

# In My Tradition: Ballads and Folk Lyrics

Rosaleen Gregory

Here are four more songs, all sung unaccompanied.

## **The Banks of Sweet Primroses**

A well-known and characteristic English folksong collected by Lucy Broadwood from Patience Vaisey of Adwell, Oxfordshire, in 1892. It was also part of the Sussex Copper Family's repertoire. I learned it a long time ago from *The Penguin Book of English Folksongs*, first published in 1959 and revived in a modified and augmented edition in 2003 by the English Folk Dance and Song Society as *Classic English Folk Songs*. My version seems to be slightly different again, most notably in having two more verses at the end. The last verse turns up in a number of songs, for example, "The Dark-Eyed Sailor". I can only attribute this to the workings of the folk process.....

## **The Snow it Melts the Soonest**

A Northumbrian song by Thomas Doubleday that Dave Gregory found in John Stokoe and Samuel Reay's *Songs and Ballads of Northern England* and reproduced in his book *The Late Victorian Folksong Revival: The Persistence of English Melody, 1878-1903* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010.) (Sorry, a bit of familial P.R. here). Doubleday set his own lyrics to a tune he collected from a Newcastle street singer around 1820. The tone of these is undoubtedly arrogant and M.C.P.ish, but what the heck – the same is true of other, far less attractive songs. I have only heard one person sing this song, and that was

CSTM's Michael Macdonald from the University of Alberta, who performed it with great sensitivity at an informal song session during the last CSTM conference held at St. John's in July this year.

## **Farewell to Tarwathie**

A Scottish whaling song with a haunting tune, brought to the attention of many through Judy Collins' evocative rendering (complete with wildlife) on her 1970 CD *Whales and Nightingales*.

## **Dead Maid's Land**

I bet this is a new one for many people who are familiar with the first three songs featured above. It's one of those English folksongs which use garden flowers as symbols, another being Child ballad #219, "The Gardener" (*alias* "Proud Maisry"), which appeared in my earlier column, *Singing the Child Ballads*, in the Spring 2008 issue of *Canadian Folk Music*. Red roses invariably stand for passion and bring consequences. "Dead Maid's Land" was collected in 1899 by English squire/parson Sabine Baring-Gould from Joseph Paddon of Holcombe Burnell in North Devon, and I learned it for a paper Dave gave on Baring-Gould's collecting. The most famous flowers-as-symbols English folksong is probably "The Seeds of Love", the first folksong collected by Cecil Sharp. His informant was the appropriately named gardener John England.

# The Banks of Sweet Primroses

Anon (Patience Vaisey)

Voice

The image shows a musical score for the song 'The Banks of Sweet Primroses'. It consists of three staves of music in G major and 3/4 time. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 3/4 time signature. The melody is written on a single staff. The lyrics are: 'As I walked out one mid-summer's mor - ning, To view the fields and to take the air, Down by the banks of the sweet prim-ro - ses, There I be - held a most love ly fair.' The second staff continues the melody with the lyrics 'take the air, Down by the banks of the sweet prim-ro - ses, There I be - held a most'. The third staff continues the melody with the lyrics 'love ly fair.' The music is simple and melodic, typical of a folk song.

As I walked out one mid-summer's mor - ning, To view the fields and to  
take the air, Down by the banks of the sweet prim-ro - ses, There I be - held a most  
love ly fair.

As I walked out one midsummer's morning,  
To view the fields and to take the air,  
Down by the banks of the sweet primroses,  
There I beheld a most lovely fair.

I said: "Fair maid, where can you be a-going,  
And what's the occasion of all your grief?  
I'll make you as happy as any lady,  
Tell me your sorrows, I may give relief."

"Stand off! Stand off! thou false deceiver!  
'Tis you have caused all my grief and pain.  
'Tis you that is causing my poor heart to wander,  
And to give me comfort is all in vain.

"Now I'll go down to some lonesome valley,  
Where no man on earth there shall me find,  
Where the pretty small birds sing songs of sweetness  
And bring true comfort to my wearied mind."

"Dear maid, believe me, I will ne'er deceive thee;  
Give your consent, we will married be;  
Your days of sadness I will change to gladness,  
And love shall alter all your thoughts of me."

Come all you maidens that go a-courting,  
Pray give attention to what I say,  
For there's many a dark and cloudy morning  
Turns out to be a sunshiny day.

# The Snow It Melts the Soonest

Anon/Thomas Doubleday

Voice



Oh, the snow it melts the soon-est when the winds be-gin to sing, And the  
com it ri-pens fast-est when the frosts are set-ting in; And when a wom-an tells me that my  
face she'll soon forget, Be - fore we part, I wad a croon, she's fain to foll-ow't yet.

Oh, the snow it melts the soonest when the winds begin to sing,  
And the corn it ripens fastest when the frosts are setting in;  
And when a woman tells me that my face she'll soon forget,  
Before we part, I'll wage a crown, she's fain to follow yet.

Oh, the snow it melts the soonest when the winds begin to sing,  
And the swallow skims without a thought as long as it is Spring;  
But when Spring goes and Winter blows, my lass, an' you'll be fain,  
For all your pride, to follow me, were't across the stormy main.

Oh, the snow it melts the soonest when the winds begin to sing,  
The bee that flew when Summer shone in Winter cannot sting;  
I've seen a woman's anger melt between the night and morn,  
And it's surely not a harder thing to tame a woman's scorn.

Oh, never say me farewell here, no farewell I'll receive,  
For you shall set me to the stile, and kiss, and take your leave;  
But I'll stay here till the woodcock comes and the martlet takes his wing,  
Since the snows they melt the soonest when the winds begin to sing.

# Farewell to Tarwathie

Anon

Voice

The image shows a musical score for a voice part. It consists of three staves of music in a 4/4 time signature. The melody is written on a single treble clef staff. The lyrics are written below the notes. The first staff contains the first line of the song, the second staff contains the second line, and the third staff contains the third line. The lyrics are: 'Fare - well to Tar - warth-ře, a - dieu moor and hill, And the dear land of Crim ond, I bid you fare - well. I'm bound out for Greenland, I'm read - y to sail, In the hopes to find rich - es in hunt - ing the whale.'

Fare - well to Tar - warth-ře, a - dieu moor and hill, And the dear land of  
Crim ond, I bid you fare - well. I'm bound out for Greenland, I'm read - y to sail, In the  
hopes to find rich - es in hunt - ing the whale.

Farewell to Tarwathie, adieu moor and hill,  
And the dear land of Crimond, I bid you farewell.  
I'm bound off for Greenland, I'm ready to sail,  
In hopes to find riches in hunting the whale.

Farewell to my comrades, for a while we must part,  
And likewise the dear lass who first won my heart.  
The cold coast of Greenland my love will not chill,  
And the longer my absence, more loving she'll feel.

Our ship is well rigged and she's ready to sail,  
The crew they are anxious to follow the whale,  
Where the icebergs do float and the stormy winds blow,  
Where the land and the ocean is covered with snow.

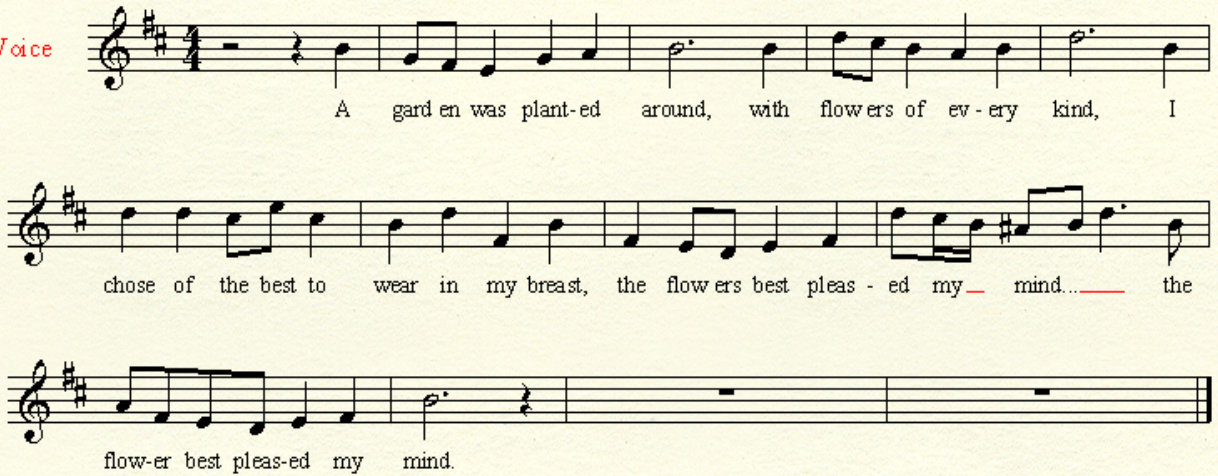
The cold coast of Greenland is barren and bare,  
No seed time or harvest is ever known there.  
And the birds they sing sweetly in mountain and glen,  
But there's no bird in Greenland to sing to the whale.

There is no habitation for a man to live there,  
And the king of that country is the fierce Greenland bear.  
And there'll be no temptation to tarry long there,  
With our ship bumper full we will homeward repair.

# Dead Maid's Land

Anon (Joseph Paddon)

Voice



A garden was plant-ed around, with flow-ers of ev-ery kind, I  
chose of the best to wear in my breast, the flow-ers best pleas-ed my mind... the  
flow-er best pleas-ed my mind.

A garden was planted around  
With flowers of every kind.  
I chose of the best to wear in my breast,  
The flowers best pleased my mind (2).

A gardener was standing by  
I asked him to choose for me.  
He chose me the violet, the lily and the pink,  
But I liked none of the three (2).

A violet I don't like,  
A lily it fades so soon.  
And as for the pink, I care not a fink,  
I said I would stop till June (2).

The lily shall be thy smock,  
The jonquil shoe thy feet,  
Thy gown shall be of the ten-week stock,  
Thy gloves of the violet sweet (2).

The gilly shall deck thy head,  
The way with herbs I'll strew.  
Thy stockings shall be the marigold,  
Thy gloves the violet blue (2).

I like not the gilly flower,  
Nor herbs my way to strew,

Nor stockings of the marigold,  
Nor gloves of violet blue (2).

I won't have the ten-week stock,  
Nor jonquils to my shoon.  
But I will have the red, red rose  
That flowereth in June (2).

The rose it doth bear a thorn  
That pricketh to the bone.  
I little heed what thou dost say,  
I will have that or none (2).

The rose it doth bear a thorn  
That pricketh to the heart.  
O but I will have the red, red rose,  
For I little heed its smart (2).

She stooped to the ground,  
To pluck the rose so red.  
The thorn it pricked her to the heart,  
And this fair maid is dead (2).

A gardener stood by the gate,  
With cypress in his hand,  
And he did say "Let no fair may  
Come into Dead Maid's Land" (2).