to the heart of his quest for art: "I guess I got to where the only way I could cry was on some piece of paper in words like these." And with an astonishing attribution to his subject matter, he confesses to his subjects and acknowledges his debt: "I know that these words I hear are not my own private property . . . The only story I have tried to write has been you . . . I am nothing more or less than a photographer without a camera."⁵¹ For those who sometimes like to point out that Guthrie was never really a member of the working class that he so often wrote about, this essay serves as recognition that his "labor" is the work of writing. It is his way of contributing to the working world, and this writing is not only his occupation, but also his vocation. Perhaps most important of all, though, is the way he relates his need to write to his personal life: writing is the only way that he can cry.

Not everyone recognized Guthrie's talents as a songwriter. During his life, he earned considerable notice, but never really a lot of money. Moses Asch and Marian Distler, frequent recipients of Guthrie's letters pushing ideas for records, rarely even responded to his queries. Even as later artists such as Bob Dylan touted Guthrie's influence again and again, he has had critics. His third wife, Anneke, who was also a musician, felt that his songs were not very good because he really did not write his own music. She allowed that she did admire "Pastures of Plenty," but that "his children's songs used to drive me up a tree." Anneke also felt that his music "was too simple, it was too basic." Nor did his lyrics particularly move her; she told biographer Joe Klein that his words "didn't do too much for me . . . even now I can't get anything out of it," concluding, "it seems to me the father of American folk music or whatever he is should compose his own tunes."⁵²

Biographer Ed Cray takes great pains to demystify the myth of Woody Guthrie as the great American songwriter. He points out that Guthrie's elevation as a folk hero during and after the 1960s distorted the real facts of his career and that he made very little money on his recordings. He agrees with folklorist Archie Green that "the more urban we become, . . . the more we have to worship a rural past," and sees Guthrie as part of that romantic notion of a lost rural past. Cray points to Robert Shelton's introduction to his edition of Woody's writings, *Born to Win*, as doing just that sort of damage: "Despite all the inconsistencies, Woodrow Wilson Guthrie is all these things: a giant of a humanist, a hero of the American little man, a poet of major proportions and a singer and composer of some of our greatest songs." The fallout from that work led folklorist Ellen Steckert to chastise Shelton because he had "waxed enthusiastic to the absurd point of calling Guthrie 'a major American literary figure.' The sad fact is that Guthrie produced reams of abominable prose and ditties, only the smallest fraction which is aesthetically worth

anything in the folk culture from which he came or in the urban culture to which he wanted at times to belong." Cray himself continues the assault: "Much of Guthrie's output was agitprop, stultifying pieces d'occasion sung once, if at all, and probably forgotten." He allows that Guthrie's essays, mostly unpublished, were good, but opines that since the pieces are relatively short, they do little "to enhance his literary reputation." Despite these negative criticisms of his writing, Cray admits that "Guthrie's impact on successive singers and songwriters was profound."⁵³

Cray goes on to explore the slipperiest slope for those who write about folk music: the question of authenticity. However, he avoids the truly difficult conundrum of what is "authentic" in folk music at large, only broaching the subject of what was authentic in Woody's writing, arguing that "Guthrie, praised for his authenticity, was inauthentic himself." Moving through the familiar themes that others such as Moses Asch had raised, Cray points out that Guthrie "posed early on as the untutored Okie" while out in California, but added that his KFVD audiences "were in on the joke." In later years, as he became more in step with proletarian issues, Cray argues, "Guthrie would be a prol." His embrace of proletarian roots not only reflected the fact that "the adult Woody straddled two social classes, two political camps," but also led to Guthrie's remaking into what Archie Green recognized as "an archetonic wanderer, a hobo, a blithe spirit." Perhaps Cray was right in following these discussions and those of others when he wrote: "Guthrie represented a synthesis of populism, religious values, and a fierce love of country overlaid with Marxist concepts"⁵⁴

These positions were not the only personae Guthrie could assume in his performances and writing. Guthrie the writer of children's songs put out an impressive catalog of works for youngsters, even though they drove his ex-wife Anneke "up a tree." His songs based on Yiddish themes have earned Grammy Awards for the Klezmatiks. Later in life, after befriending a host of African American musicians like Lead Belly, Josh White, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, and bearing witness to the Peekskill riots, Guthrie wrote two song cycles about what he called "racey hate": the Peekskill cycle noted in Will Kaufman's *Woody Guthrie, American Radical*⁵⁵ and the still unrecorded Beluthahatchee cycle penned about his experiences at fellow traveller Stetson Kennedy's compound in the Beluthahatchee Swamp⁵⁶ near Jacksonville, Florida — both great examples of his penchant to write in cyclical bursts and to write about the things he witnessed. Toward the end of his productive days, before the tremors of Huntington's disease cost him the ability to put pen to paper, Guthrie became absorbed with Jesus, writing snatches of lyrics about Christ from his hospital bed.

Anyone who spends time with Guthrie's voluminous papers in the Woody Guthrie Archives will marvel at the magnitude of his output. Ed Cray did a fine job of sifting through and identifying them in his masterful biography. Indeed, all good biographers must come to grips with the contradictions and inconsistencies of their subjects; but that necessity need not lead to a negative critique of an artist's output. It is the job of the artist to imagine — to imagine new ideas, new visions, new sounds, new lyrics, new worlds.

Woody Guthrie was an imaginative man. He imagined not only the multiple personae that he embodied, but in his social and anthropological mission to "write what he saw," he imagined the lives of the people he met, those who had provided him with "the only way that [he] could cry." Whether engaging in agitation propaganda or embracing a stage character, all performers step out of themselves and into another persona. Some do so as narrators of their songs, as does Woody, for example, in the likes of "Don't Kill My Baby and My Son," "I Ain't Got No Home," and "Union Maid." At other times, they simply imagine worlds that never existed or might exist in a distant future, as Woody did in "Freedom's Fire," "Dance Around My Atom Fire," and "My Daddy Flies that Ship in the Sky."⁵⁷ These "inauthentic" voices have a strong place in the songwriting tradition. Guthrie worked in them all and then some. Whether he was truly one of the great American bards, one who "had his ten years," or simply a writer of doggerel (as several critics tagged Dylan's work after he had won the Nobel Prize for Literature) is, in the end, not the issue. Guthrie's approach to writing what you see and his dictum to "see it, don't say it" form the cornerstone of so many approaches to American songwriting. This alone is evidence that his words on the topic should be studied by anyone participating in or commenting on the Americana tradition.

In addition to all untitled notebook writings and correspondence by Woody Guthrie, the author is grateful for permission to quote from the following writings, all words by Woody Guthrie, © copyright Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc., all rights reserved, used by permission: "Alonzo M. Zilch's Own Collection of Original Songs and Ballads," "Arlo Drizzduff," "Boomchasers and Bound for Glory" (original manuscript), "Buckboard Wagon (Old Gray Team of Horses)," "Folk Songs Are On Their Way In," "High Balladry," "House of Earth" (original manuscript), "How to Make Up a Ballad and Get Away With It," "Jiggy Jiggy Bum," "People I Owe (original manuscript), "The Place That Is Known as Tara," "Study Butte/Seeds of Man" (original manuscript), and "Texas Drive in New York City."

NOTES

¹ Woody Guthrie, "~~God Blessed America, This Land Was Made for You and Me~~," original manuscript, Woody Guthrie Archives, Tulsa, Oklahoma (hereafter cited as "WGA").

² Memo from Alan Lomax to Harold Spivacke, January 26, 1942, Manuscript/Mixed Material. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/afcwgbib000056/>.

³ John Greenway, "Woody Guthrie: The Man, The Land, The Understanding," *The American West* 3:4 (Fall 1966), pp. 26-30.

⁴ Mark Allan Jackson, *Prophet Singer: The Voice and Vision of Woody Guthrie* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2007), p. 17.

⁵ Pete Seeger to Woody Guthrie, n.d., WGA, Correspondence Series 2, Box 3, Folder 27.

⁶ Ronald D. Cohen, *Woody Guthrie: Writing America's Songs* (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 1, 88-90, 98-99, 100, 122-126.

⁷ Will Kaufman, *Woody Guthrie, American Radical* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011); Will Kaufman, *Woody Guthrie's Modern World Blues* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017).

⁸ Kaufman, *Woody Guthrie, American Radical*, pp. 145-165 and *passim*.

⁹ Kaufman, *Woody Guthrie's Modern World Blues*, pp. 6-8, 32, 38, 224, 226-7 and *passim*.

¹⁰ Greg Vandy with Daniel Person, *26 Songs in 30 Days: Woody Guthrie's Columbia River Songs and the Planned Promised Land in the Pacific Northwest* (Seattle: Sasquatch Books, 2016), *passim*.

¹¹ John Shaw, *This Land That I Love: Irving Berlin, Woody Guthrie, and the Story of Two American Anthems* (New York: Public Affairs, 2013), *passim*.

¹² Ed Cray, *Ramblin' Man: The Life and Times of Woody Guthrie* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2004), pp. 3-51.

¹³ Cray, p. 51.

¹⁴ Guthrie, "High Balladry," WGA, Manuscripts Series 1, Box 7, Folder 4.

¹⁵ Joe Klein Interviews, Mary Guthrie Boyle, WGA, 2000-38.15, Track 01.

¹⁶ Guthrie, "The Place That Is Known as Tara," July 10, 1941. WGA, Manuscripts Series 1, Box 1, Folder 4.

¹⁷ Guthrie, "Buckboard Wagon" (a.k.a. "Old Grey Team of Horses"), ca. 1935. WGA, Songs 1, Box 1, Folder 4.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Guthrie, "Folk Songs Are on Their Way In," March 15-26, 1948. WGA, Manuscripts Series 1, Box 7, Folder 7.

²⁰ Guthrie, "Boomchasers" and "Bound for Glory," WGA, Manuscripts Series 2, Box 1, Folders 15-34; Guthrie, "Study Butte/Seeds of Man," WGA, Manuscripts Series 5, Box 5, Folders 1-27; Box 6, Folders 1-24; Guthrie, "House of Earth," WGA, Manuscripts Series 4, Box 3, Folders 39-40.

²¹ Guthrie, *Alonzo M. Zilch's Own Collection of Original Songs and Ballads*, typescript, WGA, Notebooks Series 1, Item 87.

²² Jackson, 50.

²³ Guthrie, "Folk Songs Are On Their Way In."

²⁴ Guthrie to Pete Seeger, Millard Lampell, and Lee Hays, July 8, 1941. WGA, Correspondence Series 1, Box 1, Folder 3.

²⁵ Kaufman, *Woody Guthrie's Modern World Blues*, *passim*.

²⁶ Guthrie, "Arlo Drizzduff," March 26, 1948. WGA, Manuscripts Series 1, Box 7, Folder 7.

²⁷ Guthrie, diary entry, October, 1947. WGA, Notebooks Series 1, Item 52.

²⁸ Guthrie, "Jiggy Jiggy Bum," http://woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/Jiggy_Jiggy_Bum.htm.

²⁹ John S. Wilson, "An Unintentional Troubadour," *PM*, November 7, 1946, 18.

³⁰ Guthrie to Tom Scott, November 12, 1946. WGA, Correspondence Series 1, Box 3, Folder 22.

³¹ *Ibid.*

- ³² Guthrie, "How To Make Up a Balladsong and Get Away With It," March 8, 1948. WGA, Manuscripts Series 1, Folder 6.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ Kaufman, *Woody Guthrie, American Radical*, 47-49.
- ³⁶ Guthrie, "How To Make Up a Balladsong and Get Away With It."
- ³⁷ Kaufman, *Woody Guthrie's Modern World Blues*, 127.
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² Ibid.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Guthrie to Marjorie Mazia, April 20, 1947. WGA, Correspondence Series 1, Box 2, Folder 12.
- ⁴⁵ Guthrie, "How To Make Up a Balladsong and Get Away With It."
- ⁴⁶ Guthrie, undated notebook entry. WGA, Notebooks Series 1, Item 29.
- ⁴⁷ Guthrie, "Texas Driver in New York City," March 24, 1948. WGA, Manuscripts Series 1, Box 4, Folder 7.
- ⁴⁸ Guthrie to Moses Asch and Marian Distler, ca. 1943-1955. WGA, Correspondence Series 1, Box 1, Folders 6-9.
- ⁴⁹ Guthrie, "People I Owe," March 13, 1946. WGA, Manuscripts Series 1, Box 4, Folder 24. An excerpt from this essay is published in Guthrie, *Born to Win*, ed. Robert Shelton (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 17-19.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid.
- ⁵¹ Ibid.
- ⁵² Joe Klein Interviews, "Anneka" (sic). WGA, 2000-38.06, 2/2, track 01.
- ⁵³ Cray, 394-400.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵⁵ Kaufman, *Woody Guthrie, American Radical*, 145-165.
- ⁵⁶ Mark F. Fernandez, "Woody and Lead Belly," paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the Louisiana Historical Association, March 2015.
- ⁵⁷ All of Guthrie's published lyrics are available at <http://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/Lyrics.htm>.