

**Improvised metric flexibility in early recordings of self-accompanied “hillbilly” songs:
Clarence Ashley’s “The House Carpenter” (1930) and Buell Kazee’s “The Butcher’s Boy” (1928).**

Tobias Tschiedl (McGill University)
tobias.tschiedl@mail.mcgill.ca

Fig. 1: Clarence Ashley, “The House Carpenter” (1930, Columbia 15654), verse 1-6, transcription of vocals (accompanying banjo articulates quarter = ~130, but no larger spans).

The musical score is presented in two columns. The left column contains the vocal line, and the right column contains the banjo accompaniment. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The tempo is indicated as quarter = ~130. Measure counts are shown above the staves, with some measures grouped by dashed boxes. The lyrics are written below the vocal line.

Row 1: Measure counts: 4, 4, 7, 4, 2, 5, 4, 4, 4, 8. Lyrics: "Well met, _____ well met" said an old true love. "Well met, well met" said he _____ "I'm just returning from the salt, salt sea and it's all for the love of thee"

Row 2: Measure counts: 3, 7. Lyrics: Come in, _____ come in, my old true love. and have a seat with me _____. It's been three fourths of a long long year since toge - ther we have been.

Row 3: Measure counts: 4. Lyrics: Well I can't _____ come in and I can't sit down. For I haven't but a moment's time; _____ They say you're married to a house carpenter and ^{your} heart will never be mine

Row 4: Measure counts: 8. Lyrics: Now it's I _____ coulda married a king's ^{daughter} dear, I'm sure _____ she'da married me; _____ But I've for - saken her crowns of gold and it's all for the love of thee

Row 5: Measure counts: 3, 9. Lyrics: Now will _____ you forsaken your house carpenter _[sic] and go _____ along with me? _____. I'll take you where the grass grows green on the banks of the deep blue sea.

Row 6: Measure counts: 8. Lyrics: She _____ picked up her lit - tle babe and kis - ses gave it three _____. Says stay right here my darling little babe and keep your papa com - pa - ny

Fig. 2a: “Disruptions of expected pulse layers” (in the spirit of Rockwell 2011) in “The House Carpenter”:
Disruptions indicated by circles around pulse-dots.

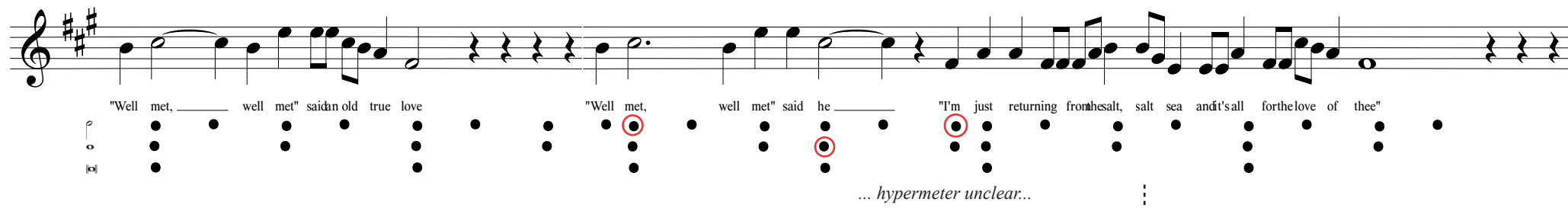


Fig. 2b: Possible underlying normalization for Fig. 2a?

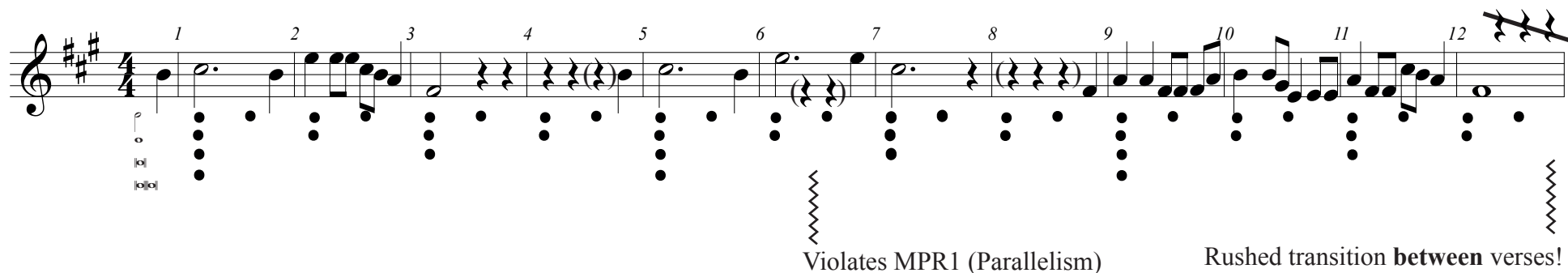


Fig. 2c: Another possible underlying normalization for Fig. 2a, with a different set of problems

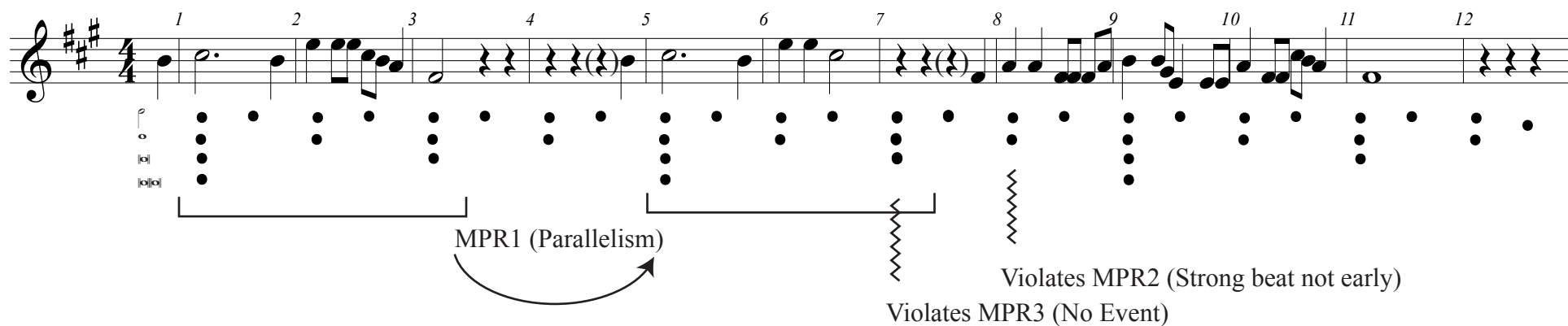
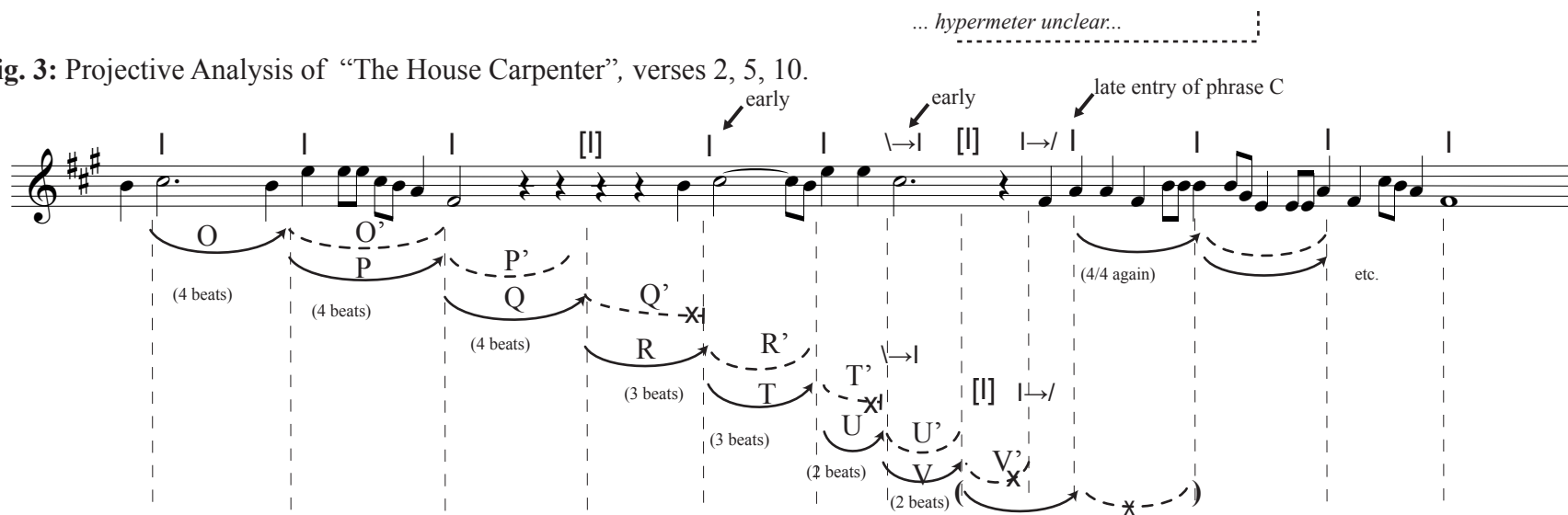


Fig. 3: Projective Analysis of “The House Carpenter”, verses 2, 5, 10.



Legend: Synopsis of analytical signs used in Hasty (1997)

Projected potential (dashed) ...:

- ... realized
- ... denied (by early third event)
- ... denied (by late third event)
- ... realized “incompletely” (early third event)
- ... realized despite late third event = Hiatus

Rhythmic qualities:

- beginning |
- silent beginning [I]
- continuation \
- anacrusis /
- reinterpretation /->, |->, etc.
- deferral | \ - \

Fig. 4: Buell Kazez, “The Butcher’s Boy” (1928, Brunswick 213A). Transcription of Verses 1–4.

Annotation: Time spans (in quarters) between stressed syllables (for explanation of 3*-anacruses, see Ex. 5).

The musical score consists of four staves. Above the first staff, two phrases are bracketed: 'phrase A' and 'phrase B'. Time spans in quarters are indicated by vertical dashed lines and numbers above the notes. For example, in Verse 1, the first span is 3* (from 'She' to 'went'), the second is 6 (from 'went' to 'stairs'), the third is 4(?) (from 'stairs' to 'to'), the fourth is 4(?) (from 'to' to 'make'), the fifth is 3* (from 'make' to 'her'), the sixth is 3 (from 'her' to 'bed'), the seventh is 2 (from 'bed' to 'And'), and the eighth is 6 (from 'And' to 'not').

Lyrics for Verse 1: She went up - stairs _____ to make her bed And not one word to her mo-ther said

Lyrics for Verse 2: Her mo-ther she _____ went up - stairs too Says "Daughter, dear daugh - ter, what troubles you?"

Lyrics for Verse 3: "Oh Mother, oh Mo - ther, I cannot tell That railroad boy I love so well

Lyrics for Verse 4: He courted me _____ my life a - way And now at home he will not stay"

Table: Variation in time spans between stressed syllables in "The Butcher's Boy," quantized to quarter notes.

Bold & Italics: Time spans that deviate from the most frequent value for each column.

* asterisks: Anacruses to each line are ambiguous (see Ex. 5; the relevant beginning can be heard to occur either on the first or on the second quarter of the three-quarter-duration.)

	<i>Phrase A</i>				<i>Phrase B</i>			
	<i>She went up</i>	<i>stairs to</i>	<i>make her</i>	<i>bed</i>	<i>and not one</i>	<i>word to her</i>	<i>mother</i>	<i>said</i>
<i>Verse 1</i>	3*	6	4	4	3*	3	2	6
<i>Verse 2</i>	3*	6	4	4	3*	4	2	6
<i>Verse 3</i>	3*	5	4	4	3*	3	2	9
<i>Verse 4</i>	3*	6	4	4	3*	3	2	5
				<i>banjo interlude</i>	2	3	2	5
<i>Verse 5</i>	3*	5	4	4	3*	3	2	6
				<i>banjo interlude</i>		2	2	4
<i>Verse 6</i>	3*	6	4	4	3*	2	2	6
				<i>banjo interlude</i>		2	2	4
<i>Verse 7</i>	3*	5	3	3	3*	3	2	7
<i>Verse 8</i>	3*	6	4	5	3*	4	2	7
<i>Verse 9</i>	3*	6	4	5	3*	4	2	7
<i>Verse 10</i>	3*	6	4	5	3*	4	2	5
				<i>banjo interlude</i>		2	2	4
<i>Verse 11</i>	3*	6	3	5	3*	4	2	6
				<i>banjo outro</i>	2	3	2	[end]

Fig.5: Anacrusis in “The Butcher’s Boy,” verse 1. Denials of projection by late and early events in both interpretation a) and b).

a) two-beat anacrusis

(very) late microtiming

1

She went up - stairs to make her bed And not one word to hermo-ther said

Q Q' (denial by late third event)

S S' T T' x (denial by early third event)

b) three-beat anacrusis

1

She went up - stairs to make her bed And not one word to hermo-ther said

R R' (denial by late third event)

U U' V V' x (denial by early third event)

Bibliography (selection):

Attas, Robin. 2011. “Meter as Process in Groove-Based Popular Musics.” PhD Diss., University of British Columbia.

Butterfield, Matthew. 2006. “The Power of Anacrusis: Engendered Feeling in Groove-Based Musics,” *Music Theory Online* 12.4

Encarnação, John. 2013. *Punk Aesthetics and New Folk. Way Down the Old Plank Road*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate.

Hasty, Christopher 1997. *Meter as Rhythm*. New York: OUP.

London, Justin. 2012. *Hearing in Time. Psychological Aspects of Musical Meter*. 2nd ed. New York: OUP

Neal, Jocelyn. 1998. “The Metric Makings of a Country Hit.” In *Reading Country Music*, ed. Cecilia Tichi. 322–37. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

———. 2002. *Song Structure Determinants: Poetic Narrative, Phrase Structure, and Hypermeter in the Music of Jimmie Rodgers*. PhD Diss., Eastman School of Music

Rockwell, Joti. 2011. “Time on the Crooked Road: Isochrony, Meter, and Disruption in Old-Time Country and Bluegrass Music.” *Ethnomusicology* 55/1.