

# “She’s Like the Swallow”: Folksong as Cultural Icon

NEIL V. ROSENBERG

“AUNT MARTHA’S SHEEP” (Taft 1986), “The Badger Drive” (Ashton), “Tickle Cove Pond” (Hiscock); all are songs that, taken from folk tradition in Newfoundland, have become local icons. Among others that have achieved this status is “She’s Like the Swallow.” It appears never to have been widely known and sung in oral tradition. Indeed, since Maud Karpeles first collected it in 1930, only five other texts from four other singers, and three other melodies have been reported by folksong researchers. Like the three other songs mentioned above, it has only been reported from oral tradition in Newfoundland.

In spite of this original rarity, today it is well known as an old Canadian folksong of English origins. Its first and still the most important primary printing was in Karpeles’s 1934 songbooks, with R. Vaughan Williams’s setting of the music. Edith Fowke and Richard Johnston reprinted it in their 1954 book *Folksongs of Canada*, still widely used in schools today. In 1965 Kenneth Peacock published a longer text, set to a very similar melody, in *Songs of the Newfoundland Outports*.

All subsequent popular and art music interpretations of the song can be traced to these key publications. Yet the song as published differs from the song as it was originally documented in oral tradition. This paper traces the research history of the song, examines the historical and intellectual processes that led to the differences between the song as recovered and the song as published, and seeks to answer these questions: What are the meanings of the song, and how did the preservation process alter them?

When Karpeles collected “She’s Like the Swallow” in 1930, Newfoundland was a self-governing dominion. By the time of its first publication, Newfoundland had reverted to colonial status, and was being governed by an appointed commission.

The Commission of Government era lasted until 1949. During this period, a popular music canon appeared. Known locally as “Newfoundland songs,” it conveyed aspects of an emergent cultural ideology that portrayed a maritime country whose strength came from the idealized society of its outports. These hundreds of small coastal fishing communities were seen to epitomize equality, self-reliance, solidarity, and other positive social values. During this era politicians like Joseph R. Smallwood, the man who would lead Newfoundland into confederation with Canada in 1949, found their main rhetorical outlets in the popular culture business. It was here that the populist mythology of the outport was promoted. By the 1940s the idea that the outport represented the national culture was virtually universal (Rosenberg 1994, 56).

Following Confederation many of the “Newfoundland songs” became well known to the rest of Canada because they appeared in publications that anthologized folksongs representing regions and ethnicities. In Newfoundland these songs became *de facto* official cultural icons. Most of them appeared in one or more of the songsters published by St. John’s businessman Gerald S. Doyle in 1927, 1940, and 1955.<sup>1</sup> Filled with advertisements for the products distributed by Doyle’s wholesale business, they were given free to Newfoundland households and schools, and to public groups like the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides.

In studying this canon (Rosenberg 1991a, 1991b, 1994), I noticed one song that is in many ways an exception: “She’s Like the Swallow.” It is widely familiar to Canadians who have sung in choirs, for many Canadian composers have made choral arrangements of it. But it did not appear in Doyle and it does not represent the outport myth. Instead, it stands for old world connections. It is considered a beautiful English antique.

## KARPELES AND HUNT

On 8 July 1930, Maud Karpeles collected “She’s Like the Swallow” by dictation from John Hunt, whom she described in her field notes as “old and childish,” living in “a filthy house” at Dunville in Placentia Bay, Newfoundland.<sup>2</sup> His text consisted of three four-line verses, followed by one five-liner, closing with a two-line verse, as follows:

- 1<sup>3</sup> She’s like the swallow that flies so high  
She’s like the river that never runs dry,  
She’s like the sunshine on the lee shore.  
I love my love and love is no more.

- 2 'Twas out in the garden this fair maid did go,  
Picking the beautiful prim-e-rose;  
The more she plucked the more she pulled  
Until she got her whole a-per-on full.
- 3 It is out of those roses she made a bed,  
A stony pillow for her head.  
Now this fair maid she lay down, no word did she say  
Until this fair maid's heart was broke.
- 4 There are a man on yonder hill,  
He got a heart as hard as stone.  
He have two hearts instead of one.  
How foolish must that girl be  
For to think I love no other but she.
- 5 For the world was not meant for one alone,  
The world was meant for every one. (Karpeles 1971, 243)

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The image shows a musical score for the song 'She's Like the Swallow'. It consists of three staves of music in a treble clef, with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). The melody is written on the top staff, and the lyrics are written below the notes. The lyrics are: 'She's like the swal-low that flies so high, She's like the ri-ver that ne-ver runs dry, She's like the sun-shine on the lee shore. I love my love and love is no more.' The music is in a simple, folk-like style with a mix of quarter and eighth notes.

Figure 1. John Hunt's melody as published by Karpeles in 1971. © 1971 Faber Music Ltd. Reproduced by kind permission of the publishers. All Rights Reserved.

Karpeles published it twice in England in 1934, once in the two-volume compendium *Folk Songs from Newfoundland* and again in a shorter popular collection, *Fifteen Folk Songs from Newfoundland*. However she did not publish the actual text noted four years earlier, but what she later would describe as a “Text Adapted for Singing” (Karpeles 1971, 295). As she explained in 1971: “Stanza 3 of the original has been slightly amended and the repetition of stanza 1 is given in place of the last corrupt and incomplete lines” (332)

- 1 She’s like the swallow that flies so high,  
She’s like the river that never runs dry,  
She’s like the sunshine on the lee shore,  
I love my love and love is no more.
  
- 2 ’Twas out in the garden this fair maid did go  
Picking the beautiful prim-e-rose;  
The more she plucked the more she pulled  
Until she got her a-per-on full
  
- 3 It is out of those roses she made a bed,  
A stony pillow for her head,  
She laid her down, no word did say  
Until this fair maid’s heart did break.
  
- 4 She’s like the swallow that flies so high,  
She’s like the river that never runs dry,  
She’s like the sunshine on the lee shore,  
I love my love and love is no more. (332)

A comparison of what she got from Hunt in 1930 and what she published in 1934 shows that line 3 of his third stanza was edited for grammar and diction, while the “corrupt and incomplete” fourth and fifth stanzas were left out altogether. They were replaced by stanza 1, which was by this repetition thus given the role of a chorus. Consequently, the influential first published version of John Hunt’s “She’s Like the Swallow” looked like this:

# SHE'S LIKE THE SWALLOW

Arranged by  
R. VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Collected by  
MAUD KARPELES

*Lento non troppo*

The musical score is presented in a standard format with a voice line on a single staff and a piano accompaniment on two staves. The tempo is marked 'Lento non troppo'. The piano part includes dynamic markings of *mp* and *pp*. The lyrics are written below the voice staff, with some lines appearing below the piano staff. The score concludes with a 'Last time' section marked with a bracket and *pp* dynamics.

1 She's like the swal-low that flies so high. She's  
 2 'Twas out in the gar-den this fair maid did go. A -  
 3 It's out of those ro-ses she made a bed. A  
 4 She's like the swal-low that flies so high. She's

like the riv-er that nev-er runs dry. She's like the sun - shine on the lee shore. I  
 - pick-ing the beau-ti - ful prim - e - rose: The more she plucked the more she pulled Un -  
 sto - my pri - low for her head. She laid her down. no word did say, Un -  
 like the riv-er that nev-er runs dry, She's like the sun - shine on the lee shore, I

love my love\_ and love is no more.  
 - til she got - her a - per - on full.  
 - til this fair - maid's heart did break.  
 love my love\_ and love is no more.

Last time

Figure 2. Karpeles's "adapted" text and music as published in 1934. Used by permission.

Karpeles (1885-1976) was the ardent disciple of and amanuensis to Cecil Sharp (1859-1924), the man who had sparked the English folksong revival at the beginning of the century. During World War I they had travelled in the southern Appalachian Mountains collecting English folksongs. A trip to Newfoundland to gather comparative data about English folksongs was cancelled when Sharp died in 1924. After several years working on Sharp's unpublished projects, and coming to terms with the void his passing had left in her life, Karpeles decided to fulfill her promise to Sharp to continue his work by coming to Newfoundland in 1929 and 1930 (Gregory 152). She was engaged, as Martin Lovelace has said, in westward voyages that were "a 'back to the future' motion in search of songs and dances to be worked into the folk dance and song revival's cultural construction of 'Englishness'" (284). She followed Sharp's example in giving priority to music over text (Wilgus 172). Like Sharp, she believed that one of the defining characteristics of folksong was modal melody, and "She's Like the Swallow" met this standard. Her first publication of the song included not only an "adapted" text, but also a piano setting by England's most prominent contemporary composer, fellow folksong enthusiast Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958).

Of the many songs she collected in Britain and North America, this was her favourite; her *Times* obituary quotes her as saying "My life would have been worthwhile if collecting that was all that I had done" (Anon. 1976). It was the only folk piece played at her memorial service. Not long after that, Herbert Halpert, writing to Mrs. R. Vaughan Williams, mentioned "The Bloody Gardener," another song she had collected in Newfoundland. Mrs. Vaughan Williams responded that she remembered that song: "Maudie *would* sing it at parties — all of it — but, of course *She's Like The Swallow* is the song."<sup>4</sup>

Karpeles's aesthetic was shared by Newfoundlanders and Canadians who heard the song. The pastoral imagery of its lyric, its simple but memorable modal melody, and its setting by the well-known Vaughan Williams were the major factors that led to its enshrinement as an exemplar of folksong beauty. Certainly a primary reason for the continuing popularity of the song throughout Canada is this canonization, as well as the fact that the song was republished by influential folksong authorities in Newfoundland and Canada, and performed by popular folksingers. The original melody collected by Karpeles has been placed in a multitude of settings by cultivated music composers and folk music interpreters and thus has its own complex history. Although variant melodies have been recorded — along with variant texts — only the original melody published by Karpeles has stirred much interest, probably because it is the only one that has a modal scale.

Her adapted text was published again in 1937 when Frederick R. Emerson included it and the tune — without Vaughan Williams's setting, although he does mention it — in his article "Newfoundland Folk Music," in the first volume of Joseph R. Smallwood's influential *Book of Newfoundland*. Emerson, a St. John's lawyer and intellectual leader, had hosted Karpeles during her visits to Newfoundland and participated in a lecture-concert with her in the fall of 1929 (Anon. 1929).

She dedicated her 1934 book to him and his wife. Emerson's discussion of the work of Karpeles is an early example of a familiar genre — the report by a prominent Newfoundlander to Newfoundland readers on the work in Newfoundland of scholars from outside Newfoundland. Although he devotes a paragraph to a discussion of modal melodies, he presents "The Swallow" without comment.

A decade later, Smallwood, the editor of the volume in which Emerson's essay appeared, was leading the campaign for Newfoundland's confederation with Canada. At the 1947 Newfoundland National Convention he rose in a debate over raising Memorial University College to university status, to argue for the study of Newfoundland culture at the future university, stating: "I remember on one occasion in London going to talk to Miss Maud Karpeles, perhaps one of the world's greatest authorities on world folksongs, and her telling me that in Newfoundland there had been discovered some of the oldest and most interesting folksongs anywhere on this side of the Atlantic" (Hiller and Harrington I, 581).

When Newfoundland joined Confederation in 1949, Smallwood became premier, and the college became a university. Canadian interest in Newfoundland's folk music was already piqued by this music's popularity with Canadians who had been in Newfoundland during World War II. Now that Newfoundland was part of Canada, its songs had even greater appeal to the middle-class intellectuals in English Canada who studied and promulgated Canadian folksong.

They were participating in a folksong revival that had connections with both the English revival in which Karpeles was a central figure, and the revival that had started during the 1930s in the United States. The Canadian revival built on the work of such well-known Canadian collector-writers as Marius Barbeau, who had made a French Canadian song repertoire familiar to Anglo-Canadians, and Helen Creighton, whose Nova Scotia songs had been heard on the CBC as sung both by her informants and by singers whom she endorsed as sensitive interpreters.

During the 1940s, broadcasts and phonograph recordings began to supplement and supersede print as popular folksong sources. Printed collections continued to be the sources for professional or semi-professional performers who interpreted them in concert, broadcast, and phonograph recordings. But the availability of folksong performances on record made such music accessible to many more people, because songs could be learned easily and quickly, and without the need for musical literacy. The interpreters were a conduit from the printed collections to popular audiences.

In the 1950s Canadian popular folksong repertoires were reshaped and expanded. Until then, no one played Canadian field recordings on the radio or released them on record. In the US the reissuing of vernacular commercial music recordings made for working-class markets — originally marketed as "hillbilly," "western," "blues," among other labels — was newly labelled "folk music," first by the Lomaxes and later by Harry Smith. This initiative was not followed in Canada (Rosenberg 1998). So, when popular folksong interpreters like Alan Mills and Ed

McCurdy embraced Newfoundland as Canada, they turned to Karpeles's collection and began performing "She's Like the Swallow."

## SCAMMELL AND BUGDEN

Newfoundlanders interested in folksong took note of this. In January 1951, A.R. Scammell, author of "The Squid Jigging Ground" and other popular Newfoundland songs, republished Karpeles's text in "Folk Songs and Yarns," an occasional unsigned column he edited for the *Atlantic Guardian*, the monthly "Magazine of Newfoundland" then published in Montreal. Scammell was a co-founder and a contributing editor. Well known as a writer of songs, poems, and short stories about outport Newfoundland, he was living in Montreal and working as a schoolteacher. In commenting on the song, he mentioned its publication history putting Vaughan Williams's name ahead of Karpeles's, and then added: "It has been sung by Alan Mills over CMB in Montreal" ([Scammell] 44). The rest of the brief article analyzed the meaning of the song as a lyric resonant with the "common everyday experiences of a maritime people." This was the first writing about this song to address its cultural meaning.

Two months later the *Atlantic Guardian* published a letter from Richard Bugden, a Newfoundlander from Trinity living in Toronto. Bugden reported that "there are a couple of other verses and wonder[ed] if anyone knows them" (Cahill 10). A melody was not included. This is the only version "collected" by its own singer. Here is Bugden's text:

- 1 She's like the Swallow that flies so high  
She's like the river that never runs dry  
She's like the waves beating on a lea shore  
I've lost my love and I'll love no more.
- 2 'Twas out in the garden this poor girl went  
A-picking the flowers that there was spread  
The more she picked, the more she pulled,  
Until she gathered her apron full
- 3 And out of the flowers she made her bed,  
A snowy-white pillow all for her head.  
She laid herself down and nevermore spoke  
Alas, poor girl! her heart was broke.
- 4 Her heart was broke and her corpse lay cold:  
It was unto her true love I told it so.  
I'm glad, I'm glad, I'm glad, said he,  
That she had thought so much of me.



- 5 A man is not born for one alone, (the cad!)  
 He takes a liking for many a one.  
 She's like the sunshine on the lea shore  
 I've lost my love and I'll love no more.
- 6 And when I go home I'll write a song,  
 I'll write it wide and I'll write it long,  
 And every line I'll shed a tear,  
 And every verse recall, my dear. (Cahill 9-10)

This version, which Cahill called “much more interesting,” remained unnoticed in the world of scholarship except by one indexer (whose published reference was, unfortunately, off by one month) (Mercer 176). The Karpeles version continued to be authoritative, making its first appearance on recordings by Emma Caslor and Alan Mills in 1952 and Ed McCurdy in 1953 (Caslor, Mills, McCurdy). Her text was given further currency when Edith Fowke and Richard Johnston included it in their influential 1954 collection, *Folk Songs of Canada*. When Canada's leading literary critic, Northrop Frye, reviewed this volume for the *Canadian Forum*, he pointed to “She's Like the Swallow” as an example of how “the unpredictable genius of oral tradition occasionally turns into a breath-taking beauty” (Frye 160). This printing of the song helped spur its popularity; the book was frequently reprinted and was widely used in schools across Canada for several decades.

Popular performers recorded the song at least eight times in the next 18 years (cf. Taft 1975; including Blondahl c.1964, Dobson, Mills and Carignon, Murray, Okun, Pinsent, Terra Novans, and Travelers). It also appeared on choral recordings, the first of which was made in Newfoundland by the CJON Glee Club in 1956 (see also Bell and St. John's). These were the first published recordings of the song performed in “cultivated music” settings — folksong presented in the guise of art song. The song was soon to become a favourite for Canadian choral arrangers and composers; by 1981, according to Edith Fowke, at least ten different arrangers had set it (Fowke 1981). Today, the figure is well over 30. The history of the song in this milieu is in some ways separate from its career in folk revival circles, but there is some overlap in that, unlike many other Newfoundland folksongs that have been presented as jolly and raucous singalongs, it has been consistently treated as a delicate, “pretty” piece.

Omar Blondahl's 1958 recording — made in St. John's at a time when this Saskatchewan native was Newfoundland's first popular professional folksinger — was the first local commercial recording by a solo folksinger. Blondahl sang *a cappella*, in a style that reflected his vocal training rather than his penchant for Burl Ives-style synthetic Irish. His tune is that of the Karpeles version, and his text varies only slightly from hers, but when he published the song and music in a locally distributed songster in 1964 he labelled its origin “unknown” (Blondahl 1964, 120). In

addition to his recordings and publication of the song, Blondahl regularly performed it on the radio in his broadcasts from St. John's.

## PEACOCK AND KINSLOW

Only a few months after Bugden's text was published in 1951, composer and musicologist Kenneth Peacock, working on contract for the National Museum of Canada, began what would become a decade of folksong collection in Newfoundland. By 1959, when Peacock started his fourth season of collecting, Karpeles's 1934 version of "She's Like the Swallow" was well known to Canadian audiences as a Newfoundland folksong with a beautiful melody. Peacock was familiar with Karpeles's text and its Vaughan Williams setting. That summer Peacock concentrated his research on the west coast of the island, moving from south to north. In June he was in Isle aux Morts on the western end of the south coast, about ten miles from Port aux Basques. There he made two recordings of Mrs. Wallace Kinslow. On the first day she sang the following version:

- 1 Out in the meadow this fair girl went  
Picking those flowers just as she went  
The more she picked them, the more she pulled  
Until she gathered her apron full
- 2 She's like the swallow that flies so high,  
She's like the river that never runs dry,  
She's like the sun shines on the lee shore,  
She lost her love and she'll love no more.
- 3 There is a man on yander hill,  
He has a heart so harder still,  
He has two hearts instead of one,  
She says, "Young man, what have you done?"
- 4 "How foolish, how foolish this girl must be  
To think I love no other but she,  
The world's not made for one alone,  
I takes delight in everyone."
- 5 She's like the swallows that fly so high,  
She's like the river that never runs dry,  
She's like the sun shines on the lee shore,  
She lost her love and she'll love no more.<sup>5</sup>

On the second day, she remembered another verse and sang as follows:

- 1 Out in the meadow this fair girl went  
Picking those flowers just as they stood  
The more she picked them, the more she pulled  
Until she gathered her apron full
- 2 Out of those flowers she made a bed,  
A stony pillow for her head,  
And there she laid and never did spoke  
Until this poor girl's heart was broke.
- 3 There is a man on yander hill,  
He had a heart so harder still,  
He has two hearts instead of one,  
I said, "Young man, what have you done?"
- 4 "How foolish, how foolish this girl must be  
To think I love no other but she,  
The world's not made for one alone,  
I takes delight in everyone."
- 5 She's like the swallow that flies so high,  
She's like the river that never runs dry,  
She's like the sun shines on the lee shore,  
She lost her love and she'll love no more.<sup>6</sup>

What Peacock printed differs in sequence from both of Kinslow's versions. Kinslow tells him that the title stanza "She's Like the Swallow" is "the chorus on 'n, see, that goes twice," but she does not actually sing it that way. He puts the first chorus at the beginning whereas she places it after the first verse. In several places his text diverges from both of her versions, while in other places he chooses variant wording from first one, then the other, of her two performances. Consequently his published version of her text is, in detail, not an accurate representation of either of her performances, or even of what might have been her ideal version:

- 1 She's like the swallow that flies so high,  
She's like the river that never runs dry,  
She's like the sun shines on the lee shore,  
She lost her love and she'll love no more.
- 2 Out in the meadow this fair girl went  
Picking those flowers just as they stood  
The more she picked and the more she pulled  
Until she gathered her apron full

- 3    There is a man on yonder hill,  
      He has a heart so harder still,  
      He has two hearts instead of one,  
      She says, “Young man, what have you done?”
- 4    “How foolish, how foolish this girl must be  
      To think I love no other but she,  
      The world’s not made for one alone,  
      I take delight in everyone.”
- 5    Out of those flowers she made a bed,  
      A stony pillow for her head,  
      And there she laid and never spoke  
      Until this poor girl’s heart was broke.
- 6    She’s like the swallow that flies so high,  
      She’s like the river that never runs dry,  
      She’s like the sun shines on the lee shore,  
      She lost her love and she’ll love no more. (Peacock 1965, 713)

The contour of Mrs. Kinslow’s tune resembles that of the tune collected by Karpeles from Hunt, but it differs in two important details — its compass is narrower (an octave, as opposed to ten degrees), and its tonality is major rather than modal. In terms of the aesthetics of the folk revival, which valued modal tonalities, this was a less interesting tune. When Mrs. Kinslow finished singing the first day she revealed something of her own aesthetic when she told Peacock “It is only short.” Perhaps, from the perspective of Newfoundland song values, this is closer to a brief “ditty” than an extended “story” (Casey et al.) and she went on that day to sing one such long piece for Peacock. But *his* immediate response to her apology for brevity was “Oh, that’s a lovely one,” and after telling Peacock that she had learned it when she was ten years old from “an old Englishwoman” who, like her parents, had settled in the community in the nineteenth century, she agreed with him about the tune: “But it got a nice tune, hasn’t it?”

After Mrs. Kinslow recalled the additional verse, Peacock had a text fuller than the one published by Karpeles in 1934, a point he stressed in the report that he submitted to the Canada Council: “The highlight of my visit to Isle aux Morts was the discovery of the complete version of ‘She’s Like A Swallow,’ a superb English love-lyric preserved only in Newfoundland” (Peacock 1959).

This report would have been read by Fred Emerson, a member of the Council, and Peacock may have been writing with this in mind, knowing of Emerson’s interest in the song and his friendship with Karpeles. But Peacock clearly shared Emerson’s and Karpeles’s aesthetic, for once he had found this version of an already canonized gem, he was eager to find others. Early in July he wrote excitedly to Helen Creighton:

**B**

PEA 122 No. 872 & 874  
Mrs. Wallace Kinslow  
Isle aux Morts, June, 1959

*Moderate*

She's like the swallow that flies so high, She's  
like the river that never runs dry, She's  
like the sun shines on the lee shore, She  
lost her love and she'll love no more.

Figure 3. Kinslow's melody as published by Peacock. © Canadian Museum of Civilization, Kenneth Peacock, 1965. Used by permission.

There has been one good scoop this year so far — the complete version of SHE'S LIKE THE SWALLOW. I have often asked about it, but nobody seemed to have heard of it. Then out of the blue when I was least expecting it a blind woman in Isle aux Morts remembered it just as I was about to leave. She also directed me to another woman further north who knows it.<sup>7</sup>

In his note to the song in *Songs of the Newfoundland Outports*, he says that “for the remainder of the trip [I] kept pestering singers for more verses” (714). He did this not just by asking for it, but also by singing it. One result was that when he sang it to Mrs. Annie Walters of Rocky Harbour, just north of Corner Brook, she recognized one verse as similar to a verse in another song she knew and sang for him, “She Died in Love.” Although Peacock grouped Walter’s performance (as “A”) with a version of “The Butcher Boy” sung by Mrs. Kinslow (as “B”), these are two different — though closely related — songs. Laws gave “She Died in Love” the standard title of “Love Has Brought Me to Despair” and assigned to it the identifying number P25 (“The Butcher Boy,” a much more widely known piece, is P24) (Laws 1957, 260-261).<sup>8</sup> Walters’s “She Died in Love” includes three verses that also appear in versions of “She’s Like the Swallow.”

PEACOCK AND DECKER

Later that summer, in Parson's Pond, Peacock found another singer who knew the song, Aunt Charlotte Decker. "When I sang two or three verses to ... see if she knew it, she immediately recognized it as one of the songs her mother used to sing. Unfortunately," says Peacock, "she could remember nothing except the title verse, but the 'air is just like that man sings on the radio' (The Karpeles variant)" (714). When queried about this, Peacock told Anna Guigné that the verses he sang for Aunt Charlotte were probably from Karpeles, and that he did not know who she meant when she spoke of "that man sings on the radio."<sup>9</sup> It was probably Omar Blondahl, who also sang Karpeles's version.

Peacock goes on to say that Decker's tune is "a little different in two places," which is true, but in both compass and modality it is identical to Karpeles's. Peacock's narrative continues, "When I left Aunt Charlotte she promised that she and her husband would try to remember the rest of the song and send me the words; this they did the following winter."

- 1 She's like the swallow that flies so high,  
She's like the river that never runs dry,  
She's like the sunshine on the lee shore,  
She loves her love but she'll love no more.
- 2 'Twas down in the meadow this fair maid bent  
A-picking the primrose just as she went,  
The more she picked and the more she pulled  
Until she gathered her apron full.
- 3 She climbed on yonder hill above  
To give a rose unto her love,  
She gave him one, she gave him three,  
She gave her heart in company.
- 4 And as they sat on yonder hill  
His heart grew hard, so harder still.  
He has two hearts instead of one.  
She says, "Young man, what have you done?"
- 5 "How foolish, foolish you must be  
To think I love no one but thee,  
The world's not made for one alone,  
I take delight in everyone."

- 6 She took her roses and made a bed,  
A stony pillow for her head,  
She lay her down, no more did say,  
Just let her roses fade away.
- 7 She's like the swallow that flies so high,  
She's like the river that never runs dry,  
She's like the sunshine on the lee shore,  
She loves her love and she'll love no more.<sup>10</sup>

When he came to edit the two versions for publication, he made Mrs. Decker's text, which is one verse longer, his "A" primary version. Not only did Decker have one more verse than Kinslow, Peacock made the version still longer by borrowing a verse from Mrs. Walters's "She Died in Love"—verse 5 in the text as he printed it:

- 1 She's like the swallow that flies so high,  
She's like the river that never runs dry,  
She's like the sunshine on the lee shore,  
She loves her love but she'll love no more.
- 2 'Twas down in the meadow this fair maid bent  
A-picking the primrose just as she went,  
The more she pick'd and the more she pulled  
Until she gathered her apron full.
- 3 She climbed on yonder hill above  
To give a rose unto her love,  
She gave him one, she gave him three,  
She gave her heart in company.
- 4 And as they sat on yonder hill  
His heart grew hard, so harder still.  
He has two hearts instead of one.  
She says, "Young man, what have you done?"
- 5 "When I carried my apron low  
My love followed me through frost and snow,  
But now my apron is to my chin,  
My love passes by and won't call in."
- 6 "How foolish, foolish you must be  
To think I love no one but thee,  
The world's not made for one alone,  
I take delight in everyone."

- 7 She took her roses and made a bed,  
A stony pillow for her head,  
She lay her down, no more did say,  
Just let her roses fade away.
  
- 8 She's like the swallow that flies so high,  
She's like the river that never runs dry,  
She's like the sunshine on the lee shore,  
She loves her love and she'll love no more (Peacock 1965, 711-712)

It is surprising that Peacock made this his primary or “A” version. It was the second he collected and he had dredged the text from the Deckers’ memories with the help of his own singing and the reminder of the melody from Blondahl’s radio singing — both of which were based on the familiar Karpeles version. Peacock had been surprised by Mrs. Decker’s cavalier attitude about melodies with respect to another song. He had recorded her singing it one year, but the recording was flawed, and so he asked her to sing it the following year. She sang the same text with a completely different melody. When he queried her about this she declared: “The h’air may be different, my son, bu the ’eart’s the same — love us, I can’t remember how I

## She’s Like the Swallow

A

MS

Mrs. Charlotte Decker  
Parson’s Pond, August, 1959

*Moderately slow*

The musical score is written on three staves of a grand staff (treble clef). The first staff contains the melody for the first line of lyrics: "She's like the swal- low that flies so high, She's like the". The second staff contains the melody for the second line: "ri- ver that never runs dry, She's like the sun- shine". The third staff contains the melody for the third line: "on the lee shore, She loves her love but she'll love no more." The melody is simple and folk-like, with a moderate tempo. The lyrics are printed below the notes, with hyphens indicating syllables that span across notes.

Figure 4. Decker’s melody as published by Peacock. © Canadian Museum of Civilization, Kenneth Peacock, 1965. Used by permission.



sang it last week, m'dear" (Peacock 1965, 5). Given this attitude, the fact that he accepted her characterization of the melody for her barely remembered "Swallow" so easily seems very much like a leap of faith.

Furthermore, given Peacock's re-arranging of Mrs. Kinslow's verse sequence, we cannot be certain that the sequence of Decker's version is as she sent it to him,<sup>11</sup> because the verses that the two versions have in common are presented by Peacock in the same sequence. In addition he chose to project his own interpretation of Decker's version of the song by adding to it a verse from another song. The added verse makes literal that which is in all of the other versions stated metaphorically — that the "fair maid" was pregnant. In this sense Peacock has moved the song toward narrative by making it longer and more explicit. In the past decade influential Newfoundland folksong revivalists Anita Best and Pam Morgan have been performing a version learned from Laverne Squires that combines Karpeles with this Peacock text (Best and Morgan).<sup>12</sup>

## FOWKE AND SIMMS

Two years after Peacock made his discoveries on Newfoundland's west coast, Edith Fowke collected "She's Like a Swallow" from Albert Simms, a native of McCallum Harbour, Hermitage Bay, on the south coast, who had settled in Toronto. Simms told Fowke he and his sister had learned it as children (Fowke 1965, 147). Here is what his text looks like:

1. She's like a swallow that flies so high,  
She's like the river that never runs dry,  
She's like the sunshine on lea shores;  
She loves her lover, but love is no more.
2. It is out in the garden this fair maid went,  
Picking flowers was her content.  
The more she picked the more she pulled,  
Until she gathered her apron full.
3. And of those flower she made a bed  
A stony pillow for her head,  
And she lay down and never once spoke  
Until her own poor heart was broke.
4. Her heart was broke and her corpse lay cold.  
Straight on to her false lover was told.  
"How foolish, how foolish this girl must be  
To think I loved no one but she."

This version's tune differs from both those of Hunt and Kinslow. Like the latter, its tonality is major rather than modal; its compass falls between the two — a ninth. Its contour is rather different from the other two, and the most striking feature of the melody is a downward leap of an octave at the end of the third line. Textually, this one shares some features with Bugden's version. I have been unable to locate Fowke's actual recording of Simms but it is unlikely that Fowke made changes of the sort Peacock made.<sup>13</sup>

### 57. SHE'S LIKE A SWALLOW

Sung by Albert Simms, November, 1961

Smoothly ( $\text{♩} = 58$ )

She's like a swal-low that flies so high, She's  
like the riv-er that nev-er runs dry, She's  
like the sun - shine on lea shores. She  
loves her lov-er, but love is no more.

VARIATION:

NOTE: Bar 10 is often omitted entirely.

Figure 5. Simms's melody as published by Fowke. Used by permission.

No versions of “She’s Like the Swallow” other than those that came either directly or indirectly from the Karpeles or Peacock publications have been recorded from oral tradition since 1961. This is in spite of the considerable amount of folksong field research in Newfoundland and Labrador by scholars such as Herbert Halpert and Kenneth S. Goldstein and their students, represented in the collections of the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive (Rosenberg 1991c). While the song is now well known as a Newfoundland folksong, its present familiarity is a result of the processes of publication that began with Karpeles’s 1934 songbook, augmented by Peacock’s 1965 publication of additional verses.

### ENGLISH ORIGINS

If the widespread current popularity of “She’s Like the Swallow” can be attributed to Karpeles and Peacock, what of its English origins? Karpeles, of course, would not have bothered to collect it if she had not believed it was an English folksong. But not until 1965, when Peacock annotated the two versions he had collected, was documentation published to support this belief. Peacock stated that the song raised “the old problem of whether traditional verse is a democratized form of art poetry once exclusive to a cultivated elite, or whether folk poetry is the inspiration for the cultivated poet.” Arguing that “it works both ways,” he presented the latter half of “As I Walked Forth One Summer Day,” a song written in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century by “an obscure poet named Robert Johnson,” that includes lines similar to those in the second and third verses (labelled as “B” and “C” below) of the Hunt version collected by Karpeles (Peacock 1965, 714).

Even this reference makes the English connection only implicitly, since Peacock did not identify Johnson’s nationality, or the place of publication for the early twentieth-century anthology in which he found Johnson’s song. Not until 1971, when Karpeles published the bulk of her collection in *Folksongs of Newfoundland*, did other references appear. It was only at this time that Karpeles published her unedited field version of the text to Hunt’s 1930 performance, and printed an annotative note.

Mentioning that Peacock had collected two versions in Newfoundland, she suggested that Decker’s version “may ... [have] been influenced by the frequent broadcast performances which, I understand, the present version of the song [i.e., the one she published in 1934] enjoys.” She noted that Fowke had collected a version in Ontario. Then, after citing her own 1934 version with the piano setting, she reported that there was “an unpublished version noted by Cecil Sharp in Cambridgeshire” that finished with three verses, which she printed. These correspond, roughly, to Hunt’s verses 2-4 (B, C, D). Following this she mentioned that the last of those three verses also appeared in “a text noted by R. Vaughan Williams” (Karpeles 1971, 289).

In 1973, Fowke called “She’s Like the Swallow” “a distinctive Newfoundland variant of a large family of songs about unhappy love of which ‘A Brisk Young

Sailor,' 'Must I Go Bound,' and 'Died for Love' (Dean-Smith 63) are the best known." Noting "the Swallow simile seems to be found only in Newfoundland," she pulled together Peacock's and Karpeles's references as evidence that "other verses turn up in various songs" (Fowke 1973, 209).

While it seems logical to conclude that this is indeed an English song, the references provided by Peacock and Karpeles are, as they stand, little more than a starting point for a study of the song's English antecedents. They raise as many questions as they answer: What is the full publication history of Robert Johnson's "song"? What does the first half of the text look like? Was it associated with a tune? Similar questions must be asked of Karpeles's annotation. If Sharp's unpublished Cambridgeshire version "finishes with" the three relevant stanzas she publishes, what does it begin with? And is there a melody associated with that version? Similarly, what of the "text noted by R. Vaughan Williams"? Are there other stanzas? Did he collect a melody? Finally, how are these songs and "She's Like the Swallow" itself related to "the large family of songs about unhappy love" to which Fowke alludes?

The last question has been answered by Roger deV Renwick in *English Folk Poetry* (1980), which includes his study of "a sample of 152 distinct English folksongs on love relationships that specify a sexual affair between the lovers" in a chapter titled "The Semiotics of Sexual Liaisons." Renwick divides his sample into three subgenres "according to their rhetoric of sex" and labels them "the *symbolic*, the *euphemistic*, and the *metaphorical*" (55). Of these three, it is clear that "She's Like the Swallow" belongs to the first. Indeed, Renwick uses as his example for this designation a text titled "There Was Three Worms on Yonder Hill" that is a version of Laws P25, the song that Annie Walters called "She Died For Love" which shares verses with "She's Like the Swallow."

Renwick defines symbolic songs of sexual content as "invariably lyric rather than narrative, ... told by a first-person narrator, and deal[ing] with one lover's lament over a love affair spoiled by the partner's falseness or enforced absence." He uses "the designation symbolic for this class of songs because its dominant language-imagery signifies abstractions rather than 'things,' interrelates phenomena that are not empirically linked, and exhibits a distinct pattern of signification in which both positive and negative values are carried by the same image" (56). In the analysis that follows his definition, Renwick sets forth "seven major semantic domains in the code-repertoire" (58) and these constitute a model for future researchers who wish to delve into the poetics of "She's Like the Swallow" as a symbolic song.

## TEXT

For purposes of such study it is useful to examine the evidence for "The Swallow" as a separate, coherent piece. As far as we now know, the first recording of "She's

Like the Swallow” was in 1930, the last in 1961. Until 1965, only Karpeles’s slim edited text was widely known, Bugden’s 1951 letter having had virtually no impact. But, as has happened with other popular texts, its popularity provoked collectors to find other examples (Rosenberg 1991d, 236-238), and Peacock was proud of his success at finding a longer version.

There is a disparity between what was sung in the first instance and what became the canon, as has happened often in the history of folksong collection and publication. The published texts of Karpeles and Peacock do not match their own ethnographic evidence — Karpeles edited Hunt’s performance, while Peacock edited and rearranged Kinslow’s and added a verse to Decker’s, which he may have also rearranged. An analysis of the text sequences of the five versions from oral tradition suggests that while there are substantial differences between the texts as recorded, they all appear to follow a basic sequence, one which is *not* suggested by the 1934 Karpeles version or followed by Peacock’s two published versions. What follows is a list of the verses, with an example of each and references to the texts in which they appear (the complete texts have already been presented individually by singer, above; they are presented together at the end of the article, verse by verse, in Appendix 1, “Field texts compared”):

- A She’s like the swallow that flies so high  
She’s like the river that never runs dry,  
She’s like the sunshine on the lee shore.  
I love my love and love is no more. (Hunt, 1)<sup>14</sup>
  
- B ’Twas out in the garden this fair maid did go,  
Picking the beautiful prim-e-rose;  
The more she plucked the more she pulled  
Until she got her whole a-per-on full. (Hunt, 2)<sup>15</sup>
  
- C It is out of those roses she made a bed,  
A stony pillow for her head.  
Now this fair maid she lay down, no word did she say  
Until this fair maid’s heart was broke. (Hunt, 3)<sup>16</sup>
  
- D There is a man on yander hill,  
He has a heart so harder still,  
He has two hearts instead of one,  
She says, “Young man, what have you done?” (Kinslow 872, 3)<sup>17</sup>
  
- E Her heart was broke and her corpse lay cold:  
It was unto her true love I told it so.  
I’m glad, I’m glad, I’m glad, said he,  
That she had thought so much of me. (Bugden, 4)<sup>18</sup>

- F “How foolish, how foolish this girl must be  
 To think I love no other but she,  
 The world’s not made for one alone,  
 I takes delight in everyone.” (Kinslow 872, 4)<sup>19</sup>
- G She climbed on yonder hill above  
 To give a rose unto her love  
 She gave him one, she gave him three  
 She gave her heart in company. (Decker, 3)<sup>20</sup>
- H And when I go home I’ll write a song,  
 I’ll write it wide and I’ll write it long,  
 And every line I’ll shed a tear,  
 And every verse recall, my dear. (Bugden, 5)<sup>21</sup>
- J “When I carried my apron low  
 My love followed me through frost and snow,  
 But now my apron is to my chin,  
 My love passes by and won’t call in.” (Peacock A)<sup>22</sup>

Here, derived from the above list, is a comparison of verse sequences between texts as reported from oral tradition and the influential published sources:

From oral tradition (\*=only part of stanza performed):

|            |   |   |   |    |    |    |    |   |
|------------|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|---|
| Hunt:      | A | B | C | D* |    | F  |    |   |
| Bugden:    | A | B | C |    | E  | F* | A* | H |
| Kinslow 1: |   | B | A | D  |    | F  | A  |   |
| Kinslow 2: |   | B | C | D  |    | F  | A  |   |
| Decker:    | A | B | G | D  |    | F  | C  | A |
| Simms:     | A | B | C |    | E* | F* |    |   |

As edited by collector and published:

|           |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|-----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Karpeles: | A | B | C |   |   | A |   |   |
| PeacockA: | A | B | G | D | J | F | C | A |
| PeacockB: | A | B |   | D |   | F | C | A |

Outlining the verse sequence helps focus our consideration of the song’s textual meanings. This is what Renwick (1996a, 453) calls a “lyric song”: a “folksong type that emphasizes emotional reaction to a significant experience, object, or idea

rather than the constituent parts of the experience, object, or idea itself.” In other words, it does not seem to be a narrative folksong, to use the briefest scholarly definition of the ballad. Lyric songs, says Renwick, “concentrate most of their rhetoric and imagery on accentuating feeling and on evoking an affective response” (Renwick 1996a, 453). A ballad, on the other hand, “recounts a short, usually single-episodic, tale of complication, climax, and resolution” (Renwick 1996b, 57). How do the verses of “She’s Like the Swallow” and their connections as sung relate to these contrasting generic definitions?

The alphabetic identifications assigned to the verses are my own, modelled on the sequences of the six texts from five singers being studied, for purposes of analysis. Let us now examine the individual verses.

In verse “A,” the first three lines present a woman as a figure of constant beauty and wonder: “She” is soaring swallow, abundant river, sheltered sunshine (or, in Bugden’s version, “waves beating”). In Hunt’s version, the final line shifts from third person to first person, apparently the voice of the woman who states that a love is “no more.” In analyzing Hunt, Scammell (44) interprets this final line as conveying “the deep personalized sense of grief and loss as the cold reality of death strikes, and ‘love is no more.’” But if we look at the other texts it becomes clear that what is “no more” is not a loved one but love itself. Like Hunt, Bugden moves to the first person in the final line, but he makes the point more clearly — “I’ve lost my love and I’ll love no more.” The other four versions carry the third person “She” on in this line, as in Kinslow: “She lost her love and she’ll love no more,” and Simms: “She loves her lover, but love is no more.”

This verse is found in all versions as either the first verse or an occasional refrain, or both. It sets the theme for the song, and as Mrs. Kinslow told Peacock, “That’s the chorus of un, see?” Peacock, engrossed by the record-setting new verse (“C”) of her second performance, answers her distractedly “Um-hm,” so she rephrases her instructions about sequence before telling him about the new verse she had just remembered: “That goes twice.”<sup>23</sup>

One of the challenges in understanding the questions raised about meaning is that there is very little in the way of interviews or other documentary information from the singers themselves about issues of performance and meaning. Kinslow clearly felt there was a “right way” to sing this song; when she did it for Peacock the first day she sang “A” after “B” and again at the end; the next day she recalled “C” and put it where she had had “A.” She again ended with “A” and it was then that she told Peacock two things (before he, who used the recorder mainly to capture performance, stopped the tape): “A” is to be repeated twice, and the verse she forgot yesterday is “C.” The question not answered by her instructions to Peacock is: at what point in the song is “A” first sung? Turning to the six performances before us, we see that Hunt, Bugden, and Simms all open with “A.” So does Decker, but Peacock could have been responsible for putting that verse there in her version. That is definitely what he did with Kinslow’s text when he edited it for publication.

If it is probable that “A” comes first, its repetition at the end is by no means certain. Neither Hunt, Bugden, nor Simms sing it at the end, although Bugden does repeat the last two lines (paired with the first two lines of “F”) near the end. There is no doubt that the first line of “A” has given us the standard title for the song, even though there is no record of any of the five singers being asked if that is indeed the title. It is not uncommon in oral traditions for the first line, particularly of the refrain, to become the title, as happened here.

One frequently noted feature of lyric folksong is the way in which their verses “float,” as it were, in oral tradition, appearing in one song here and a different song some place else. There is no evidence that verse “A” has appeared in any other pool of verses. It is associated with this song only but the same cannot be said for many of the other verses.

Verse “A”’s repetition, its source for the standardized title, and its uniqueness in being associated only with this particular pool of verses, all suggest that it could have been composed in Newfoundland.

If “A” introduces us to the main character and her state of mind, verse “B” tells us why she is in such a state. This verse presents familiar traditional metaphors that are also consistent with metaphors and images frequently found in much English popular and high art poetry. The “prim-e-rose” stands for virginity; picking and pulling represent its loss; and the full apron is an image for pregnancy (Toelken). It is a commonplace in a number of English folksongs about love. According to Fowke, this verse and the one that follows “turn up fairly frequently in other” English lyric folksongs (Fowke 1965, 194). Both Karpeles and Peacock provide specific evidence for this in their annotative notes.

Indeed, verses “B” and “C” are juxtaposed in four of our six performances. The two verses express cause and effect, so “C” tells of the consequences of “B” — a bed of roses and a pillow of stone are the site of her silent repose leading to a broken heart. Only Kinslow’s first singing for Peacock, when she forgot “C,” and Decker’s suspect text, which places “C” near the end, do not follow “B.” Does verse “C”’s ending, with the broken heart, signify the woman’s death? I would argue that it does not, that a “broken heart” is a metaphor not for death but for spiritual collapse. The woman is not dead — yet — for in three versions she speaks to her false lover in the following verse.

Verse “D” was sung in full only by Kinslow and Decker, and in part by Hunt, whose version as collected by Karpeles replaces the girl’s accusing question in the last line with two lines of “F” in which the man responds to her. Hunt actually gave Karpeles all of the lines of “F” but she reports them as the last two lines of a “corrupt” five-line verse followed by the first two lines of an “incomplete” final verse. Indeed, verses “D” and “F” seem, like “B” and “C,” a contrasting pair. In “D” she describes her former lover as she now sees him — he is two-hearted; in Bugden’s aside, “(the cad!)” — and confronts him: “what have you done?” In “F” he answers,



calling her “foolish” and rationalizing his actions with a masculine code of courtship ethics: “I takes delight in everyone.”

If “D” and “F” constitute a bracketed pair, what of “E”? This is the only verse that speaks unequivocally of death: “her corpse lay cold.” We have only one full version of that verse — from Bugden (Annie Walters also sang it, as her seventh verse, in “She Died in Love”). In it we meet a third person who, upon seeing the young woman has died of a broken heart, confronts her former lover with this news, to which he responds that he’s glad to know she “thought so much of me.” Bugden follows this with the first half of “F,” making that a continuation of the dialogue between the man and the third person. Simms compresses “E” and “F” even further, into a single verse that combines the first two lines of each. Fowke notes that Simms’s “E/F” stanza “is also found in the composite text of ‘A Brisk Young Lover’ that Reeves put together from eight English versions collected by Cecil Sharp” — evidence of a sort, though compromised by its composite nature (Fowke 1965, 194).

Verses “D,” “E,” and “F,” although used in different ways by different singers (in fact, no one sang all three), combine to convey the fact of the woman’s broken heart followed by death and the man’s callous rationalization of his role in the affair.

Verse “G” is found in only one text, that of Decker. Peacock places it between “B” and “D” in the place taken by “C” in all other versions. The gift of three roses, a metaphorical offering of sexual companionship, serves to amplify the “full apron” reference of “B” — that this is not a single dalliance but a serious affair. One expects “C” would follow this line of narrative argument well. Decker did recall “C” — but Peacock has it coming much later in her song. I’m suspicious of that placement since he did the same thing with Kinslow, who in her own sequence followed “B” with “C.”

It appears that “B,” “G,” and “C” fit together in describing the beginning of the unhappy affair; “D,” “E,” and “F” describe its sad ending. “H,” recalled only by Bugden, reintroduces the voice of the third person from “E” who declaims a fairly typical closing formula for traditional song — a promise to memorialize the event in a song.

There is one other verse, “J,” verse 3 in Walters’s “She Died in Love,” which Peacock borrowed and inserted into Decker’s version of “The Swallow.” Peacock realized that Laws P25 shares verses with it, but he chose to borrow a verse that was not common to the two. I offer my interpretation of his borrowing and its effect below.

The above discussion of the song’s meaning is my own analysis. What do others say? Among the scholars, Karpeles obviously liked the song, and was proud of having collected and promulgated it. But beyond this she did not really venture a comment on textual meaning and she edited out two key verses. Peacock comments on the symbolic import of apron and rose, but chose to imprint his own meaning on

the song by tinkering with both sequence (definitely in Kinsella's version, probably in Decker's) and content (in Decker's). In both of her notes Fowke goes no further than a mention of "unhappy love" (Fowke 1965, 1973).

Analyzing the actions of Karpeles and Peacock as editors offers insight into their cultural perceptions about the meaning of the song. Debora Kodish's feminist perspective, articulated in her study of contrasting male and female ethnographic reports, is useful in this regard. Describing "a definition that privileges men's speech roles and social norms," she says, "We are to understand oral performance as ephemeral and of the moment, as masterful, authoritative, aggressive, dominant, and coherent." In this milieu, "The ballad has long been privileged over the lyric, reflecting what might be considered a preference for explicit narrative order over the implicit and metonymic structure of lyric" (Kodish 1987, 577). Karpeles collected many ballads, but her favorite catch was "She's Like the Swallow," which, by editing out Hunt's "corrupt and incomplete" verses, she was most comfortable presenting as a lyric. Peacock, on the other hand, tinkered with Decker's text, adding a verse to create in it contrasting dialogue typical of ballads and probably also rearranging it a more linear and episodic ballad-like structure. It seems both Karpeles and Peacock were responding to the anomaly that this song's text represents: It is a lyric with narrative elements. Certainly it emphasizes emotion, but just as surely, it has a point to make about the ideas and actions that create emotion. So the female scholar pushed her edited version of the text toward lyric, while the male scholar pushed his toward ballad.

## CONTEXT

Just as culturally gendered aesthetic preferences may have shaped the editing of the song for the reading public, gender may also pertain to the transmission and singers' interpretation of the song. I turn to the tiny amount of contextual information accompanying each of the five field versions of the song. Two of the singers — Simms and Kinslow — learned it as children. Decker's report of learning it from her mother suggests that she too learned it when quite young. Bugden's also suggests this is a song from childhood, in a second letter to the *Atlantic Guardian* that related his experiences as a boy in Trinity. This does not mean that this was, at any stage, a children's song in the sense that we think of such things today. Rather, it is a reflection of the fact that in outport homes children were rarely excluded from adult activities, particularly those involving sociability — like singing.

When Hunt, Bugden, Kinslow, Decker, and Simms were children, singing was a primary source of entertainment. There were no radios, and phonograph recordings were rare. Songs might be heard in various contexts — at formal concerts, for example, or at dedicated house parties often called "times" (similar to the Gaelic

“ceilidh”) (Wareham). Depending upon the location, and the time of night at which they were held, some children could be present at such events. But another important performance context at which children were more certain to be present was “around the house.” Many women singers, in particular, performed mainly in such a context. This could either be while engaged in housework, or visiting with a friend, or leafing through a scrapbook of songs (Kodish 1983).

While children were present, songs were not chosen with them in mind. Adult singers simply performed their favourite songs on many topics. In this context songs conveyed more than one level of meaning. Thus songs of local sea disasters “are valued ... as memorials, cautionary tales, and serious entertainment” (Rosenberg 1994, 65). Children learned some of the protocols of seamanship through hearing such songs. Similarly, Kodish has pointed out that from the well-known English and Scottish traditional love ballads sung widely in outport homes, young people learned about contrasting male and female roles (Kodish 1983). From this we can take a clue: children who heard and remembered “She’s Like the Swallow” learned about contrasting gender perspectives concerning physical and spiritual love.

Renwick (1980) gives further affirmation to the contextual appropriateness of this song. In comparing symbolic songs to the other types of English folksongs on love relationships, he finds that “the symbolic model shows evidence of being a very old one in traditional English song. Truly,” he says, “its message was relevant to every sexually mature person of every era and to the very fabric of the community” (105).

## MELODY

Another aspect of meaning in this song is its melody. The singers themselves have had little to say about the melody — Kinslow told Peacock “it got a nice tune,” and Decker mentioned the tune’s similarity to that of the man on the radio. Beyond this we have evidence, presented earlier from Decker, that fidelity to melody has generally received lower priority in Newfoundland’s singing traditions than fidelity to text: melody is the vessel; text is the cargo.

But melody, and in particular the melody Karpeles noted from Hunt, is much of the reason for persistent interest in this song. Discounting Decker’s suspect melody, Hunt’s is the only one collected from oral tradition that is modal. Like Sharp, Karpeles did not use recording machines, and so we have to take her word that what she published is what Hunt sang. Sharp was criticized for “modalizing” the melodies he noted, so we may ponder Karpeles’s role in making this song into a melodic icon, but her joy at finding it suggests it was indeed a rare example of what she sought — a modal melody. Why was a modal melody so important to her?

Answering this question leads into a debate that frequently arises when Karpeles's sojourn in Newfoundland is discussed. On the one hand, Carpenter (115, 117), Narváez (215-216), and Lovelace have seen her from a perspective built on Newfoundland and Canadian experiences: a representative of the heavy-handed Empire-soaked colonial approach, that, in terms of the local perspective, retarded national cultural development. To them this was cultural conservatism.

Gregory (154-155), on the other hand, argues from the British perspective: in her time and place (including twentieth-century years of imperial decline, really) she was politically on the side of enlightened modernism. But Sharp (and his followers, of whom Karpeles was the epitome) were not just Fabian socialists, they were also followers of William Morris's arts and crafts movement. As Dillon Bustin (1982) has shown, the values of Sharp and those who followed him were significantly shaped by the thoughts and actions of Morris and his followers.

As Lovelace says, this modernist movement sought to go "back to the future" (284) by sifting through the pre-industrial past in search of workable patterns for modern life. This proved easier to accomplish in the decorative arts than in other cultural and political sectors. Be that as it may, the perspective of the Arts and Crafts movement affected early twentieth century intellectual life in Britain in many ways.

One was the way of thinking about music. As a popular educator, Sharp had a nationalist modernist agenda which was expressed in his influential *Folk Song: Some Conclusions* of 1908. The book reflects the mindset of late Victorian and Edwardian Britain, influenced by a new, intellectually fashionable, scientific frame: Darwin's theory of evolution. Sharp's aesthetics were grounded in nationalist historical agendas — pre-industrial was good; pre-Christian was very very good. Sharp concluded that one of the hallmarks of a true folksong was that its melody had been shaped by non-harmonic principles. It reflected a culture that predated post-renaissance Europe when tonal harmony-dominated musical theory developed.

Encountering singers whose repertoires included songs with modal scales, Sharp embraced the idea that their music culture was a very ancient one, or at least *like* very ancient ones. He and others of the time identified the modal scales they collected using ancient Greek terminology. Naming scales that way resembled the naming of pottery styles; it was like an archeological practice. Sharp and Karpeles felt that a singer's use of a modal melody was evidence of the old non-harmonic music. The words were another and separate matter; the fact that they did not always collect full verses — well documented by Wilgus — reflects their priorities.

"She's Like the Swallow" was, then, a prime example of a recovered cultural artifact. Like an archeologist, Karpeles rolled up her sleeves and dug into the dis-

tant minds of people living in isolated circumstances to unearth historical treasure.

Who has not visited the museum of an archeological site and seen a sixteenth-century buckle — a dark, pitted mass that’s been cleaned and given conservation and preservation treatment — in a display case? In the museum shop is a gem-like replica, for sale, made by local craftspeople. Today, the melody of “She’s Like the Swallow” which Karpeles published in 1934 is marketed, in a variety of settings by composers and performers, like a rare gem. Indeed this very metaphor has been used to describe it. In 1988 the late George Story summarized the iconic role of this song. Calling Karpeles’s “the first text of a gem among English folksongs,” and noting that Peacock had collected “two other versions of similar quality,” he observed that Karpeles’s “sole English version, gathered by her mentor Cecil Sharp in Cambridgeshire, looks to me, by the canons of aesthetic criticism, as though it might, like Newman’s port wine, have been improved by a rough Atlantic crossing” (Story, 101).<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps Story was right about the transatlantic improvement. Verse “A,” which gives the song its title, could well have been composed in Newfoundland. Not only is it unique to the region, its third line, about the sunshine (or the waves beating) on the lee shore seem particularly meaningful for a place with many thousands of miles of shoreline and a predominately coastal and maritime culture. Story was advancing an argument he had developed earlier about “the creativity of the traditional popular culture of Newfoundland and its relation to the printed literature of the region” (Story 101). He worked to link these two streams because, in his time, the oral was so much stronger than the written in the local cultural picture; and because his work on the language of Newfoundland led him to believe that they were not dichotomous but part of a continuum. Thus he strove to display the gems of folk literature unearthed in the twentieth century by folklore and folksong researchers, like “She’s Like the Sparrow,” the song he said that “haunted Ralph Vaughan Williams” (Story 106).

I suppose we shouldn’t be surprised to learn in studying this haunting icon that there is quite a disparity between what was sung in the first instance and what became the canon, for this has happened often in the history of folksong collection and publication. Thus this icon does not accurately represent its own source image. But of course that is not what icons do — they stand for something in which people believe.

Appendix: Field Texts Compared

A

- Hunt 1:           She's like the swallow that flies so high  
                      She's like the river that never runs dry,  
                      She's like the sunshine on the lee shore.  
                      I love my love and love is no more.
- Bugden 1:         She's like the Swallow that flies so high  
                      She's like the river that never runs dry  
                      She's like the waves beating on a lea shore  
                      I've lost my love and I'll love no more.
- Bugden 5,  
ll.3-4:            She's like the sunshine on the lea shore  
                      I've lost my love and I'll love no more.
- Kin. 1 2,  
5:                 She's like the swallow that flies so high,  
                      She's like the river that never runs dry,  
                      She's like the sun shines on the lee shore,  
                      She lost her love and she'll love no more.
- Kin. 2 5:         She's like the swallow that flies so high,  
                      She's like the river that never runs dry,  
                      She's like the sun shines on the lee shore,  
                      She lost her love and she'll love no more.
- Decker 1:        She's like the swallow that flies so high  
                      She's like the river that never runs dry  
                      She's like the sunshine on the lee shore  
                      She loves her love but she'll love no more.
- Simms 1:         She's like a swallow that flies so high,  
                      She's like a river that never runs dry,  
                      She's like the sunshine on lea shores;  
                      She loves her lover, but love is no more.

**B**

Hunt 2: 'Twas out in the garden this fair maid did go,  
Picking the beautiful prim-e-rose;  
The more she plucked the more she pulled  
Until she got her whole a-per-on full.

Bugden 2: 'Twas out in the garden this poor girl went  
A-picking the flowers that there was spread  
The more she picked, the more she pulled,  
Until she gathered her apron full

Kin.1 1: Out in the meadow this fair girl went  
Picking those flowers just as she went  
The more she picked them, the more she pulled  
Until she gathered her apron full

Kin. 2 1: Out in the meadow this fair girl went  
Picking those flowers just as they stood  
The more she picked them, the more she pulled  
Until she gathered her apron full

Decker 2: 'Twas down in the meadow this fair maid bent  
A-picking the primrose just as she went  
The more she picked and the more she pulled  
Until she gathered her apron full

Simms 2: It is out in the garden this fair maid went,  
Picking flowers was her content.  
The more she picked the more she pulled,  
Until she gathered her apron full.

**C**

Hunt 3: It is out of those roses she made a bed,  
A stony pillow for her head.  
Now this fair maid she lay down, no word did she say  
Until this fair maid's heart was broke.

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Bugden 3:           And out of the flowers she made her bed,  
                          A snowy-white pillow all for her head.  
                          She laid herself down and nevermore spoke  
                          Alas, poor girl! her heart was broke.

Kin. 2 2:            Out of those flowers she made a bed,  
                          A stony pillow for her head,  
                          And there she laid and never did spoke  
                          Until this poor girl's heart was broke.

Decker 7            She took her roses and made a bed,  
                          A stony pillow for her head,  
                          She lay her down, no more did say  
                          Just let her roses fade away.

Simms 3:            And of those flowers she made a bed,  
                          A stony pillow for her head,  
                          And she lay down and never once spoke  
                          Until Her own poor heart was broke.

D

Hunt 4,  
  ll.1-3:            There are a man on yonder hill,  
                          He got a heart as hard as stone.  
                          He have two hearts instead of one.

Kin.1 3:            There is a man on yander hill,  
                          He has a heart so harder still,  
                          He has two hearts instead of one,  
                          She says, "Young man, what have you done?"

Kin. 2 3:            There is a man on yander hill,  
                          He had a heart so harder still,  
                          He has two hearts instead of one,  
                          I said, "Young man, what have you done?"

Decker 4:           And as they sat on yonder hill  
                          His heart grew hard, so harder still.  
                          He has two hearts instead of one.  
                          She says, "Young man, what have you done?"



E

Bugden 4: Her heart was broke and her corpse lay cold:  
It was unto her true love I told it so.  
I'm glad, I'm glad, I'm glad, said he,  
That she had thought so much of me.

Simms 4,  
ll.1-2: Her heart was broke and her corpse lay cold.  
Straight on to her false lover was told.

E

Hunt 4,  
ll.4-5;  
5: How foolish must that girl be  
For to think I love no other but she.  
For the world was not meant for one alone,  
The world was meant for every one.

Bugden 5,  
ll.1-2: A man is not born for one alone, (the cad!)  
He takes a liking for many a one.

Kin. 1 4: "How foolish, how foolish this girl must be  
To think I love no other but she,  
The world's not made for one alone,  
I takes delight in everyone."

Kin. 2 4: "How foolish, how foolish this girl must be  
To think I love no other but she,  
The world's not made for one alone,  
I takes delight in everyone."

Decker 6: "How foolish, foolish you must be  
To think I love no one but thee,  
The world's not made for one alone,  
I take delight in everyone."

Simms 4,  
ll.3-4: "How foolish, how foolish this girl must be  
To think I loved no one but she."

G

Decker 3:           She climbed on yonder hill above  
                          To give a rose unto her love,  
                          She gave him one, she gave him three,  
                          She gave her heart in company.

H

Bugden 5:           And when I go home I'll write a song,  
                          I'll write it wide and I'll write it long,  
                          And every line I'll shed a tear,  
                          And every verse recall, my dear.

J

[Peacock,  
  Insert]:           “When I carried my apron low  
                          My love followed me through frost and snow,  
                          But now apron is to my chin,  
                          My love passes by and won't call in.”

## Acknowledgments

Thanks to Anna Kearney Guigné and Martin Lovelace.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Awareness and use of the canon continues in Newfoundland's artistic and political circles. In 1998, Newfoundland filmmaker Mary Lewis's "When Ponds Freeze Over" won the Toronto International Film Festival's Best Canadian Short Film prize, and was named Canada's best short film at the Genie Awards. The title comes from a line in "Tickle Cove Pond," a song that appeared in several editions of Doyle. In 1999, the provincial government titled its report on public forums concerning the troubled Gulf Ferries service "On Deck and Below," part of a line from the chorus of another Doyle favourite, the "Ryans and the Pittmans." The full line reads: We'll rant and we'll roar, on deck and below" — an appropriate description of the tenor of the politically charged forums. See Kean (1999).

<sup>2</sup>Karpeles's full notes for the day she collected the song — which she does not mention — read:

Arranged to go by motor boat starting at 2, but my man failed to keep his appointment. Finally got off at 5 and an hour's run took us up to old Jimmie Hunt's. A wet-cold day.

J. Hunt has known lots of songs, but he is old and childish and cannot remember things. However his son came to the rescue and gave me a couple of songs, and another son the words of G. Laddie — tune no good.

It is a filthy house, but the people as everywhere, most charming and friendly. Absolutely no trouble to get them to sing, only a little embarrassed for fear their lack of education will make their songs unsuitable “for the likes of me.”

A lovely spot at the head of the N. East Arm — like a big lake surrounded by wooded hills. A lovely trip back to the harbour. (MUNFLA accession 78-0031, Ms. Field Diary No. 2, Tuesday, July 8th, 1930, sheet eight. Folder 24 of 36)

<sup>3</sup>For purposes of description and the analysis that follows I have assigned sequential numbers to each verse in all of the texts presented in this article. Later in the article a second set of capital letter descriptors that identify cognate verses in the various versions is introduced.

<sup>4</sup>The programme for the memorial service and the Halpert-Vaughan Williams correspondence are in the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive [MUNFLA] collection 78-003, folders 33 and 34. Halpert wrote on 1/26/77, Vaughan Williams replied 1/31/77, closing her letter with the statement quoted. The emphasis is in the original.

<sup>5</sup>Canadian Museum of Civilization, Fonds Kenneth Peacock, tape PEA122, song no. 872. A duplicate of this tape is on deposit at MUNFLA: accession # 87-157, tape C11064B.

<sup>6</sup>Canadian Museum of Civilization, Fonds Kenneth Peacock, tape PEA122, song no. 874. A duplicate of this tape is on deposit at MUNFLA: accession # 87-157, tape C11064B.

<sup>7</sup>Letter from Kenneth Peacock to Helen Creighton, 9 July 1959. Public Archives of Nova Scotia, The Helen Creighton Collection, MG1, vol. 3512, file 23. Thanks to Anna Guigné for bringing this to my attention.

<sup>8</sup>Although Peacock delved widely in folksong and ballad collections to annotate the songs he had collected, he does not seem to have paid much if any attention to the work of G. Malcolm Laws, Jr. Laws’s two studies of North American Balladry — *Native American Balladry* and *American Balladry from British Broad-sides* — included, along with their analyses of the poetics of these traditions, extensive appendices, each containing what he described as “Bibliographical Syllabus.” Within each syllabus he grouped versions of the ballads he described as “Current in American Tradition” in topical categories. His criteria for currency was the collection of texts by reputable scholars. He consulted all of the published collections and many archival collections. He also drew upon information contained in collections of broadsides, songsters, and other types of cheap print that often play a role in circulating and recirculating songs in tradition. Each of Laws’s topical categories was assigned a letter, and each song within the category given a number. The result was a system of textual identification that, like Child’s 305 numbers for the English and Scottish Popular Ballads, became a standard for identifying Anglo-American balladry.

<sup>9</sup>Anna Kearney Guigné, personal communication.

<sup>10</sup>This is a reconstruction; Peacock later told Guigné that as far as he knew the correspondence containing these recalled lyrics no longer exists.

<sup>11</sup>The earliest and only manuscript for the song is Peacock’s typescript of the manuscript for his text A as published, in Canadian Museum of Civilization, Fonds Kenneth Peacock, Box 304, Document F. 1. Peacock collected some songs without a recorder in his first two years and these are represented in his collection by manuscripts. This typescript repre-

sents the only manuscript text in his collection made after 1952. Thanks to Anna Guigné for pointing this out to me.

<sup>12</sup>Squires told me (St. John's, 10/26/01) that her high school music teacher at Bishops College first taught it to her from a book (no doubt Fowke and Johnston). Later she saw Peacock's version and added verses from that to the version she already knew. When she was in London around 1970 she and Neil Murray visited Maud Karpeles and she sang her version for Karpeles.

<sup>13</sup>She did not approve, for example, of his adding a verse from another song by another singer to Aunt Charlotte Decker's text, for when she reprinted this version in *The Penguin Book of Canadian Folk Songs* in 1973, she removed that verse, without making any comment about having done so.

<sup>14</sup>Verse A. *As collected*: Hunt, 1; Bugden, 1 and 5, lines 3-4; Kinslow 872, 2 and 5; Kinslow 874, 5; Decker, 1; Simms, 1. *As edited*: Karpeles, 1 and 4; Peacock A (Decker), 1; Peacock B (Kinslow), 1 and 6.

<sup>15</sup>Verse B. *As collected*: Hunt, 2; Bugden, 2; Kinslow 872, 1; Kinslow 874, 1; Decker, 1; Simms, 2. *As edited*: Karpeles, 2; Peacock A (Decker), 2; Peacock B (Kinslow), 2. *Parallels*: Sharp (Karpeles 289, [1]); Robert Johnson (Peacock 714, ll. 3-4).

<sup>16</sup>Verse C. *As collected*: Hunt, 3; Bugden, 3; Kinslow 874, 2; Decker, 6, 2; Simms, 3. *As edited*: Karpeles, 3; Peacock A (Decker), 7; Peacock B (Kinslow), 5. *Parallels*: Sharp (Karpeles 289, [ll 1-2]); Robert Johnson (Peacock 714).

<sup>17</sup>Verse D. *As collected*: Hunt, 4, lines 1-3; Kinslow 872, 3; Kinslow 874, 3; Decker, 4. *As edited*: Peacock A (Decker), 4; Peacock B (Kinslow), 3. *Parallels*: Sharp (Karpeles 289 [3, ll. 1-3]), Vaughan Williams (Karpeles 289-90 [ll. 1-3]).

<sup>18</sup>Verse E. *As collected*: Bugden, 4; Simms, 4, lines 1-2.

<sup>19</sup>Verse F. *As collected*: Hunt, 4, lines 4-5; 5; Bugden, 5, lines 1-2; Kinslow 872, 4; Kinslow 874, 4; Decker, 5; Simms 4, lines 3-4. *As edited*: Peacock A (Decker), 6; Peacock B (Kinslow), 4.

<sup>20</sup>Verse G. *As collected*: Peacock A (Decker), 3.

<sup>21</sup>Verse H. *As collected*: Bugden, 6.

<sup>22</sup>Verse J. *As edited*: Peacock A (Decker), 5.

<sup>23</sup>PEA122, tape 874, on MUNFLA tape C11064B (accession #87-157).

<sup>24</sup>Newman's was a port that, until E.U. regulations put a stop to the practice, was produced in Portugal and aged in Newfoundland — the result of a practice that began when a ship carrying the port from Portugal to England was blown off course by a storm and landed in Newfoundland where, it was discovered, the port aged to a finer quality than in England.

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Tel: (709) 737-2144

E-mail: [nlstudies@mun.ca](mailto:nlstudies@mun.ca)

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