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**What is a shanty?**

The word has different meanings, but today “shanty” or “sea shanty” means work song on full rigged ships. The shanty genre provided for much improvisation and the ability to lengthen or shorten a song to match the circumstances. Its hallmark was call and response, performed between a soloist and the rest of the workers in chorus. The leader, called the shantyman, was appreciated for his piquant language, lyrical wit, and strong voice. Therefore you can find many variations in the lyrics as in other kinds of folk songs. Shanties were sung without instrumental accompaniment and, historically speaking, they were only sung in workbased contexts. The switch to steampowered ships and the use of machines for shipboard tasks, by the end of the 19th century, meant that shanties gradually ceased to serve a practical function.

**The most common types of shanties**

**Types related to hauling actions**

**Longdrag shanty** (also called a ”halyard shanty”)

Sung with the job of hauling on halyards to hoist, over an extended period, topsail or topgallant yards. Usual-

ly there are two pulls per chorus as in ”Way, hey, Blow the man down!” Examples: ”Hanging Johnny,” ”Whis-

key Johnny,” and ”Blow the Man Down.”

**Shortdrag shanty** Sung for short hauling jobs requiring a few bursts of great force, such as changing direction of sails via lines called braces, or hauling taut the corners of sails with sheets or tacks. These are characterized by one strong pull per chorus, typically on the last word, as in ”Way, haul away, haul away ”Joe”’!”

Examples: ”Boney,” ”Haul on the Bowline,” and ”Haul Away Joe.”

**Types related to heaving actions**

**Capstan shanty** Raising the anchor on a ship involved winding its rope around a capstan, a sort of giant winch, turned by sailors heaving wooden bars while walking around it. Other heavy tasks might also be assisted by using a capstan. Being a continuous action, shanties sung to accompany these tasks might have longer solo ver- ses and, frequently, a ”grand chorus,” in addition to the call-and-response form. Examples: ”Santianna”, ”Paddy Lay Back,” ”Rio Grande,” ”Clear the Track, Let the Bulgine Run,” ”Shenandoah”, and ”John Brown’s Body.”

**Windlass shanty** Modern shanties were used to accompany work at the patent windlass, which was designed to raise anchor and was operated by the see-saw like action of pumping hand brakes. The up and down motion of the brake levers lent the action a binary form that was well-suited by many of the same songs used as halyard shanties. And yet, the continuous nature of the task also meant grand choruses were possible. So while haly- ard shanties and capstan shanties tended to be exclusive of one another, windlass shanties sometimes shared repertoire with each of those other types. Examples: ”Sally Brown,” ”Heave Away, My Johnnies,” and ”Mister Stormalong.”

**Pump shanty** Operation of Downton pump. Because of leakage of water into the holds of wooden ships, they had to be regularly pumped out. The frequency and monotony of this task inspired the singing of many shan- ties. One design of pump worked very similarly to the brake windlass, while another, the Downton pump, was turned by handles attached to large wheels. Examples: ”Strike The Bell,” ”Fire Down Below,” ”South Australia”, and ”One More Day.” An example of special note is ”Leave Her, Johnny, Leave Her” (also known as ”Time for Us to Leave Her”), which was generally sung during the last round of pumping the ship dry once it was tied up in port, prior to the crew leaving the ship at the end of the voyage.

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**What kind of shanties do you find in this book?**

**1. A-roving** - A popular capstan shanty describing the pleasures waiting sailor John in harbour. The word ”ruin” used to be sung ”ru-ey-in”

**2. Blow the man down** - A halyard shanty said to be the war cry of the ”Packet rats”, the tough crews working for the disreputable ”Blackball line” sailing the Liverpool - New York line.

**3. Can’t you dance the polka?** This popular capstan shanty has many names. Polka became popular in the first half of the nineteenth century, reaching New York in 1840-1850

**4. Dead horse** - Before a ship left a harbour, the sailors got one month’s pay in advance. That was ”money for nothing” or they ”got paid for a dead horse”. After one month they had worked for the money and they sang this shanty at a cere- mony where they buried a ”horse” built of different materials into the sea.

**5. Donkey riding** - Very popular at the capstan when loading huge logs onto timber droghers in the ports of Atlantic

Canada, and also for unloading them when they reached Europe

**6. Farewell and adieu** - An ”outward bound” song, a ballad said to have been written and composed for the Royal Navy, thus not primarly a shanty

**7. Haul away Joe** - Famous tack and sheet shanty but probably also a halyard shanty. Exsists in many versions in both minor and major key.

**8. John Kanaka** - Halyard shanty. The word ”kanaka” is of Polynesian and Melanesian origin, with the meaning of ”man”

or ”human being”.

**9. Leave her, Johnny** - Regularly sung when pumping out the ship at the end of the trip.

**10. Rio Grande** - Always an outward-bound song, sung at the capstan or windlass. Rio Grande refers to the Rio Grande of Brazil. ”Rio” was pronounced ”Rye-O”

**11. Sally Brown** - Windlass shanty, probably from the West Indies. Nobody seems to know the meaning of ”wild goose nation”. It may refer to Ireland.

**12. Santy Anna** - This capstan and windlass shanty has many variants. In this version Santy Anna won the day and general Taylor ran away. The true historical fact is that General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, president of Mexico, was defeated at Molina del Rey in 1847 by the United States army under General Taylor. California, New Mexico and Texas were annexed by the United States, and General Taylor became president.

**13. Serafina** - From the days of the nitrate trade along the west coast of South America

**14. Shenandoah** - The song appears to have originated with Canadian and American voyageurs or fur traders traveling down the Missouri River in canoes and later become a sea shanty.

**15. The twentyfourth of February** - The strange fact that these Turkish men-o’-war, ”all belonging to Algiers”, bore names such as the Pink and the Rose and Crown, may indicate that these British ships were the booty of early pirate con- quests.

**16. We’re all bound to go** - Popular windlass shanty of Irish origin. Tapscott was a well known packet agent in Liverpool. This song was always song in imitated Irish brogue.

**17. Whoop jamboree** - This homeward-bound shanty was usually sung at capstan or windlass. The overall theme is simi- lar to ”Spanish Ladies”, naming various landmarks on the final stages of the voyage - sometimes to the Blackwall Docks in London, but more often into Liverpool, ending up at Dan Lowry’s.