

Singing the Child Ballads

Rosaleen Gregory

Child #113, "The Great Silkie of Sule Skerry"

I learned my version from the *Joan Baez Songbook* (Ryerson Music Publishers, 1964). I've added a final verse which effectively brings the prophecy in the previous verse to pass, and thus rounds off the story. The tune, which seems to me such an integral part of the ballad, was apparently composed by Dr. James Waters of Columbia University. I use a guitar accompaniment on this one.

Child #115, "Queen Eleanor's Confession"

I was going to say that I learned this from a 1976 LP titled *Folk Songs of Old England, Volume II*, by Tim Hart and Maddy Prior, but Dave says that cannot be true. He is sure he heard me (and others, including Martin Carthy) singing it at Keele University folk club in the 1960s. And he says I sang it again in the early 1970s at Queen's University, when I performed

in a group with two other folk musicians. But I don't remember either of those occasions! Anyway, it's a fine song and one which adds a touch of humour to a traditional ballad repertoire that is predominantly 'gloom and doom'. Performed unaccompanied.

Child #170, "The Death of Queen Jane"

My version I found in John Jacob Niles' *Ballad Book* (Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961). He claims to have collected it from Aunt Beth Holcolm "on July 8, 1932, in the city of Whitesburg, Kentucky". Also performed unaccompanied.

Child #173, "Mary Hamilton"

Another Joan Baez version, from the same *Songbook*. I employ a guitar accompaniment.

The Great Silkie of Sule Skerry

Anon/James Waters

Voice

An earth - ly nour - ris _____ sits and _____ sings, And aye, she
sings by li - ly _____ wean, "It's lit - tle ken I my bairn's fath - er, Far
less the land _____ where he dwells in _____

The image shows three staves of musical notation in 3/4 time. The first staff is labeled 'Voice' and contains the melody for the first line of lyrics. The second staff continues the melody for the second line. The third staff shows the beginning of the third line. Chords are indicated by letters G, F, C, Am, Dm, and G above the notes. Red lines under the lyrics indicate where the notes align with the words.

An earthly nourris sits and sings, and, aye, she sings, "By lily wean!
And little ken I my bairn's father, far less the land where he dwells in."

For he came one night to her bed's feet, and a grumly guest I'm sure was he,
Saying, "Here am I, thy bairn's father, although I be not comely.

"I am a man upon the land, I am a silkie on the sea.
And when I'm far and far frae land, my home it is in Sule Skerrie."

And he has ta'en a purse of gold, and he has placed it upon her knee,
Saying, "Give to me my little young son, and take thee up thy nurse's fee.

"And it shall come to pass on a summer's day, when the sun shines bright on every stone,
I'll come and fetch my little young son and teach him how to swim the foam.

"And ye shall marry a gunner proud, and a right fine gunner I'm sure he'll be,
And the very first shot that e'er he shoots will kill both my young son and me."

And she has married a gunner good, and a right fine gunner I'm sure was he,
And he's gone out on a May morning and shot the son and the Great Silkie.

Queen Eleanor's Confession

Anon

Voice

Queen El-eanor was a sick wo-man, And afraid that she should
die, Then she sent for two fryars out of France, To speak to her speed-i-ly.

The image shows two staves of musical notation in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. The melody starts with a quarter rest, followed by quarter notes G4, A4, B4, C5, and a half note G4. The lyrics 'Queen El-eanor was a sick wo-man, And afraid that she should' are aligned under the notes. The second staff continues the melody with quarter notes D5, E5, F#5, G5, A5, B5, C6, and a half note G5. The lyrics 'die, Then she sent for two fryars out of France, To speak to her speed-i-ly.' are aligned under the notes. The piece ends with a double bar line.

Queen Eleanor was a sick woman, and afraid that she should die;
Then she sent for two fryars of France, to speak with her speedily.

The king call'd down his nobles all, by one, by two, by three;
"Earl Marshall, I'll go shrive the Queen, and thou shalt wend with me."

"A boone, a boone," quoth Earl Marshall, and fell on his bended knee;
"That whatsoever Queen Eleanor say, no harm thereof may be."

“I’ll pawn my lands,” the King then cried, “my sceptre, crown, and all,
That whatso’er Queen Eleanor says no harm thereof shall fall.

“Do you put on a fryar’s coat, and I’ll put on another;
And we will to Queen Eleanor go, like fryar and his brother.”

Thus both attired then they go; when they came to Whitehall,
The bells did ring and the quiristers sing, and the torches did light them all.

When that they came before the Queen, they fell on their bended knee;
“A boone, a boone, our gracious Queen, that you sent so hastily.”

“Are you two fryars of France”, she said, “as I suppose you be?
But if you are two English fryars, you shall hang on the gallows tree.”

“We are two fryars of France”, they said, “as you suppose we be;
We have not been at any mass since we came from the sea.”

“The first vile thing that ever I did I will to you unfold;
Earl Marshall had my maidenhead, beneath this cloth of gold.”

“That’s a vile sin,” then said the King, “May God forgive it thee!”
“Amen, Amen,” quoth Earl Marshall, with a heavy heart spoke he.

“The next vile thing that ever I did, to you I’ll not deny;
I made a box of poison strong, to poison King Henry.”

“That’s a vile sin,” then said the King, “May God forgive it thee!”
“Amen, amen,” quoth Earl Marshal, “and I wish it so may be.”

“The next vile thing that ever I did, to you I will discover;
I poisoned fair Rosamonde, all in fair Woodstock bower.”

“That’s a vile sin,” then said the King, “May God forgive it thee!”
“Amen, amen” quoth Earl Marshall, “and I wish it so may be.”

“Do you see yonders little boy, a tossing of the ball?
That is Earl Marshal’s eldest son, and I love him the best of all.

“Do you see yonders little boy, a catching of the ball?
That is King Henry’s youngest son, and I love him the worst of all.

“His head is fashion’d like a bull; his nose is like a boar.”
“No matter for that,” King Henry cried, “I love him the better therefor.”

The King pulled off his fryar’s coat, and appeared all in red;
She shrieked, and cried, and wrung her hands, and said she was betrayed.

The King looked over his left shoulder, and a grim look lookèd he;
“Earl Marshall,” he said, “but for my oath, high-hangèd thou shouldst be.”

The Death of Queen Jane

Anon

Voice

Queen Jane lay in la-bour for six days or more, Till the worn-en folk grew
 wear-y and the mid-wives gave o'er. King — Hen-ry was sent for with horse - back and
 speed, For to be with Queen Jane in her hour — of need.

Queen Jane lay in labour for six days or more,
 Till the womenfolk grew weary and the midwives gave oe'r.
 King Henry was sent for with horseback and speed,
 For to be with Queen Jane in her hour of need.

He went to her bedside: "How comes this, my flower,
 I come to ye direct in less time than an hour."
 "King Henry, King Henry, I take you to be,
 Pray cut my side open and save your baby."

"Ah, no," said King Henry, "that never could be,
 If I can lose my pretty flower, I can lose my baby."
 Queen Jane she turned over and went into a swoon,
 Her side was cut open and her baby was found.

Her baby was christened the very same day,
 While its dear dead mother a-moulderin' lay.
 Six men went before her, four men followed on,
 King Henry stumbled after with his black mournin' on.

Oh, he weepèd and he mourned until he was sore,
 Said, "The flower of England will flourish no more."
 And he sat by the river with his head on his hand,
 Said, "My merry England is a sorrowful land."

Mary Hamilton

Anon

Voice

Word is to _____ the kit - chen _____ gone, And word is to _____ the hall, _____

_____ And word is up to Madam the _____ Queen And that's the _____ worst _____ of

all, _____ That Mar - y Ham-il-ton's borne _____ babe to the high - est

Stu - art of all _____

Word is to the kitchen gone, and word is to the hall,
And word is up to madam the Queen, and that's the worst of all,
That Mary Hamilton's borne a babe to the highest Stuart of all.

“Arise, arise, Mary Hamilton, arise and tell to me,
What thou hast done with thy wee babe I saw and heard weep by thee?”

“I put him in a tiny boat, and cast him out to sea,
That he might sink or he might swim, but he'd never come back to me.”

“Arise, arise, Mary Hamilton, arise and come with me,
There is a wedding in Glasgow town, this night we'll go and see.”

She put not on her robes of black, nor her robes of brown,
But she put on her robes of white, to ride into Glasgow town.

As she rode into Glasgow town, the city for to see,
The bailiff's wife and the provost's wife cried, “Ach, and alas for thee.”

“Ah, you need not weep for me,” she cried, “You need not weep for me;
For had I not slain my own wee babe, this death I would not dee.”

“Ah, little did my mother think, when first she cradled me,
The lands I was to travel in, and the death I was to dee.

“Last night I washed the Queen's feet, and put the gold in her hair,
And the only reward I find for this, the gallows to be my share.”

“Cast off, cast off my gown,” she cried, “but let my petticoat be,
And tie a napkin 'round my face, the gallows I would not see.”

Then by and come the King himself, looked up with a pitiful eye,
“Come down, come down, Mary Hamilton, tonight you'll dine with me.”

“Ah, hold your tongue, my sovereign liege, and let your folly be;
For if you'd a mind to save my life, you'd never have shamed me here.

“Last night there were four Marys, tonight there'll be but three,
There was Mary Beaton, and Mary Seton, and Mary Carmichael, and me.”

Treasures from Our Archives

Fifteen Years Ago

Bulletin 26.1 (Summer 1992). I [John Leeder] was guest editor of this issue, foreshadowing my return to harness in tandem with George Lyon. It consisted mostly of the 1992 Festival Directory. There was as well a provocative article, “The Function of Folk Festivals”, by Gary Cristall, then Artistic Director of the Vancouver Folk Festival, and an article by Michael Taft, “A Response to Mr. Podolak”, reacting to a previous provocative article by another folk festival director, Mitch Podolak.

Bulletin 26.2 (Fall 1992). Another transition issue. The *Bulletin* returned to the “newsletter” format which was to persist for roughly the next year, until the Society's finances permitted a more ambitious approach. As well, the editorial torch was officially thrown from Lynn Whidden to George W. Lyon and myself, but much of the content of the issue was in fact inherited from Lynn's tenure. This included Tom Brandon's song “Canadian Unity”, Allister MacGillivray's “Kitty Bawn O'Brien” and Bob Bossin's “The Casca and the Whitehorse Burned Down”, articles on “Saskatoon in the Winter” and Lunenburg's Folk Harbour festival, the as-yet-unnamed radio column and reviews of Roy Johnstone's *Rolling Waves*, Ad Vielle Que Pourra's

New French Folk Music, Penny Sidor's *Past Lives* and Willy Thrasher's *Indian/Inuit Country*.

Bulletin 26.3 (Autumn 1992). Accordion music again! Len Wallace wrote about “The Accordion: The People's Instrument”. The other feature article was from Vladimir Simosko, “Ethnomusicology and Education in the 1990s”. Judith Cohen's EthnoFolk Letters column made its first appearance, as did the then-unnamed magazine column. The still-unnamed radio column showed up for the second time. Then there were reviews of Sid Holt and George Lyon's book *A Toast to Baldy Red* and recordings *Pint Pot and Plough* (Mike Ballantyne) and *Clawhammer Your Way to the Top* (Daniel Koulack). Joe Adams' song “Harvest Time” filled the back page of this “newsletter-style” issue.

Ten Years Ago

Bulletin 31.1 (March 1997). Jay Rahn contributed an article “Using Single-Chord Pieces in Elementary School Music”, with a couple of accompanying songs, “My Dame Has a Lame Tame Crane” and “Lord Gregory” (an Ontario version from LaRena Clark); Daniel Thonon's tune “Évit Gabriel” supported an interview with him and other Ad Vielle Que Pourra members, entitled “That's World Beat,