

Letters to the Editor

Judith Cohen writes:

I've been home a couple of weeks and finally got through all my accumulated mail including two very good issues of CFMB.

Anyway, re Rosaleen's note about the tiny husband, I'm sure Donald [Deschênes] has more complete information, but the version I sing is one I learned from the Vautour-Aucoin collection, 1972 or 1973 I believe, housed in the archives at University of Moncton; it was collected in Richibouctou, N.B.

As I remember it, it goes like this:

Mon père m'a donné un mari,
REF: Sommeill', 'tit Luis, sommeille,
Il me l'a donné si petit,
REF: sommeill', 'tit Louis, dors 'tit Louis,
pass' la cruch' mélasse.

Il me l'a donné si petit, sommeill'...
Dedans la paille je l'avais mis, sommeill'....mélasse.

Dedans la paille je l'avais mis...
J'ai pris la paille, j'l'ai fait brûlée...

J'ai pris la paille, j'l'ai fait brûlée...
Dedans le cendr' je l'ai trouvé...

Dedans le cendr' je l'ai trouvé...
Dessus la chais' je l'avais mis...

Dessus la chais' je l'avais mis...
La poul' venit, ell' l'emportit...

La poul' venit, ell' l'emportit...
Ah, si jamais je me marie...

Ah, si jamais je me marie...
J'en prendrai pas un si petit...

J'en prendrai pas un si petit...
J'en prendrai un d'un' pouce et d'mie.... mélasse.

George Lyon writes:

I've got some reactions to two items from the recent Bulletin, independent of each other, but perhaps related insofar as both question our lust for innocence in folk song.

Topic 1: I've never heard Moira Cameron sing, nor have I read her liner notes, which may put me in a good position to complain about Rosaleen Gregory's cranky comments on the latter in her review of *Lilies Among The Bushes*. Let's begin with a little verbal history. As far as I remember, the construction "-bashing" enters the language as "Paki-bashing," a hobby among certain superior Anglo-Saxon lumpens which I understand to be the equivalent of "nigger-knocking," a hobby in Texas during my youth. I assume that the British version is as disgusting as the Texan: a car full of young men drives through the ghetto armed with, at least, bricks & bats (I knew one kid who used a .22), and the occupants see how much damage they can inflict on human flesh. Having lived among this sort of behavior, I am usually angry to see the term used to mean nothing more than to make a point the present author disagrees with. I recently heard a bank executive talk about "bank-bashing." Can we return to planet Earth, please?

Gregory claims that Cameron's notes to the ballads say unkind things about men. However, it seems apparent from the accompanying interview that Cameron is married & had a powerful, useful, and loving relationship with her father. In fact the ballads came out of patriarchal culture and certainly do carry the traces of that culture and cannot be selected, sung, or pondered without some reference to that culture, be it acknowledged or implicit. There surely are feminists whose judgements annoy me. Gregory would have done us a better turn to have been more specific about what exactly Cameron wrote. I am not interested in her reaction to Cameron without that kind of specificity, especially if she's going to compare Cameron's comments to physical cruelty. Gregory acknowledges that she may "give offence." Offence is not the issue. The issue is that Gregory's claim that Cameron's comments are "belligerent & abrasive" are not supported.

Singers' Workshop

Rosaleen writes:

Thank-you, Judith (Cohen), for providing another version of "Papa m'a donné un mari". Wish you could have been at Sudbury last May to hear Marcel Bénétteau's rendition, which I remember as quite similar to yours. No takers for "The King of Ireland's Sons", though, it seems.

This time the puzzle song is one I learned at my mother's knee (yes, really). It should be easier to trace, although I looked it up on the Mudcat Café website and found nothing. I might have done better with a U.K. website, as I feel sure it is of U.K. origin – a children's (Sunday-school?) song entitled "Once there was a dragon". I can't remember all the words and my mother is, alas, no longer around to fill in the gaps. She was a Froebel-trained teacher of young children before she married and may have used this song with her pupils (I can hear a piano accompaniment in my head when I sing it). I think she thought it a bit heavy on the theology, but liked the dragons.

Anyway, this is as much as I remember. Can anyone fill in the missing words, or add any more verses? Is there by any chance a francophone version?

Once there was a dragon, dressed in green
Dressed in green, all in green
Never has a worse one yet been seen
Than this dragon who is dressed in green.
Envious and spiteful is his name,
Dreadful name, dragon's name!
Envious and spiteful is his name,
This dragon who is dressed in green.

Once there was a dragon, dressed in red
Dressed in red, all in red
Never has a worse one yet been bred
Than this dragon who is dressed in red.
Angry and revengeful is his name,
Dreadful name, dragon's name!
Angry and revengeful is his name,
This dragon who is dressed in red.

Once there was a dragon, dressed in black
Dressed in black, all in black
Never will a worse one cross your track
Than this dragon who is dressed in black!
? is his name,
Dreadful name, dragon's name!
? is his name,
This dragon who is dressed in black.

Topic 2: I enjoyed Bartlett & Ruebsaat on "Lamkin," and I agree that an important concern in the song is abandonment. But I think they've failed to swing at a good pitch on the whole matter. Considering the Dead Baby Joke phenomenon, Alan Dundes (Western Folklore 38) suggested that we consider the possibility that parents not only love their children, but also resent them and that this resentment finds cultural expression in jokes - and let's say also in song. Certainly in a youth-centred society such as ours, it shouldn't be surprising that this would be so, but given the bough-breaking horrors of older nursery rhymes, it's probably a pretty widespread response.

Alan Lomax makes a similar point about the popularity of "The House Carpenter" on the frontier. Women must have frequently felt trapped in marriages; this is not to say that they were not willing to accept their commitments, but humans are complicated beings, capable of many emotions. A tale of erotic escape could give women a screen onto which to project some of their desires; that both the adulterous woman (who left her baby!!!) and the demon lover are ultimately killed allows the dreamer to return to the dreary world with a minimum of guilt. Why not think something similar about "Lamkin," as about Dead Baby Jokes?

Child's comment about Lamkin as the terror of countless nurseries leads me to another thought. If children were in fact terrified by this or any other story, perhaps our symbolic violence does in fact do more damage than we'd like to admit. Jon and Rika admitted to feeling terrified at a baby's first cries in the night; I'll admit that when I came home from a tedious round of student teaching in 1972 and heard Fred Flintstone's scream as I entered the door, I could easily imagine the tv flying out the window, with the cord wrapped about the necks of my own two bundles of joy, and I have to ask myself: when I made them jump by rapping the bottom of my armchair as I read to them of Blind Pew tapping his way up to the Admiral Benbow Inn, was my practical joke entirely innocent? Was it entirely harmless?

I think the vices to be eschewed in the last verse are related to lack of faith, despair, absence of hope, a worse state for a believer even than envy, spite, anger and revenge, but for the moment, until someone comes up with them (and an author for the

words and/or the tune, perhaps?), the rest of the words escape me. I apologise – this is not strictly folk or traditional lyrics or music – I will try to provide something more authentic next time.

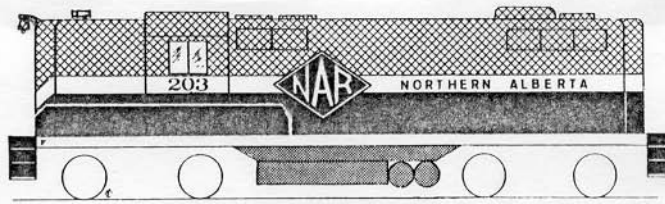
Once There Was a Dragon

Anon

Once there was a drag - on dressed in green, dressed in green,
 all in green, Never had a worse one yet been seen than this
 dragon that is dressed in green. En - vi - ous and spite - ful
 is his name, dread - ful name, drag - on's name!
 En - vi - ous and spite - ful is his name, this dragon that is dressed in
 green.

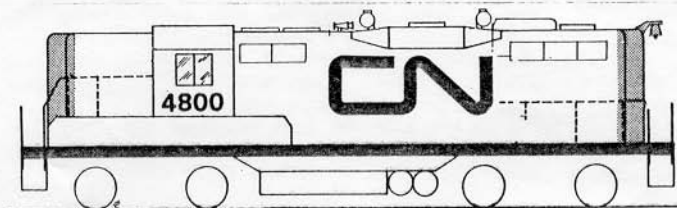
Song of the Month

You will find in the reviews section two unbiased and completely independent assessments of our esteemed Review Editor's own first CD release, "Fresh Forest Breeze". He sent Rosaleen a review copy, thereby bravely taking the risk of being accused of urban-bashing, or, worse yet, hockey-bashing. Ever since I first heard it, I've been partial to his song "Painting Over the N.A.R.", mainly because of its infectious tune and conservationist sentiments but in part because the said railroad line passes quite close to where we live. Anyway, I thought it would be nice if we could print one of John's songs in this issue, as a way of celebrating the long-awaited delivery of his musical child, so I made the request and I was pleased when I saw that "Painting Over" was the one he had submitted. I'm not sure if the artwork is John's own, but I like it and thought you might too. So here, reproduced from manuscript, is the composition in question.



Painting Over the N.A.R.

F C7 Bb F
 They take the cars down to Cal-der Shops, Mak-ing re-pairs on the
 C7 F C7 Bb
 roll-ing - stock, They come back paint-ed and spruced up and clean, But the
 F C7 F
 N. A. R. diamonds no more to be seen. There's a brand new sym-bol on the
 C Bb F C7
 side of each car, The fat white noo-dle of the C. N. - R.; A
 F C7 Bb F
 new day has dawned, and a sad one for me, For the North-ern Al-ber-t-a is
 C7 F Chorus: C7 F C7 Bb
 hist-o - ry, And they're paint-ing o-ver the N. A. - R., That
 F C7 F
 worked so hard and tra-velled so far; Little by lit-tle and
 C7 Bb F C7 F
 car by car, They're paint-ing o-ver the N. A. - R.



PAINTING OVER THE N.A.R.

Words and music © 1981 by John Leeder

They take the cars down to Calder Shops,
Making repairs on the rolling stock;
They come back painted and spruced up and clean,
But the N.A.R. diamond's no more to be seen.
There's a brand new symbol on the side of each car,
The fat white noodle of the C.N.R.;
A new day has dawned, and a sad one for me,
For the Northern Alberta is history.

Chorus: And they're painting over the N.A.R.
That worked so hard and travelled so far;
Little by little and car by car,
They're painting over the N.A.R.

We were doing O.K. a year or so back,
Minding our business, running in the black;
The only line in the West, they say,
That found itself able to pay its own way.
Then came the news that the line had been sold,
Taken into the government fold;
We did too well for our own good;
We can't turn back time; how I wish that we could.

My Dad worked the railway for forty-five years;
The day that they sold her he came close to tears;
The N.A.R. was his pride and joy;
I've been around her since I was a boy;
The people all knew us the length of the track,
Up through Lac LaBiche to McMurray and back;
They knew who to talk to when they needed things done,
And there always was time for a wee bit of fun,

But now the boss lives a long ways away,
He's nothing to me but the name on my pay;
He don't know the people in Conklin or Chard,
He's never set foot in Dunvegan Yards;
And now we're smothered with regulations,
Piled up with forms and choked up with frustration;
The prices are up and the traffic is down,
And I'm starting to think about moving to town.

"The above song was writ by John Leeder in 1981 and got an iron clad copyright 75623489]08663 registered in Ottawa. Anyone caught singing this song without my permission and spreading it around will sure be a good friend of mine because that's what I wrote it for in the first place." (Paraphrased from an old Woody Guthrie songbook).

Commentary to accompany "Painting Over the N.A.R."

This song grew from my participation in August 1981 in the second annual Folk Festival on Rails, which takes place aboard an historic railway car over trackage between Edmonton and Fort McMurray, Alberta, and return. This line used to be part of the Northern Alberta Railway; however, within the year previous to the festival the N.A.R. had been absorbed into the C.N.R. system, despite being the only profit-making railway in western Canada. The N.A.R. logo was gradually disappearing; each time cars went into the shops for repairs or refurbishing, they returned repainted in the C.N.R. colours. I was struck by the sense of Northern Alberta history slipping away; this song resulted.

The characters are fictional; the attitudes don't represent the views of any one individual, but were consolidated from bits and pieces of ideas expressed to me by various individuals at various times before and during the festival.