Document generated on 04/17/2024 8:52 a.m.

Ethnologies

ethnologies

Lisa — La jeune esclave indienne/A Young Indian Slave

Roger Paradis

Volume 14, Number 2, 1992

Folksongs
Chanson

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1082479ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/1082479ar

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (print)
1708-0401 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this article

Paradis, R. (1992). Lisa — La jeune esclave indienne/A Young Indian Slave. *Ethnologies*, *14*(2), 95–112. https://doi.org/10.7202/1082479ar

Article abstract

Lisa — la jeune esclave indienne is a ballad about a young Indian slave girl who pleads for her liberty from the auction block of a slave market. This study is a comparative and critical analysis of eight variants of the song, recorded from the State of Maine to the Canadian Province of Saskatchewan. It also examines the poetic structure, morphology and peregrination of the song against the background of Indian slavery in North and South America.

Tous droits réservés © Ethnologies, Université Laval, 1992

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

https://www.erudit.org/en/

LISA — LA JEUNE ESCLAVE INDIENNE/ A YOUNG INDIAN SLAVE[1]

Roger **PARADIS**
University of Maine
Fort Kent, Me

One of my most memorable fieldwork experiences was recording the ballad about a young Indian slave named Lisa.[2] I later had the good fortune to record seven more versions of this song, all from the upper St. John River Valley otherwise known as the Madawaska. Although I conducted extensive field research along both sides of the river, I recorded the ballad only on the south shore, or American side of the Valley. No doubt this was a coincidence since Madawaska is an international community of Acadian exiles and Québec settlers.[3] The informants said only that they had learned the song either from mother, or in some forgotten lumber camp. I did not pursue the subject further until last year when the Kommission für Volkedichtung honored me with an invitation to read a paper on the subject of "Women and the Folk Ballad". The upshot was the ballad analysis that follows.

The title that I assigned to this song, *La jeune esclave*, was the preferred title of the Madawaska folk, though they retained the definite and more personal article, *une*. Other people named it *Lisa* — from the proper name of the heroine of the ballad. From the familiar lines of the chorus also came titles such as *Ma cabane* and *Mon rivage*. When written down the titles became more reflective with the use of verbs and adjectives such as *Rendez moi* and *Une sauvagesse*. Among themselves the folk usually requested a song by quoting the first words from the first or second line. This served as a cue for the remainder of the song and was usually all the prompting needed for the singing to begin.

A quick comparison of the various versions of this folksong showed that words, lines and entire verses had been switched around or substituted for other words altogether. To decipher the rhyme and meter of the song I had to reconstruct it as closely as possible to what I presumed to be a reason-

---

1. Presented at the annual conference of the Kommission für Volkdichtung, May 3, 1989, Freiburg, Germany.
2. Coll. Roger Paradis, Laval University Folklore Archives, Québec, enreg. no. 5494.
3. This homogeneous community was decapitated in 1842 by the Treaty of Washington (Webster-Ashburton Treaty). On this subject see my article, "John Baker and the Republic of Madawaska," *Dalhousie Review* 52:1 (1972), p. 78-95 and "Louis Mercure, fondateurs du Madawaska," *Les cahiers de la Société historique acadienne* 20:1 (janvier-mars, 1988), p. 49-56.

able facsimile of the original. I did this by comparing every word and line of one song against those of the other variants. Gradually most of the pieces fell into place so that the poetic structure of the song could be analyzed.

La jeune esclave is a lament ballad in four stanzas, each marked by very dramatic elements. The first stanza is expository and contains no narrative except in the chorus, but the last three stanzas are rich in narrative. The stanzas are in eight lines that include the chorus, with the last line of the chorus being repeated *(bis)*. The stanzas are arranged in lines of iambic pentameter that are rhymed alternately — one with three, two with four, five with seven, and six with eight. The chorus is the same in the first three stanzas, but in the fourth stanza the first line of the chorus is different and more dramatic, as the young slave says adieu to her mother and resigns herself to dying in slavery. The song is usually sung at a slow tempo, which is desirable for this type of ballad and for individual singing. This song does not figure in Conrad Laforte's *Catalogue de la Chanson,* which is based on the poetic characteristics of folksongs. If it did, consistent with the Laval University Classification System, it would likely be entered as a *chanson strophique.*

The eight Madawaska recordings of *La jeune esclave* are remarkably alike.[4] The song begins with a woeful scene of slavery as a young Indian maiden is sold from the auction block. The tragedy unfolds in the early hours of dawn by the light of Spanish torches amidst desperate pleas by the slave to be restored to her home and mother. In the second verse we learn that the girl's name is Lisa and that her master is a captain. Moved by her tears, the officer wants to persuade his slave to come with him on his campaigns. This is the only glint of compassion in what is otherwise a very brutal song. Perhaps the composer intended the listener to imagine that this was an act of mercy to keep the young slave from work on the plantation or the mines. The officer endeavors to reconcile the slave to her fate, but she is beyond consolation. She reminds the master of her Indian race and that another has won her affections. The officer becomes more persistent in the third verse, and the slave more obstinate. He promises her a beautiful flower garden and a lovely courtyard; he tells her that his lord, like himself, doubts that she can ever regain her freedom. She spurns the officer's self-serving gestures, however, and renews her plea for freedom. In the fourth and closing stanza the officer, stung by the rebuff, reminds Lisa that she is his property and must henceforth suffer her chains and accompany him. Overwhelmed by this outrage, the distraught girl bids her mother adieu and resigns herself to dying in a strange land. Each stanza is punctuated by a haunting refrain which is a mighty cry to be free and to be reunited with those of her home and race.

---

4. Coll. Paradis, nos. 2493, 2498, 3038, 3586, 4474, 5236, 5494, 7790.

The differences among the Madawaska versions are largely superficial. In number 2493 the informant substituted the word *charmiére (chaumière)* for *cabane,* which is the term used in the other versions.[5] In another version the slave is sold *aux blâme* instead of *aux blanc.*[6] In performance the singer may receive a little friendly prodding from his audience when there is a lapse of memory. In private, the individual may have unlimited time to search his or her mind for a missing word. In a fieldwork situation, however, the informant feels pressured to record and, in the event of a mental block, any word will do if it rhymes and if it feels right. Hence, the phrase *mère qu'elle adore* may become *mère qu'elle honore,* or *bien aimée.* The meaning is close, the meter is unchanged, and the rhyme is preserved. In a pinch an oxymoron may be used if it sounds right; in the second stanza of this recording for example, the slave girl is told that she will have to carry the officer's *charmes* rather than her *chaines.* The woman who made this recording was so absorbed that she never noticed her awkward mistake.

In the first full length version of the song that I recorded, the third and fourth stanzas are switched around so that the slave is resigned to die before the master can persuade her otherwise.[7] Such awkwardness would trouble the professional, but hardly the folk. In this and another version the words *su fert* are replaced by *souffert* — an understandable substitution since the theme is one of suffering.[8] As with song no.3586 the word *seigneur* is mistaken for Seigneur, to wit: *le Seigneur je l'adore.*[9] In no. 3038 the singer says it a little differently: *le Seigneur je lui pense,* while in other variants the definite article *le* is used instead of the subject *lui*: *le seigneur, je le pense.*[10] Such gaucherie is not surprising when we consider that most of the singers were functionally illiterate and deeply religious. Moreover, it is difficult to differentiate between homonyms in oral tradition except through contextual clues. An oral text, unlike a printed one, cannot be studied for meaning and word clues such as capital letters, and this often results in incongruous expressions.

---

5. Coll. Paradis, Amanda "St-Onge" Soucy (Mme Arthur Soucy), Fort Kent, Maine, age - 73, enreg. 1973 no. 2493. (Learned from her mother from St. Jaques, N.B.) *"Je l'avait en écrit".*
6. Coll. Paradis, Anne Déchaines (Mme. Alyre Déchaine), Fort Kent, Maine, age - 75, enreg. 1973. no. 2498 *("Apprit de ma mère").*
7. *Ibid.,* Mme Archié Hébert, Madawaska, Maine, age - 68, enreg. 1973, no. 3038 *("Ma mère chantait ça").*
8. *Ibid.,* Joesph Theriault, Fort Kent, Maine, age - 74, enreg. 1973, no. 5494.
9. *Ibid.,* Estelle "Bourgoin" Hébert (Mme. Emile Hébert), Fort Kent, Maine, age - 62, enreg. 1973, no. 3586.
10. *Op. cit.;* see also nos. 3038, 4474, 5236, 7790.

In oral transmission the image that a word conjures in the mind may take precedence over the word itself. We have an example of this in song 3586, where the *capitaine* becomes *un beau jeune homme.*[11] An impressionable young lady hears the word *capitaine* and associates it with a handsome man in a sparkling uniform; the word is forgotten, but the impression remains. Such is the learning process. It is also noteworthy that the rhythm was preserved even when the words changed. Further evidence of this is line six of the second verse of the same song. If we compare the phrase *fair mon bonheur,* with *charmer mon coeur,* in no. 2493 we see that the three elements of rhyme, meter, and meaning are perfectly preserved.

The woman who recorded no. 4474 of *La jeune esclave* was eighty-five years old and omitted two lines in the last verse of the song.[12] She was also semi-literate in French. This may explain why her rendition has fewer grammatical errors than the others. She did not shy away from the more difficult words, like *ainsi,* that the other singers avoided. In line six we have a classic example of improvisation, a common phenemenon with unrehearsed field recordings: the informant sang *En regardant les flambeaux les* and then paused briefly as she groped for the word *espagnol. Bagnel,* she said, and continued with her song. When the word *espagnol* is juxtaposed with *les bagnel* the similarity becomes immediately obvious. Place an apostrophe after the letter L, replace the letter B with a P since the difference in sound is slight, substitute the E for an O for the same reason, and we have *L'ESPAGNOL,* the lost word: *L'es-pag-nol/Les Bag-nel.* The folk are generally reticent about asking the researcher to stop his recorder, erase the tape, and start over. Wanting to accommodate, but stuck on a word, he singer of no. 4474 produced a substitute that came surprisingly close to the mark.

Song no. 5236 was recorded in a nursing home without either quiet or privacy, and the guests in the room made the woman visibly shy.[13] This may explain why the second verse is missing altogether, and why the last two verses were switched around. The most interesting word substitution in this song is *caverne* for *cabane.* Words like *forêt sauvage* and *rivage* suggest a woodland home rather than a cavern. We can be reasonably certain that it is a personal substitution, since none of the fifteen recorded versions of this song used this term. In most of the Madawaska recordings the last two lines of the last three stanzas are repeated to compensate for the lines that were forgotten. This creates the impression that the refrain is much longer than it really is, beginning with line seven instead of five and the words *Elle lui répond.* The omission became clear only after I compared my recordings with those from Canada.

---

11. *Ibid.,* no. 3586.
12. *Ibid.,* Caroline Theriault, Wallagrass, Maine, age - 85, enreg. 1974, no. 4474.
13. *Ibid.,* Mme. Blanch Nadeau, Fort Kent, Maine, age - 80, enreg. 1975, no. 5236.

Song no. 5494 is missing the third verse.[14] In line four of the second verse there is an awkward line that reads, *J'emporterai ton amour avec moi*. The line does not rhyme with line two, but it blends with the rest of the stanza and, as usual, the meter is perfect. The awkward line may be an improvisation, which is common in oral tradition. Had there been time for reflection, this singer's quick wit would have told him that the slave woman could hardly love her master and still plead for her freedom; that must be the ultimate male egocentricity. Folksongs tend to be unreflective and spontaneous, however, so that awkward statements are often made only to get on with the song and without any malice intended. In the other songs the statement is less presumptuous and speaks of sharing: *Je partagerais ton amour, tes plaisirs,*[15] or *ton bonheur, tes plaisirs.*[16] *Partagerais* was likely the original word, but it proved too difficult for most of the singers, who simply substituted an easier and more common word for it.

Finally, we come to song no. 7790, which is in manuscript without the musical score.[17] The word *larmes* is repeated in line three of the second verse. This is an obvious *faux pas* that a professional would have avoided, but to which the folk are indifferent. *Larmes* lacks one syllable for the required meter, so that the rhythm itself is affected. To compensate for this shortcoming the singer stressed the *es* and pronounce it *larmes-e*, a practice that is not uncommon with folksingers in search of a missing syllable; if we may judge from the text of the other songs, the word should probably be *alarmes*. All four verses are present, but the third and fourth were switched around. It would also appear that lines six in the second and fourth verses were interchanged. The manuscript was copied by two older members of the family, evidence that when the song was recorded in 1973 it had been in the family for at least a generation.

The seven versions of *La jeune esclave* recorded in Canada have some striking differences from those recorded in northern Maine. Those differences become obvious with a comparative analysis of the lyrics. The least different are the two variants from neighboring Québec province, and we may conclude that the similarity is due to physical and cultural proximity. One version is from Kamouraska, the "cradle" of the Madawaska. A notable difference occurs in line six of the first stanza. It reads, *En regardant ses douleurs, ses alarmes*, and probably belongs in the third line of the second verse.[18] This is in curious contrast to the Madawaska versions that spoke of

---

14. *Op. cit.*, enreg. 1973, no. 5494.
15. *Ibid.*, Joesph Gervais, St-Luce Parish, Frenchville, Maine, age - 69, enreg. 1974, ms. no. 7790.
16. *Ibid.*, no. 3038.
17. *Ibid.*, no. 7790.
18. Alice Michaud-Latremouille, *Chansons de Grand Mère*, Éditions de l'Université d'Ottawa, Ottawa, Ont., 1900, p. 22.

les flambeaux espagnol. In fact, six of the seven recordings from Canada make no mention of any *flambeaux*, Spanish or otherwise.

The word *flambeaux* resurfaces in a recording of the ballad from Saskatchewan, *En regardant ses flambeaux, ses Palmiers.*[19] This morphological change appears to be the result of a deterioration of two or three other words in the Canadian recordings of the ballad. From Sturgeon Falls, Ontario we find that the questionable line reads *Ell' contemplait ses bamboux, ses palmiers.*[20] When we juxtapose *ses bamboux, ses palmiers* with *les flambeaux, l'espagnols,* we discover some interesting parallels. We have only to delete, change or add eight letters from a total of twenty-one in the first phrase to obtain the second, thus: *ses (les) bamboux (flambeaux), ses palmiers (l'espagnols).* The same word analysis technique may be applied to *les nombreaux palmiers* in song no. 5565 with the same convincing results.[21] The pronounciation is similar, the meter is unchanged, and *palmiers* rhymes with *née* in line eight. The words *bamboux* and *palmiers* are uncommon in the folk lexicon of Canada, whereas *flambeaux* is a popular term. Moreover, it would be natural to speak of torches in the first stanza, since the auction occurred at dawn. Which expression was in the original composition is impossible to say, but the presence of any unusual words implies literary influence if not outright authorship.

The other Québec version of *La jeune esclave* was recorded in Matepedia.[22] The second verse is missing in this song, and line three of what should be the third stanza is another good example of improvisation. It reads, *Oui, c'est bien vrai, oui c'est vrai, je l'espère.* This sentence bears little relevance to the lines that precede or succeed it, but the cadence is perfect, with the usual ten meters for the five-metrical feet. What follows is quite different from anything recorded along the banks of the St. John. The slave tells her master that she prefers her *lieu enchanter* and her *cabane aux feuillages* to his beautiful and sweet-scented lemon grove. Similar passages are found in the four renditions from Ontario, and in one of two versions from Saskatchewan. The *lieu enchanter* found in Québec becomes the slave's *plains en fleurs* in Ontario.[23] Clearly this could not have sprung from the mind of the Québec folk and must be literary unless it is an import from a warmer clime.

---

19. Coll. Claudette Gendron, Saskatchewan Archives Board (S.A.B.), 1980, R.500.5.7 (micro R-9.1).
20. Coll. Mme J. Bédard (Eloise Bois), Sturgeon Falls, Ont., Centre Franco-Ontarien de Folklore (C.F.O.F.), 1969, no. 4319.
21. Coll. Gilbert Gaudreault, Astorville, Ont., C.F.O.F., 1969, no. 5565.
22. Coll. Louise Lévesque (Céllina Sirois), St. François d'Assise, Matepédia, Québec, C.F.O.F., no. 1500.
23. Coll. Marie Louise Perron, National Museum of Canada (N.M.C.), no. 5125-20, 1981.

From western Canada we have another example of the impact that time and distance may have on oral tradition. In line four of the third stanza the captain complains of ill treatment from his own seignior, saying *Toujours me nourie de pain et de l'eau.*[24] This passage cannot be found in any of the other songs and contrasts sharply with the comparable line in the Franco-American versions that reads, *La liberté ne sera plus à toi.* As it is, the Saskatchewan version does not make much sense. Why, it could be asked, would the seignior want to starve his own captain? The first impulse is to say that this is an improvisation to compensate for a mental block. Perhaps, but if we change the article *me* to *te* the sentence takes on new meaning; it is the slave, not the officer, who is kept on a diet of bread and water. This miserable existence was perhaps what the captain wanted to spare Lisa and what moved him to want to bring her with him on his military tour. The rhyme is of no more use than the contextual clues in supporting a conclusion on this enigmatic sentence because none of the key words before it seems to fit. We can doubt the noble intentions of the officer, however, because of the abuse that he showers upon his slave in the concluding stanza.

Another word derivative is found in line six of the second and third verses of my recordings. The slave girl scorns the vacuous promises of the captain, saying *En t'repugnant, je ne peu vous aimer.*[25] We also find this sentence in one of the Saskatchewan interpretations, *Un repaynin je ne puis vous aimé.*[26] Above the word *repaynin* someone penciled, in the same handwriting, *payien* probably meaning *paien.* In most of the other recordings from Canada the word is *Européen.*[27] *Repugnant* is another word that is uncommon to folk speech, and we may suppose that it would not have been used unless it had been part of the original text. By comparison, *Européen* is a popular word and its use suggests that the one may have derived from the other, but that is only a plausible conjecture.

In the final verse of this ballad is a classic example of what happens in oral transmission whenever the folk encounter a difficult or unfamiliar word or expression. In version no. 5565 from Ontario we find the following first two lines from the last verse:

> Puisque c'est ainsi, tu porteras les chainses.
> Tu m'apprartiens, tu mourras avec moi.[28]

---

24. Coll. Gilbert Gaudreault, Astorville, Ont. C.F.O.F., no. 5565, 1969.
25. Paradis, no. 3586.
26. Gendron, S.A.B., R 500.5.7.
27. Perron, *op. cit.*; Latremouille, *Chansons*, p.22. The version from Matepedia is missing the second verse.
28. Gaudreault, C.F.O.F., no. 5565.

This is uncomplicated literature for the literati, but it can be quite overwhelming for the unsophisticated folk. Three major concepts — captivity, bondage, and death — are crowded into two short sentences. The phrase *Puisque c'est ainsi* is a literary expression common in polite society, but quite foreign to popular speech. The elements of syntax, meaning, and vocabulary combine to make this an awkward and difficult piece of oral literature. The Madawaska folk were unable to recall the difficult first phrase of this verse and simply substituted another, which they repeated in the second line as follows:

Tu viens ici, tu porteras mes chaines.
Tu viens ici, tu mourras avec moi.[29]

In no. 4474 we can observe the transition in progress. In the first line we have *Ah! C'est ainsi*, followed in the next line by *Tu viens ici.*[30] The woman who recorded this song had very likely heard it sung correctly as in 5565 above, and in the local dialect. Being somewhat literate in French she did not shy from the word *ainsi*. The word *puisque* is never used in the local patois so it was probably beyond recall. To compensate she substituted the exclamation *Ah!* and thus preserved the musical symmetry of the sentence. The same thing happened in the Matepedia version, except that the word *ainsi* was dropped in favor of the simpler *ici* so that the altered sentence begins, *Ah! C'est ici.*[31] From Saskatchewan we discover that the difficult first phrase was retained, but the second underwent some modifications. Instead of *Tu m'appartiens* we find *J'te garderai*, not quite a parallel, but an interesting simile. Throughout those changes the folks carefully preserved the poetic meter of both lines.

Lisa's repudiation of her master was edifying, but fatal. From Ontario we learn that she was locked behind either *des flots, des barres,* or *des portes de fer.*[32] There is no mention of iron bars or doors in the two Saskatchewan versions, only that she would remain in chains and that her *douleurs augmenteront tes pleurs.*[33] This is confirmed in one Québec version that says, *Mais la douleur augmentant ses alarmes.*[34] The Madawaska versions, in contrast, do not mention how the master reckoned with his slave, and there is no reference to actual pain. Instead, lines five and six from the

29. Paradis, no. 3038.
30. *Ibid.*, no. 4474.
31. *Op. cit.*, C.F.O.F., no. 1500.
32. *Op. cit.*, C.F.O.F., nos. 4319, 4096, 5565.
33. *Op. cit.*, R.500.5.7; p. 5125-20.
34. Latremouille, *Chansons, op.cit.*

last two verses are repeated, giving the impression that they are part of the refrain. This suggests that the song was neither as well nor as widely known in Madawaska as in Québec and Ontario.

In the oral tradition six different adjectives are used to describe the reaction of the slave to the "outrage" against her. We find, by turn, that she is either *épuisée, étouffée, attristée, tèrrassée, effrayé* or *désolée*, the last being the most common and perhaps the original word. Regardless of the word in use, however, the reader will note that the meter remains fixed. Despite the numerous alterations that pervade folksongs this poetic element, so vital to the melodic line, remains generally constant, and we may doubt that song and poetry could long survive oral transmission without that constancy.

Another significant difference between the Madawaska songs and those recorded in Canada is that in line six, usually of the second verse, allusion is made to a fourth party. This occurs when Lisa tells her master that *Un autre que toi a sus faire mon bonheur*, or *a su charmer mon coeur*.[35] This adds significantly to the emotional appeal of the song, as does the youthfulness of the slave when reference is made to *la jeune esclave, la pauvre enfant*, or *la jeune fille*. If the song was composed as abolitionist literature, which is probable, we can understand that reference to "the poor child" would have greater impact than to the poor slave. "The poor child" then bids adieu to her mother *bien aimée* or *cherie, en pleurant, en mourant, en pensant, s'écria*, or *s'écriant*, all with the intended melodramatic effect.[36] Death is the most dramatic event in a person's life, and the composer used this to conclude his ballad with a rousing climax. The folk, however, dealt circuitiously with this grim reality. In one version Lisa says, *"Ah! Si je meurre"*; death is only a possibilty. *"Mais si je meurre"* implies that death is likely and expected, *"s'en va mourrire"* that death is certain and, finally, *"Adieu! Je meurre"* that death is imminent.[37] The song has all the elements to stir the emotional susceptibilities of the folk — gender, youth, familial love, a wisp of romance (in some versions), love of country, oppression and death.

The two thousand miles that the song traveled between Maine and Saskatchewan produced six name changes for the slave: Elisa, Lisa, Liza, Lizon (m), Lena, and the familiar Marie. Anthroponemic variations are common in folklore, and this is true of the song *Lisa*. These changes represent the ravages wrought by time and illiteracy on oral tradition. In passing it should be observed that ten of the fourteen versions of this ballad were

35. *Op. cit.*, nos. 7790, 4474, 3586, 3038, 2493.
36. C.F.O.F., nos. 1500, 5565, 4319, 4096; S.A.B., 500.5.7.
37. *Ibid.*, and Perron, no. 5125-20

recorded from women, and only four from men; for the most part, the song was also transmitted by women. This evidence is hardly conclusive, but it tends to substantiate the conclusion of some colleagues that gender has an affinity for certain songs.

The focus of this analysis has been the alterations in verbs, conjunctions, adjectives and nouns, and the ways in which words, lines, and entire stanzas may be altered or omitted in the process of oral transmission. Those changes notwithstanding, there should be no doubt that we are dealing with the same song because the similarities far outweigh the differences. Perhaps the most telling sign is that the refrain remains unchanged throughout the evolution of the song, as do the opening words in each stanza. The variants are thematically identical, and the melody remains fundamentally unaltered throughout the period of folk interpretation. Despite the occasional changes in key, the wandering tonality and evidence of asymmetry, the recurring motto and melodic patterns confirm that this is one and the same piece of music. The melody of a folksong is less subject to change than the lyrics because it recurs in every stanza and refrain, and becomes more readily and permanently ingrained than the words.[38] In time words may change, but the melody lingers on.

I now sought to determine whether the song was a translation or adaptation from some other ballad about Native Americans, or an original composition. To appease my curiosity, I consulted the usual secondary sources and depositories.[39] I searched over a hundred archives, including those of the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian Institution, for either a French, English, or Spanish version of the song. Those efforts were unavailing, though in the process I discovered some other interesting Native American songs. On the strength of this research I concluded that *La jeune esclave* is an original French composition and that the fifteen recorded versions are probably the only ones extant.

---

38. Also the conclusion of Dr. Robert Chabora of our music department with whom I conferred.
39. For example, Phillip Barry, *The Maine Woods Songster*, Cambridge, Mass., Powell Printing Co., 1939, p.36; G. Malcolm Laws, Jr., *Native American Balladry*, Philadelphia, American Folklore Society, 1964 (H15). A few Indian laments are in Kenneth Peacock, *Songs of the Newfoundland Outports*, Ottawa, National Museum of Man, Bull. No. 197, A.Y.S., Queen's Printer, 1965, Vol. I, "The Indian's Lament", p. 157, "White Man Let Me Go", p. 164. These are not Indian songs, but ballads about Indians. Examples of the former are in Edith Fowke and Richard Johnston, *Folksongs of Canada*, Vol. I, Waterloo, Ont., Waterloo Music Co., 1954, p. 13, 16.
French sources included Anselme Chiasson et Frère Daniel, *Chansons d'Acadie*, 8 vols., Montreal, 1942-; M. Barbeau, *Alouette*, Montréal, Les Éditions Lumen, 1946; *Romancero du Canada*, Montréal, Beauchemin, 1937; *Chansons populaire du vieux Québec*, Musée National du Canada, A.Y.S. No. 16; and E. Sapir, *Folk Songs of French Canada*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1925; H. Davenson, *Le Livre des Chansons*, Boudry, Suisse,

It now remained for me to establish whether the song was of folk or literary origin. The first inkling that the song was literary came from the melody, which does not appear to be related to any known folksong or hymm. Songs of known folk origin frequently have a borrowed tune from a popular literary song. Furthermore, the melody is rather long and surprisingly complex for a folksong, while the poetic characteristics, including rhyme and meter, are quite sophisticated. This is no simple ditty. The major theme of slavery, the systematic unfolding of the secondary themes of coercion, rejection and repudiation, and resignation may be deemed too complex for the untrained mind.

The vocabulary is further evidence that the song may not be of folk origin. The polished vocabulary of this ballad leads me to believe that it emanated from a literary mind. Songs of folk composition are in the local dialect. Not so with this song, however, which for the most part is in standard French — the numerous errors of grammar notwithstanding. By implication we may conclude that this ballad is an original literary composition, that this was how it entered oral tradition and was preserved in the archives of the mind until it was recorded a few years ago.

La jeune esclave is unique among other songs by or about Indians in that it deals specifically with the subject of slavery. There are other songs, however, with passages that virtually replicate those in our slave ballad. We find in *La Jeune Huronne,* for example, a refrain that is strangely similar to that of *La Jeune Esclave,* as follows[40]:

Oh! Rendez moi, ma voix vous en conjure,
Mon beau pays avec ma liberté.

Éditions de la Baconnière, 1964; G. Doncieux, *Le Romancero populaire de la France,* Paris, Librarie Émile Bouillon, Editeur, 1904; E-Z. Massicotte et M. Barbeau, «Chants populaires du Canada», *Journal of American Folklore* 32 (1919), p. 1-89. H. La Rue, «Les chansons populaires et historiques du Canada», *Le foyer canadien* 1 (1863), p. 320-384; 2 (1864), 3 (1865), p. 5-72; C. Laforte, *Catalogue de la chanson folklorique française,* Québec, Les Presses de L'Université Laval, 1977-1987; P.-E. Prévost et J.-C. Franchère, *Chansons canadiennes,* Montréal, 1907, and numerous other repertoires.

The H.W. Thompson Folklore Archives of the New York Historical Association holds several Indian songs and research papers with Indian songs and music. The Bentley Historical Library of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, has several Indian laments including "The Indian Lass" (B-2-234) and "Indian's Lament" (A-6-170). Other songs with an Indian theme are deposited in the National Museum of Canada and include: *"Dans l'Mississippi"*, *"Danse — La Huronne"*, *"La Huronne"*, and *"La Sauvagesse"*. See also n. 52 and 53 below.

40. Latremouille, *Chansons,* p. 120.

This song is about a young Huronness who is ambushed and taken by *des méchants* and brought up by them. In captivity, she remains implacable and tells her abductors that she prefers her fair land to their polluted cities. This particular thread is also woven into the lyrics of our song when Lisa spurns the white man's culture in favor of her own.

In another ballad, *la Sauvagesse*, we discover a couple of lines that are somewhat similar to ones in the ballad under study. First there is the phrase *Disait une brave sauvagesse*, and elsewhere, *Enfin, moi je suis sauvagesse*.[41] The similarity to the refrain of our ballad is unmistakable, but it could be a coincidence.

In the ballad, *White Man Let Me Go*, we find the following lines[42]:

Let me go to my mother,
Let me go to my home,
Let me go to my hills and valleys,
Let me go to my dark eyed maid,
Let me go,
Let me go to my forest home.

This song is about a man, however, not a woman; about a captive, not a slave; and it is tame by comparison to the brutality meted out to the young Lisa. The melody is also different, as is the music of the other songs mentioned above. They are all different songs, but one could have influenced the other.

In G. Malcolm Laws, Jr.'s, *Native American Balladry*, we find five songs about Indians listed under "Ballads of Various Topics".[43] The songs include *The Little Mohea* (H 8), *The Lake of Ponchartrain* (H 9), *The Chippewa Girl* (H 10), *On the Banks of the Pamona* (H 11), and *Oblan* (H 15). These are songs of love and quite different from and insipid when compared to *La jeune esclave*. In short, while we have numerous slave songs and songs about slavery by Afro-Americans, *La jeune esclave* may be our only recorded song about an Indian slave.

When the first notes of this song were heard, who could have thought that it would survive the bedrock institution that it was meant to destroy? But survive slavery it did. The folksong has more permanence than other forms of oral literature because the lyrics are reinforced by rhyme and melody, and a song does not require a listening audience to be sung. It survived because the toiling and illiterate masses identified with its message of

41. National Museum of Canada, Hull, Québec, No. 3.
42. Fowke and Johnston, *op. cit.*, p. 12; Peacock, *op. cit.*, p. 164-165.
43. Laws, *Balladry*, p. 229-244.

pain and exploitation. Expressions like *negré, travailler comme un negre, comme des esclave,* are common to folk speech and for good reasons. The working class was exploited not only for its labor, but also to perpetuate certain practices such as serfdom, indentured servitude, sharecropping, tenantry and forced patronage of company stores that kept them in bondage. On the frontier, for example, there was the custom of selling poor orphans and the destitute elderly from the steps of the parish church. They were auctioned not to the highest, but to the lowest bidder, who would receive a parish stipend to care for the unfortunates.

When I discussed this song with the folk they were as one in their condemnation of slavery. What most impressed them was the pathos it evoked. *"Chanson d'misére"* said one[44]; *"pauvre malheureuse"*, said another.[45] "Whenever I sang this song", said a big burly farmer, "it always caught me in the throat".[46] *"Mon Dieu!"* exclaimed a woman, *"que l'monde peu tu et'e cruelle"*.[47] The folk were fertile soil for a song of exploitation, and it was probably more popular than the number of versions would indicate. Obviously it could not compete with the hundreds of popular favorites that included love songs, rèligious songs and songs of war. Indeed, it might have been missed altogether except for some timely field research, because it lay buried in the depths of the folk repertoire, and at a time when the folk had actively ceased to sing.

To appreciate the full measure of this song, one has only to imagine the world without it. No race of humans suffered more exploitation than the Native Americans who were subjected to enslavement, expropriation, and genocide. Yet, this is the only known ballad that was written to protest Indian slavery. What an indictment for our civilization it would be if at least this one voice had not been raised in song to protest this awesome inhumanity.[48]

---

44. Field Notes, July 19, 1973, p. 27.
45. *Ibid.*, August 5, 1973, p. 11.
46. *Ibid.*, October 4, 1973, p. 22.
47. *Ibid.*, January 24, 1974, p.5.
48. This baneful institution still exists in parts of the world, including the western world. The sugar plantations in the Dominican Republic, at this writing, are cultivated by an estimated 100 000 people who are kept in involutary servitude. What an opportunity for field research to document the story and culture of these unfortunates and, thereby, focus attention to their plight and hasten the day of their emancipation.

APPENDIX

Madawascan texts of *Lisa*

Une Jeune Esclave[49]

Un beau matin a l'elver de l'aurore,
Une jeune esclave était vendue aux blâme.
A l'pleurait temp d'une mère qu'alle adore,
Vers la montagne fit entendre ses cris.
Les yeux fixés à travers la forêt sa'vage,
"En repungnant je ne peu vous aimer.

Ref. Oh! Rendez-moi. Rendez-moi mon rivage,
Et la cabane ou je suis née". *(bis)*

II

"Tu viens d'ici, tu porteras mes charmes,
Tu viens d'ici, tu mourras avec moi".
Al lui repond: "Moi je suis une savagesse,
En repugnant je ne peu vous aimer".

Ref.

Une Sauvagesse[50]

"...Moi je suis une sauvagesse,
Un autre que lui a su charmer mon coeur.

Ref. Oh! Rendez-moi. Rendez-moi mon charmière,
Et la cabane ou je suis née". *(bis)*

Une Jeune Esclave[51]

Un beau matin au lever de l'aurore,
Une jeune esclave était vendre aux blancs.
Elle pleurait d'une mère qu'on honore,
Vers la montagne fit entend'e ses cris.
Les yeux fixés vers la forêt sauvage,
En regardant les flambeaux l'espagniols.

Ref. "Oh! Rendez-moi. Rendez-moi mon rivage,
Et la cabane ou je suis née". *(bis)*

---

49. Paradis, no. 2498, *"Je les apprit d'ma mére"*.
50. *bid.*, no. 2493, *"Je l'avait en écrit"*.
51. *Ibid.*, no. 3038, *"Ma mère chantait ça"*.

II

Le capitaine eut pitié de ces larmes,
Il dit, "Lisa, viens avec moi servire.
Je calmerai tes douleurs, tes alarmes,
Je portagerrai ton bonheur, tes plaisirs".
Elle lue répond, "Moi, je suis une sauvagèse,
En répugnant je ne puige vous aimer".

Ref.

III

"Tu viens ici, tu porteras mes chaines,
Tu viens ici, tu mourras avec moi".
La pauvre fille épuisée par l'autrage,
C'est de mourir loin d'une mère bien-aimée.
Elle lui repond, "Moi je suis une sauvagèse,
En répugniant je ne peu vous aimer".

Ref.

IV

"Vois ce jardin et ce joli parterre,
Vois ce qu'ést tout rempli de fleurs.
Donc comme nous la Seigneur je lui pense,
La liberté ne sera plus à toi".
Elle lui repond, "Moi je suis une sauvagèse,
Une aut'e que moi a soufert mon bonheur.

Ref. Oh! Si je meurt, Je meur loin du rivage,
Et la cabane ou je suis née". *(bis)*

La chanson d'une savagesse qui a été vendu au blanc[52]

Par un matin au lever de l'aurore,
Une jeune esclave était vendue aux blanc.
Elle pleurait tous pour ca mère bien-aimée,
C'est de mourir loin d'une mère bien-aimée.
Elle lui dit,"Je ne suis q'une sa'vagesse,
En t'répugnant je ne pourait vous aimer.

Ref. Oh! Rendez-moi. Rendez-moi mon rivage,
Et la cabane ou je suis née". *(bis)*

II

Un beau jeune homme eut pitié de ses paines,
I' dit, "Lizon, vien avec moi sarvive.
Je portagerai ta douleurs et tes paines,
Je portagerai ton bonheur, ton plaisir".
Elle lui repond, "Je ne suis q'une sa'vagesse,
Un aut'e que toi a su fair mon bonhuer".

Ref.

52. *Ibid.*, no. 3586, *"Une chanson de ma mère"*.

III

"Tu viens ici, tu priseera mes paines,
Tu viens ici, tu mourras avec moi.
Tout, comme vous, le seigneur je l'ador".
Dans la montagne on l'entendiat ses cris.
Les yeux baisses non pas sur la forêt sa'vage,
"En t'repugnant je ne puige vous aimer".

Ref.
Mais si je meure, rendez-moi mon rivage,
Et la cabane ou je suis née. *(bis)*

Une Jeune Esclave[53]

Un beau matin ou lever de l'aurore,
Une jeune esclave était vendue aux blanc.
Elle pleurait d'une mère qu'elle adore,
Vers la montagne faizêt entende ses cris.
Les yeux fixes sur la forêt sa'vage,
En regardant les flambeaux, les bagnel.

Ref. "Oh! Rendez-moi. Rendez-moi mon rivage,
Ou la cabane ou je suis née". *(bis)*

II

Un capitaine eut pitié de ces larmes,
Il dit: "Liza, viens avec moi servire.
Je calmerai tes douleurs, tes alarmes,
Je portagerai ton amour, tes plaisirs".
Je lui répond: "Moi je suis une sa'vagesse,
Un aut'e que toi a sus fair mon bonheure".

Ref.

III

"Vois ce jardin et ces joli parterre,
Vois ce jardin qu'ést tout rempli de fleurs.
Donc comme nous, le seigneur, je le pense,
La liberté ne sera plus qu'a toi".
Je lui repond: "Moi je suis t'une sa'vagesse,
Et repiliant je ne plus vous aimer".

Ref.

"Ah c'est ainsi, tu porteras tes chaines,
Tu viens ici, tu mourras avec moi".
La pauvre enfant épuisée par l'autrage,
C'est de mourir loin d'une mere bien aimée.

Ref. "Adieu! Je meure. Je meure loin du rivage,
Ou la cabane ou je suis née". *(bis)*

53. *Ibid.*, no. 4474.

Une Jeune Esclave[54]

Une beau matin au lever de l'aurore,
Un jeune esclave était vendue aux blanc.
Elle pleurait d'une mère qu'elle honore,
Elle lui répond, "Moi je suis une sa'vagesse.
En repugnant je ne peu vous aimer.

Ref. Oh! Rendez-moi. Rendez-moi mon rivage,
Et la caverne ou je suis née". *(bis)*

II

"Tu viens ici, tu porteras ma chambe,
Tu viens ici, tu mourras avec moi".
La pauvre enfant épiusée par l'autrage,
C'est de mourir loin d'une mère bien-aimée.
Elle lui répond, "Moi je suis une sa'vagesse,
En répugniant je ne peu vous aimer".

Ref

III

"Vois ce jardin ést tout rempli de fleurs,
Vois ce jardin ne sera plus à toi.
Donc comme nous le seigneur je le pense,
La liberté ne sera plus à toi".
Elle lui répond, "Moi je suis une sa'vagesse,
Une aut'e que toi a su faire mon bonheur".

Ref.

Une Jeune Esclave[55]

Un beau matin au lever de l'aurore,
Une jeune esclave était vendue aux blanc.
Il pleurait d'une mère qu'elle adore,
Vers la montagne fait entendre ses cris.
Les yeux était vers la forêt sa'vage,
En regardant les flambeaux espagnols.

Ref. "Oh! Rendez-moi. Rendez-moi mon rivage,
Et la cabane ou je suis née". *(bis)*

II

Le capitaine eu pitié de ses larmes.
Il dit, "Liza , viens avec moi sarvir.
Je calmerai tes douleurs, tes alarmes,
Je enporterai ton amour avec moi".
A lui répond, "Moi je suis une sa'vagèse,
En répugnant je ne peu vous aimer.

Ref.

---

54. *Ibid.*, no. 5236. *"Chanson d'ma mère"*.
55. *Ibid.*, no. 5494. *"J'ai apprit ca dans l'bois"*.

III

"Tu viens ici, tu porteras mes chaines,
Tu viens ici, tu mourras avec moi".
La pauvre enfant desolée par l'autrage,
C'est de mourir loin d'une mère bien aimée.
A lui répond, "Moi je suis une sa'vagèse,
Une aut'e que moi a souffert vos douleurs".

Ref. Oh! Si je meure. Je meure loin du rivage,
Et la cabane ou je suis née". *(bis)*

Une Jeune Esclave[56]

Un beau matin ou lever de l'aurore,
Une jeune esclave était vendue aux blanc.
Elle pleurait d'une mère qu'elle adore,
Vers la montagne fit entendre ses cris.
Les yeux fixes vers la forêt sa'uvage,
En regardant les flambeaux espagnols.

Ref. "Oh! Rendez-moi. Rendez-moi mon rivage,
Et la cabane ou je suis née". *(bis)*

II

Le capitaine eut pitié de ses larmes,
Il dit: "Liza, vien avec moi servir.
Je calmerai tes douleurs, tes larmes,
Je portagerai ton amour, tes plaisirs".
Elle lui repond, "Moi je suis une sauvagesse,
En répugnant je ne peu vous aimer".

Ref.

III

"Tu viens ici, tu porteras mes chaines,
Tu viens ici, tu mourras avec moi".
La pauvre enfant epuisée par l'autrage,
C'est de mourir loin d'une mère bien-aimée.
Elle lui repond, "Moi je suis une sauvagesse,
En répugnant je ne peu vous aimer".

Ref.

IV

"Vois ce jardin et ce joli porterre,
Vois ce jardin tout rempli de belles fleurs.
Donc, comme moi, le Seigneur, je le pense,
La liberté ne sera plus a toi".
Elle lui repond, "Moi je suis une sauvagesse,
Une autre que toi a su faire mon bonheur".

Ref. Car si je meure! Je meure loin du rivage,
Et la cabane ou je suis née". *(bis)*

---

56. *Ibid.*, no. 7790. *"Mon pére la chantait"*.