

## The Rosy Banks So Green

Sung by O.J. Abbott, Hull, Quebec, July 1957

One of the pleasures of editing the *Bulletin* has been the Christmas-like delight of opening envelopes from Edith Fowke, which periodically included songs from her extensive collecting. This will be the last of these ever to appear. It is highly appropriate to us that this final song come from the repertoire of one of her most significant informants and that it deal with a feminist issue.

This kind of broadside ballad was scorned by scholars of Child's generation and afterwards as sentimental bombast mass-produced to provide a fast buck. These attitudes haven't changed, though their application certainly has. To many listeners who would perhaps despise or laugh at Harlequin romances or cheap Mother's Day cards, this ballad rings with an authenticity that age provides, at least until they examine it closely.

Sentimentality and commercialism aside, the domestic violence at the heart of the song has clearly been with us for a long time; the father's viciousness begins with patriarchal control of the family and comfortably moves to double murder. We can't blame television, marijuana, or feminism for it! One of the values of folk song is that it can provide us a diachronic glimpse at the concerns of our culture. What changes over time? What remains with us?

♩ = 86 - 100 (104)

Oh come all you good peo-ple, I pray you will at-tend To these few lines that in  
sor-row I have penned, Con-cern-ing a young sai-lor that ploughed the rag-ing main And his  
dar-ling Jos-e-phine on the ro-sy banks so green.

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It was on a sum-mer's eve-ning down by her un-cle's grove, This la-dy sat con-  
ver-sing with a lad she dear-ly loved; A - kiss-ing and em- bra-cing he  
cried, "Dear Jos-e-phine, This night we will be far from the ro-sy banks so green.

Note: Verse two has been transcribed as it is more representative of the subsequent verses.

Oh come all you good people, I pray you will attend  
To those few lines that in sorrow I have penned,  
Concerning a young sailor that ploughed the raging main  
And his darling Josephine on the rosy banks so green.

It was on a summer's evening down by her uncle's grove  
This lady sat conversing with a lad she dearly loved.  
A-kissing and embracing, he cried, "Dear Josephine,  
This night we will be far from the rosy banks so green."

Her old father overheard until he could no longer stand;  
He rushed upon those lovers with a loaded gun in hand,  
Saying, "Die, you cursed youth, no more you'll plough the main,  
For this night I'll separate you on the rosy banks so green."

He aimed the deadly weapon, the fatal trigger drew;  
Then Josephine like lightning to her lover's arms she flew,  
But the fatal ball had sped its course, so true had been its aim  
That they fell side by side on the rosy banks so green.

Ce type très répandu de ballade a été dénoncé vertement par les érudits de la génération de Child et ceux qui leur ont succédé pour ce qu'il n'en résulte que bêtise sentimentale propre à faire gagner des sous rapidement. Cette attitude n'a pas changé quoique son application ne soit certes plus la même. Pour un grand nombre d'auditeurs du genre à dédaigner les romans Harlequin ou les cartes de souhaits bon marché, cette ballade semblera néanmoins empreinte d'une authenticité honorablement acquise avec le temps, jusqu'à ce que, en tous cas, nous en fassions un examen plus poussé.

Mis à part les points de vue sentimental et commercial, la violence familiale dont fait état la chanson n'est pas d'aujourd'hui: la brutalité du père commence avec le contrôle patriarcal de la famille et aboutit ainsi tranquillement au double meurtre. Ce qui donne de la valeur à la chanson folklorique, c'est, entre autres, sa capacité à donner un aperçu diachronique de tout ce qui touche notre culture. Qu'est-ce qui a changé? Qu'est-ce qui persiste?

As young Josephine lay dying, those words I heard her say,  
"It's well that my old mother did not live to see this day,  
But from the high seat of glory, a witness she has been  
To the murdering of her daughter on the rosy banks so green.

As young Willie he lay dying, those words I heard him say,  
"Soon we will be lying in the cold and silent grave."  
He embraced her in anguish and kissed both cheek and chin  
And they died side by side on the rosy banks so green.

"Oh, fare you well, dear Willie, no more you will return  
To your poor old aged mother, who will never cease to mourn,  
But you'll rise up in glory with your own dear Josephine,  
And you'll never be forgotten on the rosy banks so green."

So come all you good people, I pray you will draw near  
To the graves of those lovers and in silence shed a tear,  
For beneath the marble tombstone down by yon purling stream  
Lie those innocent young lovers on the rosy banks so green.