

## Stolen Youth

### *Orphan Songs and Abolition*

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**ABSTRACT** In 1847 Atwill of New York published “The Lament of the Blind Orphan Girl.” Composed by William Bradbury, the song is written for voice and piano in a lilting 3/8 meter. Mary, the song’s protagonist, sings of “the silvery moon” and “bright chain of stars” over diatonic harmonies. A dramatic shift to the minor mode supports the climax: “Oh, when shall I see them? I’m blind, oh, I’m blind.” Mary explains that she and her brother have also lost their parents. On the sheet music cover a wreath of flowers encircles an image of a young white woman kneeling beneath a tree, alone at a grave. The title page notes: “As sung with distinguished applause by Abby Hutchinson.”

Orphan songs pervade nineteenth-century pop repertory. Scholars have analyzed Latvian, Hmong, Danish, and German orphan songs, but US orphan songs have generated little more than passing references. Other examples include: “The Orphan Nosegay Girl” with words by Mrs. Susanna Rowson from 1805; “The Colored Orphan Boy,” composed by C. D. Abbott and sung by S. C. Campbell of the Campbell Minstrels from 1852; and “The Orphan Ballad Singers Ballad” by Henry Russell from 1866. Orphans were not just a topic; in the latter half of the nineteenth century, actual parentless youth featured in bands such as the Hebrew Orphan Asylum Band of New York City.

This paper connects the stolen childhoods in orphan songs to those of enslaved youth. If free children were aware of slavery and the movement to abolish it as historian Wilma King has shown, what did it mean for Abby Hutchinson, who started performing abolitionist songs with her brothers at age twelve, to sing as the sentimental stock character of the orphan? Songs like the one above may have been a way that young abolitionists empathized with enslaved youths robbed of their youths.

**KEYWORDS** Abby Hutchinson, The Hutchinson Family, orphans, orphan songs, “lament of the blind orphan girl”, William Bradbury, abolition, political song, nineteenth century, United States, gender, sentimental songs

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*The video lecture transcribed here is available in the online version of JPMS Volume 33, Number 1.*

**[SLIDE 1: Paper title and author’s name, affiliation, twitter handle, and image]**  
Greetings PopCon fam! You’re listening to Dr. Emily Gale and this is Stolen Youth: Orphan Songs and Abolition.

Youth as it pertains to pop music tends to connote post-World War II genres and their descendants. Often used synonymously with “teen,” the concept is linked to 1950s consumer culture. **[SLIDE 2: Screenshot of author’s presentation on the London**

**Calling: IASPM UK & Ireland Online Conference website]** As I argued earlier this summer, however, youth featured importantly in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century popular music, too. I showed how youth was an important keyword featured frequently in song titles—songs about youth—and in addressing consumers of popular song publications—songs for youth. In this short talk, I focus on nineteenth-century songs at the intersection of youth, race, ability, and gender. I'll discuss one young woman popular singer, in particular, and the repertory she sang.

**[SLIDE 3: Image of Abby Hutchinson, 1847]** Abby Hutchinson was one quarter of one of the most popular singing groups of the nineteenth century: Milford, New Hampshire's Hutchinson Family Singers. She was just twelve years old when she initially filled in as lead tenor and began touring with her brothers Judson, John, and Asa in 1842. Like other youth pop stars, Abby was concerned with the politics and issues of her times. Today I'll attempt to connect the repertory Abby sang—namely her orphan songs—with the abolitionist aims of her harmony-singing family. If children were aware of slavery and the movement to abolish it as historian Wilma King has shown, what did it mean for Abby Hutchinson to sing in this context as the orphan? Did she connect the stolen childhoods depicted in orphan songs to those of enslaved youth? Indeed, orphan songs may have been a way that young abolitionists empathized with enslaved youths robbed of their youths. This is part of my ongoing work in which I aim to untether some of the long-standing gendered definitions of sentimentality.

**[SLIDE 4: Image of the cover to *Songs of the Hutchinson Family*, 1843]** In 1989, musicologist Dale Cockrell published *Excelsior*, an annotated version of the Hutchinson Family Singers' journals. This fascinating set of tour diaries charts the farm family's ascent to popularity in the 1840s. It documents the cost of meals and lodging as well as details of their performances; if you've ever wondered what touring by horse and Carryall—a four-seater covered carriage—was like, this is a must read! **[SLIDE 5: Image of a Hutchinson Family concert ticket, 1843]** Shortly after the siblings began touring, a dispute arose around Abby's participation in the tours; her concerned mother sent for her to return home in the fall of 1842 which she did. Some months later she resumed touring with her brothers. By 1844 the group was performing to halls of hundreds of listeners up and down the East Coast of the United States. Their journal documents concert stops in Boston, Baltimore, New York, Philadelphia, as well as many other smaller cities and towns throughout New England.

**[SLIDE 6: Image of the sheet music cover to "Get Off the Track," 1844]** The diaries also chart the Hutchinson Family's direct engagement with growing reform movements in the United States, including issues such as temperance, women's rights, and abolition. They attended and sang at Anti-Slavery Societies, met with abolitionist leaders including William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, and Edmund Quincy. The singers' biggest hit was "Get Off the Track" an abolitionist anthem written by their brother Jesse Hutchinson Jr. and performed to the tune of Dan Emmett's minstrel song "Old Dan Tucker." **[SLIDE 7: Image of the sheet music cover to "The Fugitive's Song," 1845]** Eventually they would board the steamship Cambria to Liverpool in mid-August of 1845 with Frederick Douglass whom they'd befriended several years earlier. Douglass had just

published his *Narratives* and had been advised to leave the US for a time in case his testimony was used as evidence against him. By 1847 the Hutchinsons openly refused an invitation to sing in Philadelphia, where “the Mayor would not allow mixed-race audiences.”<sup>1</sup>

Throughout their touring, the Hutchinson Family also described their visits to prisons, orphanages, and Institutes for the Blind, where they would perform. Focusing in on a two-week period at the beginning of 1844 suggests a potentially important relationship; the Hutchinsons visited 68 students at the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind on the fifteenth of January where they sang to the students and the students sang to them. Abby received a card from one of the students that she would keep for years to come. On the eighteenth, they visited the Pennsylvania Asylum for the Deaf and on the twenty-sixth they attended the exhibition of the New York Blind Institution, where 16 pupils performed. In this same two-week period, the Hutchinsons met with several leading abolitionists, including James McKim and his wife Sarah, Mrs. C. C. Burleigh and Mr. Thomas Davis, who encouraged the group to go to England (nineteenth of January). On the twenty-fourth and the twenty-sixth of January, Asa reported that he was reading Cassius Clay’s letter on slavery and Lydia Maria Child’s *Letters from New York*—her column from the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* later published as a book. “It is one of the most interesting books I have ever read,” he noted.<sup>2</sup> Cockrell observes that “an interest in the various benevolent organizations was a simple extension of the impulse that led to involvement in the humanitarian reform movements.”<sup>3</sup> A closer look at song repertory potentially pushes this connection further.

**[SLIDE 8: Images of the sheet music cover to “The Lament of the Blind Orphan Girl,” 1847]** In 1847 Atwill of New York published “The Lament of the Blind Orphan Girl.” Composed by William B. Bradbury, the song is written for voice and piano in a lilting 3/8 meter. On the sheet music cover a wreath of flowers encircles an image of a young woman kneeling beneath a tree, alone at a grave. The title page notes: “As sung with distinguished applause by Abby Hutchinson.” This tactic was a common nineteenth-century strategy: sell more sheet music by linking a song to a popular performer. The poetry is attributed to Ailenroc, and the music is dedicated to Miss Catherine T. Patton. Two years after the song’s publication, Abby would marry Ludlow Patton; Catherine was his sister. The poet Ailenroc is somewhat of a mystery; the only clue I’ve located is to a later nineteenth-century writer by the name of Cornelia Randolph Murrell who inverted her first name for the purposes of publishing. That Cornelia’s dates don’t line up for her to be this Ailenroc, but it suggests the same clever pseudonym for a different Cornelia poet.

Mary, the song’s protagonist, sings in first person, but opens with: “They tell me the earth is most lovely and fair.” She proceeds through descriptors that have been offered to

1. Dale Cockrell, ed., *Excelsior: Journals of the Hutchinson Family Singers, 1842-1846* (Pendragon Press, 1989), 379.

2. Quoted in Cockrell, 209.

3. Cockrell, 191.

her of “the silvery moon” and “bright chain of stars” while simple harmonies provide the support. These flowery descriptions serve as an imaginative invitation to the listener. A dramatic shift to the parallel minor mode supports the climactic reveal: “Oh, when shall I see them? I’m blind, oh, I’m blind.” A modulation to another key here might signify a transposition of experiences; an imagining of a relation, but fundamentally not the same. A shift to the parallel minor, on the other hand, is deeply affecting while retaining the same sense of home. Mary doesn’t have to step outside of her key in order to convey her sense and her experience. The melody quickly returns to the major mode, and a rising scale spans a melodic seventh; we’re left hanging on a fermata at the question “O when shall I see them?” before an almost trite sing-songy conclusion. The second and third verses are similarly detailed and intimate in descriptive quality but focus on the sensations and sounds of close relations instead. In the second verse, Mary describes her little brother and in the third and final verse she reveals that both of their parents have died. The text setting preserves a structure wherein references to Mary’s blindness are supported by the shift to the minor. Let’s listen to that first verse. **[SLIDE 9: Audio recording of the author playing and singing “The Lament of the Blind Orphan Girl”]**

The song is not anomalous; orphan songs pervade nineteenth-century US pop repertory. Examples include “The Orphan Nosegay Girl” with words by Mrs. Susanna Rowson from 1805; “The Colored Orphan Boy,” composed by C. D. Abbott and sung by S. C. Campbell of the Campbell Minstrels from 1852; and “The Orphan Ballad Singers Ballad” by Henry Russell from 1866. Orphans were not just a song topic, though; in the latter half of the nineteenth century, parentless youth featured in bands such as the Hebrew Orphan Asylum Band of New York City.<sup>4</sup> The popularity of Abby Hutchinson’s lament of the blind orphan girl would no doubt set the stage for Little Katy, the hot corn pedaling orphan of 1853 described in Robert Grimes’s 2011 article.<sup>5</sup>

**[SLIDE 10: Image of the sheet music to “The Beggar Girl,” ca. 1798]** Abby also sang an abolitionist song titled “The Slave’s Appeal.” A little digging reveals that the song was another adaptation by Abby’s brother Jesse Hutchinson, Jr., who employed language for the title from other earlier abolitionist appeals, such as David Walker’s 1830 *An Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* and Lydia Maria Child’s 1833 *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans called Africans*. The tune that Jesse borrowed for “The Slave’s Appeal” is “The Beggar Girl” by H. Piercy from around 1798. Within the first few lines, the beggar girl reveals that her father is dead. **[SLIDE 11: Quote from *A Woman of***

4. Cut from virtual presentation: The country scholars in the Zoom room will likely recognize the song—or at least in part—from early country music repertory. WLS’s National Barn Dance star Bradley Kincaid, for instance, recorded “The Blind Girl” in 1930. Perhaps other scholars have already pieced this together, but it’s worth noting that Kincaid’s “Blind Girl” shares several important similarities with “The Lament of the Blind Orphan Girl.” Both songs begin with the line “They tell me . . .” The two songs also share the name Mary. In the “Blind Girl” the dead mother is named Mary and so is the new stepmother. The most likely explanation is that “The Blind Girl” was some kind of answer song to “The Lament of the Blind Orphan Girl”—a smart and familiar way of capitalizing on an earlier song’s success.

5. Robert R. Grimes, “Come Buy Hot Corn! Music, Sentiment, and Morality in 1850s New York,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 5, no. 1 (2011): 33–59.

*the Century, 1893*] In an 1893 tome titled *A Woman of the Century: Fourteen Hundred-seventy Biographical Sketches Accompanied by Portraits of Leading American Women in All Walks of Life*, compilers Frances Elizabeth Willard and Mary Ashton Rice Livermore write: “The Hutchinsons, imbued with the love of liberty, soon joined heart and hand with the Abolitionists, and in their concerts sang ringing songs of freedom. This roused the ire of their pro-slavery hearers to such an extent that they would demonstrate their disapproval by yells and hisses and sometimes with threats of personal injury to the singers, but the presence of Abby held the riotous spirit in check. With her sweet voice and charming manners she would go forward and sing ‘The Slave’s Appeal’ with such effect that the mob would become peaceful.”<sup>6</sup>

[SLIDE 12: Images of Hutchinson Family Singer concert announcements] In her path-breaking study, historian Wilma King describes the psychological, emotional, and physical conditions of enslaved youth in the United States. King argues that “enslaved children had virtually no childhood because they entered the workplace early and were subjected to arbitrary authority, punishment, and separation, just as enslaved adults were.”<sup>7</sup> These traumatic conditions produced what King refers to as “children without childhoods” who were forced to “grow old before their time.”<sup>8</sup> King also documents children’s awareness of chattel slavery. Much more recently, Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers has presented chilling evidence that goes well beyond awareness—in *They Were Her Property*, Jones-Rogers shows the myriad ways that young white Southern girls actively participated in and perpetrated acts of white terrorism.<sup>9</sup>

The above musical examples suggest an immediate and intimate relationship at the crossroads of gender, youth, ability, and race; in taking on the perspective of the blind orphan girl, Abby Hutchinson likely imagined the other forms of oppression that would leave youth parentless. Did she also hope to influence other young listeners? While some orphan songs envoice the experience and perspective of a minor who has been neglected or abandoned or whose parents have died, others use the idea in a more figurative, colloquial sense to depict a situation that the OED reminds us is one in which someone or something has been deprived of protection, advantages, benefits, or happiness previously enjoyed. This is the social, political, and semantic context into which Abby sang her orphan songs.

[SLIDE 13: Image of Abby Hutchinson at age eighteen] Recent accounts of the Hutchinson Family Singers seem to grant relatively little agency to the young Abby or downplay her participation; surely, gender and age are factors. Pop scholars, including Jacqueline Warwick, Kyra Gaunt, Angela McRobbie and others, have shown that young

6. Frances Elizabeth Willard and Mary Ashton Rice Livermore, eds., *A Woman of the Century: Fourteen Hundred-seventy Biographical Sketches Accompanied by Portraits of Leading American Women in All Walks of Life* (Buffalo: Charles Wells Moulton, 1893), 561.

7. Wilma King, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century America*, second edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), xxi.

8. King, xxii.

9. Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2019).

women's musico-political work is often sidelined. So too in the nineteenth century. And yet some accounts of Abby's abolitionist convictions show her to be substantially more committed than her siblings. In *Blackface Nation*, Brian Roberts describes the mob violence that threatened abolitionist organizing. During a March 1845 concert in New York, there was a question amongst the singers about whether or not to perform "Get Off the Track!"—their signature abolitionist song. The next night, Abby pointed to the program. "Gentlemen," she told her brothers, "we are going to sing this tonight, if we have to die for it."<sup>10</sup>

**[SLIDE 14: Image of Ludlow Patton]** Abby married in 1849 and for the most part stopped performing with her brothers. William Lloyd Garrison's abolitionist paper, *The Liberator*, published the announcement of her marriage to Ludlow Patton in 1849. **[SLIDE 15: Sheet music covers to "Ring Out, Wild Bells" and "Brother Speak in Whispers Light" by Abby Hutchinson]** Though no longer performing, she would continue to compose and publish her own songs and maintain her political commitments. While I have only just started to track these engagements, I have found letters between Abby and William Lloyd Garrison, Susan B. Anthony, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. She was a member of the American Equal Rights Association. In an April 10, 1869, letter from Elizabeth Cady Stanton, she is listed on the Executive Committee. Other signatories include Frederick Douglass, Lucretia Mott, Henry Ward Beecher, and Susan B. Anthony. Abby Hutchinson Patton is also listed and discussed in an 1869 book titled *Eminent Women of the Age; Being Narratives of the Lives and Deeds of the Most Prominent Women of the Present Generation*.

**[SLIDE 16: Quotes from Abby Hutchinson Patton's book *A Handful of Pebbles*, 1891]** In 1891—the year before her death—Abby Hutchinson Patton privately printed a book titled *A Handful of Pebbles*. Dedicated to her parents Jesse and Mary Leavitt Hutchinson "by their loving daughter," the short book contains poems and snippets of wise, aphoristic prose. Across her fifty-seven pages of text, Abby devotes significant attention to perceived gender differences. On page 7, she writes: "The best men are those who bear a large share of their mother's nature, and the best women those who combine traits, both masculine and feminine."<sup>11</sup> Later on page 35, she asks: "Why are weak men always called effeminate, and strong women masculine? Cannot a woman have strength of character, and yet be womanly, and a man be gentle, and yet thoroughly manly? In a long lifetime I have seen but few men who are thoroughly just to women."<sup>12</sup> And, finally, on page 41, she states: "When a woman is encouraged to fill her mind with the jewels of thought, she will need less personal adornment to make herself attractive. In half a century I have seen many more heroic women than men."<sup>13</sup> These comments point to a life lived in public; to the experiences of a woman who refused to conform to the expectations and limitations of her gender; this work began in her youth. Ultimately,

10. Quoted in Brian Roberts, *Blackface Nation: Race, Reform, and Identity in American Popular Music, 1812-1925* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 229.

11. Abby Hutchinson Patton, *A Handful of Pebbles* (1891), 7.

12. Patton, 35.

13. *Ibid.*, 41.

Abby Hutchinson's performances and song repertory force important conversations about the possibilities and the limits of empathetic engagement and these specific examples invite us to think more broadly about the pervasiveness of the orphan figure in nineteenth-century popular music.

#### IMAGE DESCRIPTIONS/CREDITS:

Slide 1: Paper title and author's name, affiliation, twitter handle, and image.

Slide 2: Screenshot of author's presentation on the London Calling: IASPM UK & Ireland Online Conference website, <https://london-calling-iaspm2020.com/emily-gale-university-college-cork-republic-of-ireland/> (accessed 17 August 2020).

Slide 3: Image of Abby Hutchinson by engraver Samuel F. Baker (New York, 1847), Library Company of Philadelphia, <https://digital.librarycompany.org/islandora/object/digitoool%3A68307> (accessed 10 August 2020).

Slide 4: Image of the cover to *Songs of the Hutchinson Family* (New York: Firth & Hall, 1843), Lester S. Levy Sheet Music Collection, The Sheridan Libraries, Johns Hopkins University, <https://levysheetmusic.mse.jhu.edu/collection/020/204> (accessed 2 August 2020).

Slide 5: Image of an 1843 Hutchinson Family concert ticket, The Nutfield Genealogy Blog by Heather Wilkinson Rojo, 8 January 2010, <https://nutfieldgenealogy.blogspot.com/2010/01/hutchinson-family-singers-of-milford.html> (accessed 31 July 2020).

Slide 6: Image of the sheet music cover to "Get Off the Track! A Song for Emancipation" by Jesse Hutchinson, Jr. (Boston: Published by the author, 1844), The Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2008661453/> (accessed 14 July 2020).

Slide 7: Image of the sheet music cover to "The Fugitive's Song" by Jesse Hutchinson, Jr. (Boston: Henry Prentiss, 1845), The Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2008661459/> (accessed 14 July 2020).

Slide 8: Images of the sheet music cover to "The Lament of the Blind Orphan Girl" by William B. Bradbury (New York: Atwill, 1847), Lester S. Levy Sheet Music Collection, The Sheridan Libraries, Johns Hopkins University, <https://levysheetmusic.mse.jhu.edu/collection/020/019> (accessed 2 August 2020).

Slide 9: Audio recording of the author playing and singing "The Lament of the Blind Orphan Girl" by William B. Bradbury (New York: Atwill, 1847).

Slide 10: Image of the sheet music to "The Beggar Girl" by H. Piercy (ca. 1798), Lester S. Levy Sheet Music Collection, The Sheridan Libraries, Johns Hopkins University, <https://levysheetmusic.mse.jhu.edu/collection/031/027> (accessed 10 August 2020).

Slide 11: Quote from *A Woman of the Century: Fourteen Hundred-Seventy Biographical Sketches Accompanied by Portraits of Leading American Women in All Walks of Life* by Frances E. Willard and Mary A. Livermore (Buffalo, NY: C. W. Moulton, 1893), republished by Gale Research Co., 1967.

Slide 12: Images of Hutchinson Family Singer concert announcement (ca. 1844), <http://popmusic.mtsu.edu/hutchinson.html> (accessed 4 August 2020).

Slide 13: Image of Abby Hutchinson at age eighteen, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/39058216/abby-jermima-patton> (accessed 10 August 2020).

Slide 14: Image of Ludlow Patton, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/39057993/ludlow-patton> (accessed 10 August 2020).

Slide 15: Sheet music covers to “Ring Out, Wild Bells” (New York: Ditson & Co., 1891) by Abby Hutchinson and “Brother Speak in Whispers Light” by Bernard Covert (Boston: A. & J. P. Ordway, 1850), both from the Lester S. Levy Sheet Music Collection, The Sheridan Libraries, Johns Hopkins University, <https://levysheetmusic.mse.jhu.edu/collection/066/079> and <https://levysheetmusic.mse.jhu.edu/collection/022/013> (accessed 19 August 2020).

Slide 16: Quotes from Abby Hutchinson Patton’s book *A Handful of Pebbles* (Cambridge, Mass: The Riverside Press, 1891), republished by HardPress Publishing, 2012. ■