Habsburg Empire to the Americas: Transculturalism in a Song About Sisi's Assassination

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Abstract

Most studies of diasporic vernacular singing focus on song lyrics and emphasize the preservation of pre-emigration repertoire. In this two-article study, we focus in detail on one narrative song to illustrate the complexity of transculturation in Ukrainian-Canadian vernacular singing. Empress Elisabeth of the Habsburgs was assassinated in 1898, and this event was commemorated in a song in Ukrainian. The song has been documented over a wide territory and changed periodically to produce four clear chronological redactions. In this article, we examine the history of the song lyrics in available texts from Ukraine. The patterns are strikingly atypical for a "traditional folk song." Whereas the literature on the genre of "song-chronicles" emphasizes brief lifespans and limited local distribution for any given song, this example has been sung for over a century, diffused orally across hundreds of kilometers, and on two continents. Whereas previous scholarship on folksong transmission emphasizes vertical transmission "from generation to generation," we show that this song was much more often learned "horizontally," from peer to peer. Whereas most literature on 20th century folkloric transmission emphasizes the great power and influence of media, it is clear in this case that published versions of the song were rare and surprisingly un-influential.

"То є король Франсісяк, ше давно - давно,
то її забили, ту… ту царівну, й я знаю за ню співанку [sings].
Uh huh, правдива, yeah. [А де Ви її навчилися?] То так люди співали."

[It's about king Franciszek, long, long ago,
they killed her, that princess, and I know a song about her (sings).
Yes, it's a true one. (And where did you learn it?)
Well, people were singing like that.]

Nastja Masiowsky, interviewed by Robert Klymasz,
Fork River, Manitoba, 20 July 1964.

Introduction

Many studies of diasporic vernacular singing emphasize the preservation of pre-emigration repertoire or, contrastingly, its "loss" to assimilation. Ukrainian-Canadian vernacular singing has been treated in this binary way as well [Koshetz 1950], though also sometimes with a more positive interest in hybridity and transcultural qualities [Hnatiuk 1902; Fedyk (1911) 1927; Rudnyc'kyj 1956-1963; Melnyk 1972; Klymasz and Porter 1974; Klymasz and Medwidsky 1983; Klymasz 1992; Shevchenko 2012; see Nahachewsky 2018: 99-100]. The overwhelming focus of publications has been on the lyrics of the songs [exceptions include Koshetz 1950; Klymasz 1968; Cherwick 1999; Koszarycz 1997; Zaitseva-Herz 2024].

One song attracts our attention in this article because of the textual and musical features of its variants and transmission to the Canadian diaspora in two redactions. The song narrates the death of Empress Elisabeth of the Habsburgs in 1898 and has been the subject of one previous article, written by Bohdan Medwidsky [1978], to whom this study is dedicated. In this article, we step back to the core territories of the song in what is now western Ukraine and discuss the lyrics and their variability across twenty-nine full and partially documented texts over 125 years. We observe that the song circulated orally in four clear chronological redactions over its history, each reflecting an increasing distance from the initiating event and each influenced by the changing environment in these lands. This song's documented texts illustrate a pattern that contrasts with many clichés about folksong transmission and diffusion. Whereas the literature on narrative songs relating recent historical events emphasizes their brief lifespans and limited local distributions, this song spread widely and quickly and was still sung via oral transmission over a century after the event. Secondly, whereas previous scholarship on folksong transmission emphasizes vertical distribution "from generation to generation," we show that this song was much more often learned horizontally, from peer to peer. Thirdly, whereas most literature on twentieth-century folkloric transmission emphasizes the increasing power and influence of media, we demonstrate that published versions of this song were rare and surprisingly un-influential (at least until the fourth redaction in the twenty-first century).

Empress Elisabeth of the Habsburgs ("цісарева" or "цісарова" [wife of the emperor], nicknamed Sisi by her intimates), was visiting Geneva in the fall of 1898. On 10 September, as she and her attendant, lady-in-waiting Irma Sztáray, were walking along a lakeside promenade to board a steamer to Montreux, anarchist Luigi Lucheni punched her in the chest with a thin metal file. This assassination was consistent with a larger anarchist movement promoting violent "propaganda by the deed" in Europe and beyond at the turn of the twentieth century [Graham 2005]. She stood up again after the blow and walked to the steamer, then collapsed on the boat, which thereafter returned to dock to allow her to be carried back to her hotel. The thin blade resulted in an eight and half centimeter deep wound and had penetrated her heart (as later found in the

autopsy), making her survival impossible, and she died in about an hour [Yasenivs'kyi 1914: 164-181; Medwidsky 1978: 30-33; Matray and Krueger 2000: 67]; "Die Kaiserin lag in schmerzloser agonie. Die Mediziner erkannten schnell, dass keinerlei Hoffnung mehr bestand" [The Empress lay in a state of painless agony. The doctors quickly recognized that there was no longer any hope] [Matray and Krueger 2000: 67]. (1) The murder and state funeral were described extensively in the media.

The empress's assassination became related in song in Ukrainian very soon after the event. Western Ukrainian ethnographic territory was then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the empress was a very high-profile figure. It is intriguing that the song became popular in Ukrainian, though we have not been able to find evidence of similar songs about her in Hungarian, Polish, German, or other language communities in the Habsburg Empire, which were equally impacted. (2) Neither can we explain its popularity in the absence of songs of a similar character for other high-ranking members of the Habsburg court, such as Crown Prince Rudolf or Archduke Franz Ferdinand, who also met high-profile tragic deaths, nor the absence of songs about the demise of the Emperor Franz Josef himself. The song about Elisabeth blurs the boundaries between public commemoration and vernacular mythmaking, allowing performers to draw a humanized imperial figure into local imaginaries. Relations between the monarchy and its diverse subjects were very complex, but Ukrainians in this rural eastern crownland seem to have felt more than average support for the royals [see Himka 1988; Zubrytskyi and Sysyn 2013; and more generally Magocsi 1985; Subtelny (1988) 1996; Plokhy 2016].

On the other hand, we do not wish to fall into the same naive binary as in beginner folk prose discussions, in which personal experience narratives are believed to be "true" whereas fairy tales are "fictional." One cannot make blind generic generalizations about the many levels of engagements a storyteller has with the contents of a story, nor that a singer must understand the words that are being sung. We will demonstrate below that the text variants of this song are a rich and evolving mixture of historical truth and falsity. In terms of its meaning, the song can variously suggest patriotism, political identity, national/ethnic identity, nostalgia, sympathy for the victim, and gender-based empathy, and at other times disassociation, satire, and counter-cultural rebelliousness. Further, it was probably often sung, like many other traditional songs in vernacular settings, because of an aesthetic disposition for the act of singing, pleasure and satisfaction for its successful performance, the eloquence of a refined composition, emotional release, personal wellbeing, and/or for the intimacy and camaraderie of the singing occasion. We note, to illustrate, that the Empress's name never appears in any of the text variants. This may have been a function of respect, identifying her by title rather than name (although the Emperor himself is sometimes identified by his first name), but it may also have been an indication of relational distance (the Emperor's name is quite often corrupted and inaccurate), and surely, sometimes the result of simple ignorance about who she was (as evoked in the epigraph describing a "princess long ago"). We cannot be sure who Empress

Elisabeth of the Habsburgs was for the diverse singers, nor their motivations as they may have changed and combined over time. The meaning of the song to a singer may tend to be less opaque in the more recent documentations, though singing the song at a wedding or during a choral concert certainly suggests complexity and ambivalence. Especially for some of the older documentations, we can't know the mindset of rural tradition bearers, nor the impacts of when an educated person (with their own political position) came from the city, perhaps with an exotic machine, and asked them to sing out of context. We note that even the expert ethnographers of the early documentations were almost universally silent on the political sophistication and views of the singers, their overall song repertoire, the logic of their selections during the recording sessions, and usually even the sampling method and the contexts of recording sessions. These were simply not key issues in research at that time, though researchers were very scrupulous in documenting and commenting on other aspects, as we show below. Singers might have had multiple and diverse reasons to choose this song rather than another. The early performances of the song about the Empress may have functioned as expressions of personal admiration and cultural belonging, while many of the later ones seem to have had a satirical tone.

Influenced by these arguments, the goal of this study is not to focus primarily on the social environment and political context for the song. We acknowledge the prudence of restraint in our evaluation of its meaning in specific cases. Rather than focus on why the song arose and achieved popularity, we direct our attention to questions of how and when. Our methodological approach is to delve deeply into the textual and musical variation of the documented performances to reveal significant patterns in the singing tradition itself. Questions of meaning and social context are certainly involved, but are secondary, maximally derived from our primary data, the empirical textual and musical evidence itself.

Early History of the "Tsisareva" Song Text

Many intellectuals were interested in folklore texts as characteristic features of "the nation" in Ukrainian nation-building process at the turn of the twentieth century. They actively documented song lyrics and other folklore genres, publishing many in periodicals or scholarly works. Variants of the song about Empress Elisabeth were written down and reported by diverse collectors, and additional versions were recorded but not published. (3)

All these songs are structured in *kolomyika* form, that is, two lines of 4+4+6 syllables each (typically accented as | –∪∪∪ | –∪∪∪ | –∪∪∪ | – – |), rhyming to create one verse. The kolomyika was the dominant productive form in most areas of western Ukraine at the time [Hnatiuk 1905; Kolessa (1928) 1970: 40]. Significantly, the nine early versions of the song with geographic information were recorded in widely dispersed villages, hundreds of kilometers apart in some instances: "Народна пісня про смерть цісаревої Єлисавети належить зараз до найбільш поширених народних пісень в Галичині: її записи надійшли до нас майже одночасно з різних околиць" [The folk song about the death of Empress

Elisabeth is now among one of the most widespread folk songs in Galicia: I've received documentations of it from various locations almost at the same time] [Franko (1905) 1963: 97, cited in Dei 1972: 21]. None of the available versions are identical in their textual content.

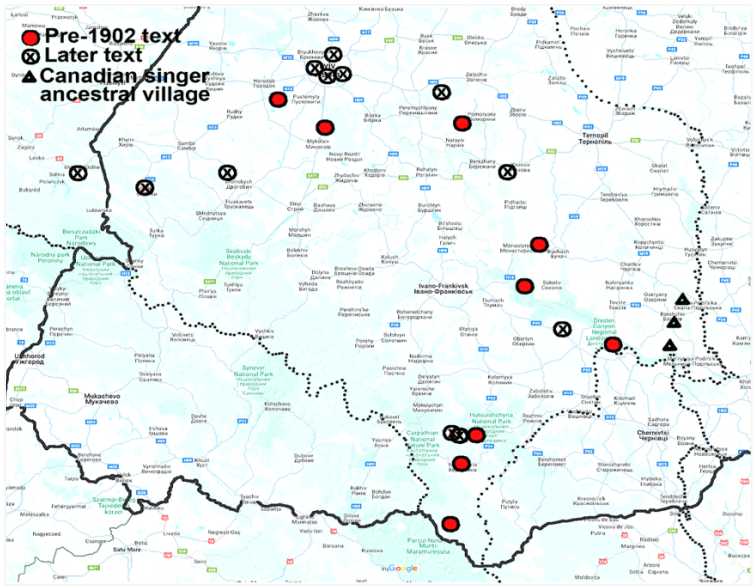

Figure 1: Locations documented for "Tsisareva" song versions, all within the bounds of the eastern Crownland of Galicia and Lodomeria (dotted lines).

The five available complete early texts of the songs share the same overall content, featuring six "scenes" (locations in which the narrative is set): scene one, Vienna, the Emperor and Empress plan to give medals to their citizens; scene two, Vienna and a narrative space, foreshadowing her death and sadness and describing her difficult life and good works; scene three, Switzerland, she should not have gone to the spa there; scene four, Geneva, the lakeside murder, efforts to save her, and her death; scene 5, Vienna and the empire, the Emperor and citizens learn about her death and grieve; scene 6, Vienna and a narrative space, the funeral, mourning, and a panegyric. Many of the lines within each of the scenes are similar in content and sequence across variants, though they often vary in length and finer details, such as specific vocabulary, filler syllables, and dialectal forms. The two versions published by Ivan Franko in 1900 are the most similar and suggest a more recent common source; they are also geographically least distant, both in Buchach county. The versions sung by Fit' and Dutchyk have several more significant differences, including the transposition of parts of scene three into a different sequence, as well as numerous unique phrases and lines. The first and last two lines of the Dutchyk version, for example, present a brief framing scene,

depicting village girls thinking about the Empress and composing the song. (4) Otherwise, however, the text of every version recorded in the first decade after the murder is easily recognizable as "the same song," the same "type set," or the same "redaction." A sense of their similarities and differences can be gained by comparing the first sentence of scene one in these variants: (5)

> Ой наш цїсар з цїсарівнов взяли ся радити: | ой які би то призента тим людьом зробити?
>
> [Our lord, the emperor and the empress began to deliberate | What kind of presents to make for those people?]
>
> Ivan Zhylavyi (singer and transcriber), Slobidka horishnia, Buchach povit. [Franko 1900: 54]
>
> А наш цїсар, цїсарева зачили радити: | ой які би тим жовнярам призента зробити?
>
> [Our lord, the emperor and the empress started to deliberate | What kind of presents should we make for those soldiers?]
>
> M. Hnatiuk (singer and transcriber), Koropets', Buchach povit. [Franko 1900: 54]
>
> А наш цісар з цісаревов взєли сі радити: | «Яку би [нам] тим жомнєрам памнєтку зробити!
>
> [Our lord, the emperor and the empress began to deliberate | What kind of presents should we make for those soldiers?]
>
> Ivan Fit' (singer), Volodymyr Hnatiuk (collector), Brodky, L'viv oblast', 1900. Orthography revised by Dei [1972: 174-175].
>
> Взьались цьісар с цьісаріуноу, взьали сьи радити, | йакіж би то й тим жоуньарам призента зробити.
>
> [Our lord, the emperor and the princess began to deliberate | And what sort of presents to make for those soldiers?]
>
> Iosyf Rozdol's'kyi (collector), Pecharne, Zalishchyky povit, 1901. [Rozdol's'kyi and Liudkevych 1906: 154]
>
> А наш цьісар с цьісаровоу взьили сьі за руки | посьідали конец стола, і думайут думки.

[Our lord, the emperor and the empress took each other by the hands | They sat at the end of a table and are thinking thoughts]

Iosyf Rozdol's'kyi (collector), Liubin' malyi, Lviv povit. [Rozdol's'kyi and Liudkevych 1906: 160]

А наш цьісар с цьісаревоу стали сьа радити, | а йяк би то тим жомньарам презента зробити.

[Our lord, the emperor and the empress took to deliberating | What kind of presents to make for those soldiers?]

Iosyf Rozdol's'kyi (collector), Dunaïv, Peremyshliany povit. [Rozdol's'kyi and Liudkevych 1908: 179]

Ой сів цісар з цісаревов, стали се радити: | Ой що ж би то за призента жовнірам зробити?

[Our lord, the emperor and the empress began to deliberate | What should we give as presents for the soldiers?]

Unknown singer, Lesia Ukrainka (collector), 1900-1901, Burkut (?), Lviv oblast. [Ukrainka 1971: 263; 2019]

Наш пан цїсар з цїсаровов стали сї радити, | Йикі би тим жовньирикам презента зробити:

[Our lord, the emperor and the empress began to deliberate | What kind of presents to make for those dear soldiers?]

Third and fourth lines in this version, following a framing verse. Ivan Dutchyk (singer), Volodymyr Shukhevych (collector), 1902?, Zhab'ie [now Verkhovyna], Kosiv povit. [Shukhevych 1902: 183-184]

We present two full texts relevant to our analysis below:

M. Hnatiuk version, 1900
[Franko 1900: 54-55]

Scene 1 ----------
А наш цїсар, цїсарева зачили радити:
ой які би тим жовнярам призента зробити?

Слава Богу найвишшому, що-смо тілько жили:
подаруймо тим минтелї, котрі в нас служили.

Scene 2 ----------
Ой наш цїсар Франц Йосиф, думає о Бозї
а царівна від ворогів умерла в дорозі.

Masiowsky version, Canada, 1964 [Klymasz n.d.]
(6)

А наш цісар з цісарівнов, взяли си радити
Які ж би-то тим жовнярам презента зробити.

Вже п'ятдесят літ минуло як ми царствували
Подаруй-мо їм метелі, щоб нас пам'ятали.

Ой наш цїсар сідит в Видни, тай ся там турбує,
Що за панев цїсарівнов цілий край банує.

Тай жалує, тай жалує як не жалувати?
Вона була така добра, як та рідна мати.

Рідна мати добра була, що нас породила,
а царівна добра була, ввес край боронила.

Скасувала всї улиці, кайдани тай буки,
тай зазнала від ворогів тяженької муки.
Scene 3 ----------
Наша пані цїсарівна єсть з людського роду,
послали ї бай купати в швайцарівну воду.

Бодай тота Швайцарівна була ся розпала,
Тай була би цїсарівна муки не зазнала.

Була би ся бай скупала в медї тай в молоці,
тай би була не терпіла спіса в лївім боці.

Scene 4 ----------
Старий батярь нехрещений, в Парижу роджений.
Циж він так сам із себе чи він намовлений?

Циж він так сам із себе чи він намовлений?
Що прискочив до царівни, як той пес скажений.

Що прискочив до царівни, як той пес скажений.
пустив у ню острий пильник, що був затроєний.

Затроєний, запущений тяженького трійла, -
ай, що вона, така панї, тілько витерпіла!

Майор жовняр взяв ю в шіфу тай взяв пізнавати,
зараз зачав до цїсара смутний лист писати,

Scene 5 ----------
Зачьив цїсар, зачьив цїсар смутний лист читати,
не міг, не міг три годинї з жалю відозвати.

Тай розписав той сумний лист по цілій державї:
вмерла панї цїсарівна в такі сумні славі.

Тай той сумний лист великий по цілій родинї,
що віддала Богу духа в четвертій годині.

Scene 6 ----------
Тай з'їхала сї вся родина з цїлої держави,
тай зачьили жалувати найяснішої панї.

А наш цісар-цісарівна княжеського роду,
Поїхала купатися в Швайцарську воду.

Бодай то та Швайцаріва була ся запала,
Була би ся цісаріва в нашім краю скупала!

Тай була би ся скупала в меді та в молоці,
Тай була би не терпіла тріла в лівім боці.

Бакер-букер не хрещений, в Парижу роджений
Тай прискочив до цариці, як той пес скажений.

Взєв се перник завострений, трілом запущений
Та й прискочив до цариці, як той пес скажений.

Наша пані цісарівна в шовковій сорочці
Та й не було ніде знаку, лиш в одній квіточці.

Взяла пані цісарівна на шіфу сідати,
Пан капітан ві там шифі, зачив пізнавати.

Пан капітан на том шифі зачив пізнавати,
Зачив же він до цісара сумний лист писати.

Писав же він сумні листи по всій родині,
Що віддала Богу душу в четвертій годині.

Scene 1 ----------
And our Tsar-emperor-princess, started to deliberate
How could they make a present to the soldiers.

Glory to God in the highest, that we've lived so long:
Let's give medals, to those who have served us.

Scene 2 ----------
Oh, our Emperor Franz-Joseph, is thinking of God
And our Empress, from enemies, has died on the road

Oh, our Emperor sits in Vienna, and has his worries there,
That for our lady the Empress, the whole country grieves.

It's in sorrow, it's in sorrow, how could it not be in sorrow?
She was so good to us, like our own dear mother.

Our own mother was so good, as she gave us birth,
And the Empress was so good, she protected the whole country.

She abolished all gauntlets, chains and canings,
And now she has suffered great tortures from the enemies.

Scene 3 ----------
Our lady Empress is of a people's family,
They sent her off to bathe in Swiss water.

That Switzerland should have fallen apart,
Sothe Empress would not have known such injuries.

She would have bathed in milk and honey
And would not have suffered a spear in her left side.

Scene 4 ----------
An old hooligan, unbaptized, he was born in Paris.
Did he do it on his own, or was he ordered to it?

Did he do it on his own, or was he ordered to it?
That he jumped at the Queen, like a mad dog.

That he jumped at the Queen, like a mad dog.
Sent into her a sharp file, that was set with poison

Set with poison, contaminated with heavy venom,
Oi, that she, such a lady, suffered so greatly!

And our Tsar-emperor-princess, started to deliberate
How could they make a present to the soldiers.

"Now fifty years have passed that we've reigned
Let's give them some medals, so they'll remember us!"

And our Tsar-emperor-princess, of the princely family,
Went swimming in Swiss water.

That Swiss water should have sunken,
She would have just stayed in our land for a bath!

Here she could have bathed in honey and milk,
And she wouldn't have suffered poison in her left side.

Backer-Buker, unbaptized, he was born in Paris.
He jumped at the Queen like a mad dog.

He took a sharpened penknife, laced with poison.
He jumped at the Queen like a mad dog.

Our lady, the Queen, was in a silk shirt
And there was no sign anywhere, but a single [red blood] flower.

Our lady the princess went to board the ship,
The captain on that ship started understanding.

Maior, a soldier, took her to the ship, and started understanding, And right away he began to write a sad letter to the emperor.	The captain on that ship started understanding. He began to write a sad letter to the emperor.
Scene 5 ---------- The emperor started, the emperor started to read the sad letter, He couldn't, he couldn't, respond for three hours for the sorrow.	
And he wrote out that sad letter out to all the land The Empress has died in such an inglorious way.	
And that great sad letter went out to the whole family, That she gave her soul to God at the fourth hour.	He wrote sad letters to the whole family, That she gave her soul to God at the fourth hour.
Scene 6 ---------- And the whole family came together from the whole land, And they began to grieve this most excellent lady.	

The consistency of the six-scene structure and the numerous identical expressions among geographically distant variants by 1900 strongly suggest the existence of an influential and elaborated text within months of the event, which then spread widely. (7) This song's creation surely involved mediated information at its very core. Most співанки-хроніки [song-chronicles] were composed in the immediate vicinity of the event itself, perhaps by neighboring villagers [Kolessa (1928) 1970: 53-58]. The events described in this song, however, took place in Geneva and Vienna, many hundreds of kilometers away and far beyond the personal geographic horizon of most of the singers, (8) yet the song text still communicates numerous accurate details. The singers knew, for example, that the murderer was born in Paris, the attack was swift, the weapon was a sharpened file, and the Empress stepped onto a steamship in the aftermath—particulars available initially only through journalistic reporting or some other media technology.

Other models for the origin of songs with elaborate scenarios suggest multiple independent fragments combining and overlapping and sometimes then crystalizing as mergers. (9) If this was such a composite text in the beginning, its structure became assembled, harmonized, and stabilized very quickly, probably within months of the event, and certainly before the geographically widespread diffusion of 1900 and 1901.

The identity of the original author of this song has inspired speculation: Franko notes that Zhylavyi was a long-time soldier in the Austro-Hungarian army and that the narrator's positionality is consistent with such a soldier [1900: 55]; the Dutchyk version suggests village girls near Zhab'ie composed the song [Shukhevych 1902: 183]; (10) one commentator argues that the song is a translation of an original German poem [Yasenivs'kyi 1914]; and later descriptions venture that it was originally composed and disseminated by *lirnyky*,

blind itinerant minstrels playing the hurdy-gurdy [Zhulakivs'kyi 1928: 11; Ielyzaveta Bavars'ka 2024], a peasant named Kovbasniuk, or a criminal sitting in jail with the assassin [Medwidsky 1978: 33, 35]. Hnatiuk writes about this specifically:

> Коли якась нова пісня утворить ся, простолюдин почувши її і знаючи, що вона нова, а не знаючи, як широко вона вже відома, любить підшивати ся під її автора і подавати себе за нього. Про се я переконав ся на пісні про смерть цїсаревої Єлисавети. Я дістав коло 10 її варіянтів із ріжних сторін краю, нераз дуже віддалених від себе. Майже під кождим варіянтом було написано: Зложив той і той, там і там. Очевидно, зложити пісню на одну тему кільком людям у ріжних місцях, річ можлива; неможливо одначе, щоб вони зложили її так, аби вона мала однаковий ритм, однакове число стихів, однакові реченя і то на стілько, що в тих 10 варіянтах не можна навіть віднайти двох редакций! Натурально отже, що всї претенденти на її авторство—фальшиві претенденти. [1902: 2-3]
>
> [When some new song is created, a common man, having heard it and knowing that it is new, but not aware of how widely it is already known, likes to pull himself in and claim to be its author. I became convinced of this by the song about the death of Empress Elisabeth. I received about 10 variants from different locations in the land, sometimes very far apart from each other. Under almost every variant, it was written: Composed by such and such, there and there. Obviously, it is possible for several people in different places to create a song about the same topic. However, it is not possible that they all composed it using an identical rhythm, an identical number of verses, identical sentences, and so much that in those 10 variants one can't even find two different redactions! It is natural then, that all the pretenders to its authorship—are false pretenders.]

Hnatiuk clearly sides with what became the majority view in debates of the time: "The authors of most studies of folklore involving fairy tales, ballads… and other complex forms assume monogenesis rather than multiple origins" [Georges and Owen Jones 1995: 138-139]. Oleksii Dei [1974: 21-25] is more accommodating about the local peasant claims of authorship than Hnatiuk. In any event, we have only a fraction of the evidence necessary to reconstruct the exact origins of the song text.

We propose that because of the sensational assassination and the Empress's celebrity the song was composed quickly in at least a rudimentary form in an environment with access to journalistic reporting. From there, it spread like gossipy wildfire in the immediate aftermath, retained interest, and was integrated into ever more singers' repertoires for a longer period than most songs about current events. Whereas most newly composed folksongs about recent events

never developed beyond local interest and had short life spans [Kolessa (1928) 1970: 45; Dei 1972: 6-7], this event, which shook the entire empire and resonated in its upper and lower classes, was exceptional.

Songs such as "Tsisareva" were not particularly interesting to the many folklorists who were oriented to the Romantic notions of archaic origins and pure "national character." This part of the peasants' repertoire, however, did attract the attention when academic discussions turned to the more post-Romantic question of whether folklore was dying out, or whether traditional people's creativity continued to be productive. Several scholars thus wrote about the formation of new narrative songs in the Ukrainian oral tradition. Volodymyr Hnatiuk [1902], Filiaret Kolessa [(1928) 1970], and others called them "пісенні новотвори" [newly created songs]. Soviet Ukrainian scholarship defined "співанки-хроніки" [song-chronicles] as an independent genre in the 1960s and related it to ballads and historical songs [Dei 1972: 7]. According to Oleksii Dei, the chief designator of this genre, співанки-хроніки were most characteristic in the Carpathian and pre-Carpathian regions—western Ukraine. Earlier, Kolessa had characterized them in this way:

> До найбільш характерних признаків пісенних новотворів оповідального змісту належить, безперечно, реалізм зображення, відбиття безпосереднього враження від події, що дала привід до зложення даної пісні, багатство реалістичних локальних рис та подробиць… щоби пісня могла прийнятися в широких кругах поза місцевістю, де з'явилася, мусить отрястися із локальних подробиць, важливих і зрозумілих лише для найближчої сфери, мусить позбутися індивідуальних рис якогось одного відірваного факту… Колектив, властиво цілий ряд колективів, через які сей твір переходить, мандруючи з покоління в покоління, з краю в край… мають тенденцію стирати все індивідуальне, зв'язане з обставинами місця й моменту, а полишати й розвивати найбільш загальне, яке віддає настрої типові, загальнолюдські. [Колесса (1928) 1970: 45, 47; see Hnatiuk 1902: 10]

> [Certainly, among the most characteristic features of newly composed folk songs with narrative content are the realism of their depiction, representation of direct impressions about the event that inspired the creation of the given song, a richness of realistic local features and details… So that a song can become incorporated into broader circles beyond the location in which it appeared, it must shake off its local details, which are important and understandable only for the closest sphere, it must rid itself of the individualistic qualities of one particular isolated fact… The collective, rather a whole series of collectives, through which this text travels as it moves from one generation of singers to the next, from one locality to another… have the tendency to wipe away all individual elements, tied to the specific situation of that place

> and that time, and allow only the most general to develop, which produces more generic human emotions.]

Kolessa also writes that songs in their youngest phases tend to use local dialectal language, even though they often immediately also use poetic elements: archaic forms, extensive diminutives, special grammatical turns, established epithets, parallelisms, and others [(1928) 1970: 58-59]. Dialectal idiosyncrasies tend to decrease as the song integrates into the broader folkloric tradition, and the poetic tone and linguistic devices tend to increase. Songs get "polished" through repetition, as each singer "re-composes"/"remembers"/"searches for" the next word, expression, and rhyme during each performance. The most comfortable rhythmic, poetic, and euphonic solutions tend to leave an impact, get repeated, become more solidly memorized, and stabilize [Hnatiuk 1902: 2; Kolessa (1928) 1970: 48; see also Lord (1960) 2000; and more generally, Olrik (1909) 1965; Ong (1982) 2002: 31-76; Lord 1987].

Franko describes his two 1900 versions of the "Tsisareva" song as obviously *in statu nascendi* [1900: 54; see also Hnatiuk 1902: 2]. All within a few years of the assassination itself, the diverse dialects remain clear in the eight early texts, while poetic devices remain rather modest, including a few standard epithets (наш пан Цісар [our lord Kaiser], пес скажений [mad dog]), and diminutives (рідненька мати [dearest mother], тяженькії муки [severe suffering]). The feminine rhyme (two or three syllables deep) and rhythm structures are quite consistent and strong.

Numerous elements are repeated in these song variants, elements which can be interpreted as folklorizations of historical facts. (11) Each scene is somewhat reduced to a tableau, usually with a maximum of two active characters. In two versions, the heroine's identity mutates from цісарева [wife of the emperor] to цісарівна [daughter of the emperor, princess] [Franko 1900: 54; Rozdol's'kyi 1906: 154]. Indeed, princesses were typical key characters in traditional folk narratives of this era, characteristically passive captives or victims of the main villain. (12) The early versions emphasized how the Empress suffered terribly, providing dramatic effect and a standard image of a violent death. The historical descriptions, meanwhile, indicate that she verbalized that she was not in pain and might not have even been aware of being stabbed and then later lying mostly unconscious [Matray and Krueger 2000: 67]. The sinister idea that the weapon was laced with poison appears from the earliest texts and is then repeated in all later song redactions, becoming a somewhat stable epithet "Острий пильник, що був затроєний [sharp file, that was poisoned]; острий пильник, трійлом напущений [sharp file, poison-dipped]; пустив у ню трійло [introduced poison into her]; Тай була би не терпіла тріла в лівім боці [So she wouldn't have suffered poison in her left side]." No poison was reported in the historical accounts or descriptions of the autopsy [Matray and Krueger 2000]. (13) Also, ahistorically, the captain of the ship is described as the one who informs the Emperor by writing a letter. Letters were a common motif in folk songs [Klymasz 1969a]. In a typical balladic tableau, the Emperor sits immobilized for three hours

after reading the news. The songs consistently declare that she died at four o'clock, perhaps in part because the phrase "в четвертій годині" [at four o'clock] has six syllables that fit very comfortably into the second half of a kolomyika line. Historically however, the pronouncement of death was made at 2:10 pm. Each of these numerous elements is consistent with a folklorized narrative of a gruesome homicide

Two Literary Versions

A slightly later text adds complexity: an anonymous sixteen-page booklet was produced by publishers Chaikovskyi and Kelbusievych in Lviv in 1907 entitled, *Піснь руско-народна о покійній Цїсареві Єлисаветї що погибла з рук анархісти Люкенього в Женеві дня 10. вересня 1898* [A Folk-Ruthenian Song About the Late Empress Elisabeth, Who Died by the Hand of the Anarchist Lucheni in Geneva on 10 September 1898]. The booklet consists simply of the song text and a reproduced photograph of the Empress on the cover.

Whereas the versions described above were also "published," they were presented by folklorists or ethnomusicologists with an intent to communicate the orally transmitted vernacular song transparently to their readerships. Perhaps the Zhylavyi and Hnatiuk versions were "cleaned up" by the literate rural men who wrote down the texts before they sent their letters to the newspaper office in Lviv [Franko 1900: 54], though Franko is confident that these are "folk songs," i.e., not actually composed by Zhylavyi or Hnatiuk. Each person creating the paper documentation certainly had to decide on the orthography of the transcript, punctuation, line spacing, resolution of unclear syllables, etc. In general, however, Rozdol's'kyi, Liudkevych, Franko, and Shukhevych surely followed ethnographic best practices of the time in presenting the oral text as accurately as possible. Indeed, Rozdol's'kyi and Liudkevych invested heavily in the cumbersome new phonograph technology specifically because their goal was to fix the smallest acoustic details as dependably as possible. (14)

The 1907 booklet, however, presents a different situation altogether and unequivocally shows substantial individual poetic creation overlaid upon existing oral model(s). It can be characterized as a literary text more than a vernacular song; however, these categories certainly overlap greatly. (15) Similar song booklets were produced by publishers in Ukrainian parts of the Habsburg Empire (and beyond) at this time, and in some ways they can be seen as a late modification of broadside sheets.

Like a "піснь народна" [folksong] referenced in its title, the 1907 poem also features kolomyika verse form, and presents the same six scenes and approximately twenty of the same lines as the earlier orally documented texts. However, the lines are incorporated within a much-expanded body of 240 lines in total. Whereas Hnatiuk noted that individuals often claimed authorship of orally transmitted songs, the reverse is observable here—a clear individual text was labeled a "folksong" and presented anonymously. This author was obviously familiar with some orally transmitted versions but then supplemented them with

a great deal more detail about the murder and death: scene four occupies approximately eight lines in the earlier versions, but sixty-two lines in this text. It provides substantial detail about the brief physical attack; rumored interrelations among several anarchists; that the Empress was helped to her feet and walked a further hundred meters to the steamship; that she collapsed after stepping onboard; that she was massaged and given a drink; that her tight corset was loosened and that they discovered a stab wound only then; that the ship left the dock but returned soon thereafter, so that she could be carried on a makeshift stretcher back to her hotel; and that two doctors and a priest attended to her at the hotel bed, but that she died soon thereafter. These facts are consistent with historical descriptions of the attack and could have only been known to an eyewitness and, much more likely, from reading the detailed accounts assembled and promulgated by journalists in its aftermath. The same pattern is repeated in scene six, which occupies two lines in each of the earlier versions but ninety lines in the 1907 poem, where it presents details about the funerary proceedings in Vienna the following week and a long panegyric. Whereas the vernacular texts also present a perspective sympathetic to the Empress and the Emperor, the point of view of the 1907 author shows a much more explicit and intentional political stance—very conservative, religious, and monarchist.

The more specialized and technical vocabulary, as well as the lesser euphonic qualities of the additional contents, give an impression of a less "polished" versification than in the earlier oral texts, a feature characteristic of a composition project made by an educated amateur prioritizing narrative content and ideology. We have seen that the processes of anonymization and reduction of detail are already evident in oral versions from 1900 and 1902—these qualities are strongly reversed in the 1907 poem, which abounds in concrete facts and details. For example, this author correctly names Luigi Lucheni [Люкені] as the assassin and calls him an anarchist, while the oral versions refer to him namelessly and variously as an unbaptized hooligan and troublemaker [лайдак гунцвот, старий батярь, батьир нехрещений]. The 1907 author also names the Empress's lady in waiting, Countess Irma Sztáray [Стараєвна], doctors Golay [Ґаляй] and Mayer [Маєр], the priest [Пагніс], and others. He describes where black flags were hung in Vienna, that eight horses pulled the coffin in the parade, that the emperor and his daughters followed behind it, and that a solemn march was played with large drums. An official mourning period of six months was declared. The vernacular texts had also occasionally mentioned a grieving period but presented it from the perspective of rural folk: "А за панев цїсаровов чельидь банувала, | Та нї в сьвита нї в недїлї вже не данцувала." [And the girls sorrowed for the lady Empress | And so ceased their dancing on Sundays and on holidays] [Shukhevych 1902: 184, lines 39-40].

One more literary version of the song about Empress Elisabeth's assassination was produced in 1914, this time in a Ukrainian publishing house in Winnipeg, Canada [Yasenivs'kyi 1914: 182-184]. It was part of a 192-page biography of the Empress translated by Maksym Yasenivs'kyi from a source in the German language *Die Märthyrerin auf dem Kaiserthrone* [The Martyr on the

Emperor's Throne] attributed to Countess Marie Louise Larish-Wallersee [Märthyrerin 1900]. (16) Yasenivs'kyi simply calls the verses a "song" and presents it anonymously. This text also follows the six-scene composition closely, has thirty-four lines, and strongly resembles vernacular versions from earlier years. The language and orthography of the Yasenivs'kyi version uses more modernized Ukrainian. Interestingly, it does show some possible influences from the 1907 publication, but very few. For example, like the 1907 author, he notes correctly that the Empress is "Наша пані цїсарева з *баварського* роду" [Our lady the Empress is from a Bavarian family line (emphasis added)], whereas most of the early vernacular singers included the same sentence but not the "Bavarian" adjective, using instead a variety of other ascriptions for her background (людського [people's], руського [Ruthenian], боярського [boyar], боварського [a corruption of boyar]). He calls the ship a "корабель," rather than the earlier versions' дамшіфа [Dampfschiff]—German for a steamboat. He follows the 1907 text in that the Emperor was incapacitated for "two" hours when he heard the news, rather than three hours, like in all the folk versions. Interestingly, Yasenivs'kyi also names the murderer specifically, though he spells his name "Лючені" [probably lju:tʃɛni:] rather than "Люкені" [lju:kɛni:] as in the 1907 version. This point is unequivocal evidence of written rather than oral transmission; he does not know Italian, has not heard it pronounced orally, and imagines the surname "Lucheni" as a German or English speaker would read it from paper, with a "ch" sound. Yasenivs'kyi does not share the 1907 author's emphasis on glorifying the Kaiser nor bemoaning that the Empress's death took place in "чужина, за границев" [in a foreign land]. (17)

A Second Redaction of the Vernacular Text

The emperor died in 1916, and the Habsburg Empire itself collapsed at the end of World War I in 1918. The pro-monarchist tone of the song had lost much of its currency by that time, and Empress Elisabeth's personal celebrity was diminished twenty years after her passing. Serhii Plokhy [2015] notes that Ukrainophiles tended to be pro-Habsburg prior to the war of 1914-1918, whereas a competing political orientation, the Moscophiles, supported Tsarist Russia. Plokhy explicitly suggests that the "Tsisareva" song may have sometimes taken on this political connotation beyond the Austro-Hungarian political context and after 1918 [2015: 267]. Members of village intelligentsia may have promoted or suppressed peasant song repertoires somewhat in that period to reflect their own ideologies.

The Habsburgian patriotism of the 1907 author became less significant to vernacular singers as western Ukrainian lands were contested during the period of the Ukrainian National Republic and then after being incorporated in pieces into the Second Polish Republic, Czechoslovakia, and Romania. In particular, this song was not very attractive for the burgeoning post-war Ukrainian national movement with its many Romantic nation-building features: the song was clearly not ancient and dealt with an event that took place outside of Ukrainian territory,

featuring protagonists who were not Ukrainian, represented a non-Ukrainian ruling nobility, and thus could not be used as an illustration of the beautiful Ukrainian national character (nor Polish, Czechoslovak, or Romanian for that matter, all states which owed their current political status to the demise of the Habsburgs). Some forty Ukrainian songbooks published in the twentieth century were perused for this project, and this song about the assassination of Empress Elisabeth was not found even once. The song clearly persisted in vernacular repertoires, though it was not promoted or sustained by powerful agents and media of official culture.

Exceptionally, two fragments of the song are reproduced in a nostalgia-filled short story by Ukrainian nationalist Marian Zhurakivs'kyi, printed in a Ukrainian student's journal in Warsaw in 1928:

> Сліпий лірник грав на лірі і співав захриплим голосом. Співав про цісареву: Як то вона пішла си купати в карілзбадьську воду, як — — —
> Лукин батир нехрищений | В Парижу роджений
> Як прискочив до царівни | Як той пес скажений,
> як запхав її в перса шпиндель затроєний — — —
> Від тогди всякий сум йде, | Терпить Русь світая,
> А на небі появилась | Мітла вогневая…,
> Кажут люди, що ворожит | Войну, помір, труди,
> І здаєтси, що на Руси | Добра вже не буде.
> Хилились мужичі голови до долу — жінки плакали. [1928: 11]
>
> [A blind hurdy-gurdy player played on his instrument and sang in a hoarse voice. He sang about the empress: How she went to bathe in the Karlsbad waters, how — — —
> Lukyn the unbaptized hooligan | Born in Paris
> How he jumped at the empress | Like a mad dog,
> how he stuck a poisoned spindle into her breast — — —
> Since then, many sorrows persist, | Holy Rus' suffers,
> And in the sky appeared | A fiery broom…,
> People say that this foretells | War, death, struggles,
> And it seems, that in Rus' [Ukraine] | We will no longer have good fortune.
> Men bowed their heads low — women cried.]

Zhurakivs'kyi clearly quotes the traditional song, referencing scene three, quoting scene four, but he features a different ending. He presents an image of a comet in the sky as a dark portent, incorporating it into scene six. Indeed, 1898 and 1899 were exceptional years for comet observations [see Denning 1897], which were likely discussed in local media and inspired anxiety and fear according to traditional beliefs. (18) Significantly, in this song the comet foretells dark days for Rus'-Ukraine, no longer for the Habsburgs. One might think that

Zhurakivs'kyi invented these lines to fit his storyline, but several other documentations of "Tsisareva" suggest otherwise.

Though the Zhurakivs'kyi text is incomplete, it features a striking resemblance to a version sung by A. Burman, documented by Sofia Hrytsa in 1970, east of Lviv [Dei 1972: 176] and one sung by Y. Elyjiw in Toronto for Bohdan Medwidsky in approximately 1977 [Medwidsky 1978: 35]. (19) Elyjiw was a migrant from western Ukraine to Canada during the Second World War, thus his song and Zhurakivs'kyi's 1928 fragment imply that these themes were established in the interwar period. (20) The similarities among these three distant documentations suggest that the motifs became somewhat stable. Conforming with Dei [1972], we identify this as a separate redaction of the "Tsisareva" song. We quote these latter two texts to illustrate the new features of this redaction and give an impression of their consistency:

Наша пані цісарева тєжко занепали,
Так, же, правє, два месьонци з лужка не вставали.
Зажурився пан наш ясний, такі слова рече:
"Може, би сі викупала, стало би ти лекше."
Наша пані цісарева ради вислухала
І на другий день раненько зофорт виїхала.
Наша пані цісарева з ганьсбурського роду
Поїхала сі купати в карлісбадську воду.
Ледви вспіла шати знєти та й шпригнула в ванну,
Юж сі зрада зготовила на шляхетну панну,
Люкин-батєр затрацений, в Паридзу зродзений,
Запхав пані цісаревій шпіндель затруєний.
Запхав шпіндель в саме серце, кровця сі полила,
Не минули цвай секундлі, ганц духа спустила.
Якби був так Франц пірішко мав бабу на воці,
Була б жила, не терпіла шпіндля в лівім боці.
Бодай тую Швайцарію кров ясна залліла,
Була б наша цісарева до дзісь дзісяй жила.
З тої пори велик туск став, терпить Русь святая,
І на небі появилась мйотла вогневая.
Кажуть люди, же вість чують, войну, голод, труди
І же юж на святій Русі та й добра не буде.

[Our lady, the empress has gone down seriously in health
So that, really, for two months she has not gotten out of bed.
Our bright lord became worried, and uttered these words:
"Maybe, you might take a bath, you'll feel better."
Our lady the empress listened to the advice
And early on the second day, she quickly departed.
Our lady the empress of Hansburg lineage

Went to bathe in Karlsbad water.
She had barely taken off her resplendent vestments and jumped into the tub,
And already treachery is being plotted against the most noble lady.
Lukin-the bedeviled scoundrel, born in Paris,
Thrust a poisoned spindle into the empress.
He thrust the spindle right into her heart, blood was spilled,
Not two seconds passed, she gave up her spirit completely.
If that Franz the dumpling would have kept his eye on his woman,
She'd have lived, not suffered the spindle in her left side.
May that Swiss land be inundated with bright blood,
Our princess would have lived until this very day.
From that time a great sorrow has arisen, holy Rus' is suffering,
And in the sky a fiery broom has appeared.
People say that they feel premonitions, war, famine, suffering
And that on holy Rus' there will no longer be good fortune.]

A. Burman (singer), S. Hrytsa (collector), Holohory, Zolochiv county, Lviv oblast'. [Dei 1972: 175-176]

Our lady, the empress fell gravely ill
So that for almost three weeks she did not get up from bed.
Our magnificent lord stood at her side and is looking down on the bed
But since he is not a doctor he can't help her a bit.
Our magnificent lord stood at her side and spoke the following words:
Maybe if you somehow took a bath then you will feel better.
Our lady the empress of Bavarian lineage
Went to bathe in Swiss water.
She had not yet taken off her resplendent vestments nor gotten into the tub
And already treachery is being plotted against the most beautiful lady.
Some unbaptized scoundrel born in Paris
Thrust a poisoned spindle into the empress.
He entered the poisoned spindle, blood was flowing,
Not two minutes passed, she gave up her ghost completely.
He thrust the poisoned spindle between the white breasts
And the lady, the empress will not breath anymore.
The very lord, the emperor is weeping for her, Holy Rus' is weeping,
And on the sky a fiery broom appeared….

Y. Elyjiw (singer), B. Medwidsky (collector and translator). [Medwidsky 1978: 35-36, lines 7-26 of 34]

This redaction presents some notable creativity and an increasing proportion of historically inaccurate images that might be fitting for a generic "murder at the

spa" narrative; the longer versions invoke the image of a famously beautiful woman undressing and hopping into a bathtub when the assassin strikes, whereas in reality she was attacked on the street while fully clothed in her customary long black dress. She has not explicitly morphed into a "princess" in these versions, but she jumped [шпригнула] into the tub in a way that is uncharacteristic of a sixty-year-old woman (even if the empress was renowned for her physical fitness). The killer stabs a spindle rather than a metal file into her heart, blood flows, and she dies in two seconds or two minutes. Historically, the blood did not "flow," but instead the tiny weapon and her tight corset kept internal and external bleeding to a minimum. Only when they loosened her clothing on the boat did they reveal a small "flower" of blood on her underclothes above her left breast and then realized that she had been stabbed rather than just punched. She did not die instantly, but after about an hour.

Most notably, the Burman and Elyjiw versions of the song have taken on a parodic tone. This is in direct contrast with the Zhurakivs'kyi mood. In the Burman version, the emperor "Franz пирішко" [Franz-the-dumpling] is reproached for "not keeping an eye on his woman" [Dei 1972: 175-176, line 15]. (21) We can sense a bit of erotic innuendo with the image of the lovely lady undressing or entirely undressed, and the spindle being thrust between her white breasts [Medwidsky 1978: 35-36, lines 15, 23]. Whereas earlier versions conclude with an elegy to the empress, to the emperor, or to the empire, this version ends with the dead woman lamenting that she will no longer sleep with her husband "Franciscus" on a spring bed [lines 31-32].

The Burman "Tsisareva" text is one of a few that were collected in the post-World War II period, after western Ukraine was annexed to Soviet Ukraine. Indeed, all the later versions published by Dei appear to have been collected by Sofia Hrytsa or other people from 1966-1971, specifically in preparation for the anthology volume *Співанки-хроніки* [Dei 1972: 8-9, 514-515]. (22) Dei makes a point of emphasizing the parodic aspect of numerous versions in his description of the song. This fits the Soviet ideological perspective that good Soviet people would not want to preserve a positive representation of a decadent pre-revolutionary monarch. We have not found the song in other Soviet Ukrainian published collections. (23) Elyjiw's version and Medwidsky's analysis, however, show that this caricaturization of the subject matter was not entirely a Soviet bias nor Dei's prejudgment.

We see the word батяр [batiar, baciar, baciarz in Polish, apparently derived from the Hungarian betyar] in the "Tsisareva" song text as early as 1900, referring derogatorily to the killer. At that time, the word generally referred to a street person, troublemaker, hooligan in the city of Lviv. However, a батяр counter-cultural movement gained positive prestige and peaked in the 1930s in Lviv, a sort of "hipster" scene of comfortable outcasts. Viktor Morozov, musician and a leader of a second батяр revival of the 1980s and 1990s, characterizes батярі as nonconformist and ironic, celebrating cultural hybridity with Polish, Ukrainian, and Jewish intersections and disrespect for established authorities [Stefanchuk 2024]. The extensive use of Polish words in the Burman text may have been an

intentional stylistic device. The song seems to have enjoyed a reformulation in the interwar generation, now no longer about a current event or lamenting the loss of a celebrity and not supported by official ideologies, but as a somewhat jubilant expression of counterculture, political incorrectness, and anachronism.

The Third and Fourth Redactions

This ironic, burlesque quality is even more evident in a third redaction, sung by B. Husak in 1969 in the village Strilky, Starosambir county, Lviv oblast'. The first ten lines of the song reflect scenes one, three, and four of the early versions in a condensed form. Then the song medley takes on a livelier tempo and presents a completely different scene, not found in any earlier variant, apparently appended from a separate song about the emperor:

> Наш татуньо Франца-Йосиф, як йшли воювати,
> Взєли з собов штирі доні, як штири гармати.
> Перша коня му подала, друга осюдлала,
> Третя його напуяла ще й поцілувала.
> А четверта, наймолодша, дала му рушницю,
> Жеб єї встрілив, як програє, у саму гузицю.
> B. Husak (singer), M. Starovoit (collector). [Dei 1972: 175]

> [Our daddy Franza-Joseph, when he was going to war,
> Took with him four daughters, like four cannons.
> The first presented him his horse, the second afixed the saddle,
> The third gave it water, and even kissed it.
> And the fourth, the youngest, handed him his rifle,
> So he'd shoot her, if he loses, right in the ass.] (24)

A seemingly independent documentation by Roman Bil' from 2009 presents a very similar juxtaposition of these same two parts as one song, only over fourteen lines in reverse order [Romanart 2009]. These two distant attestations forty years apart suggest the linkage of these two songs was not a one-time experiment.

A fourth redaction of the song in Ukraine, related to the second, has appeared on the internet in recent decades [Observator 2003; Rox 2008; Pav1o 2013; Shapiro 2022; MKLvivkavamuzklub 2023; Mys'ko-Pasichnyk 2023; Seniv 2024; Ielyzaveta Bavars'ka 2024]. The song might have become more attractive to potential singers because of the large wave of celebrity that "Sisi" enjoys in recent decades, through numerous films and other media, though the sources of our texts do not refer to them specifically. Several sources do mention L'viv sculptor Emmanuil Mys'ko as a catalyst for its popularity. Mys'ko lived from 1929 to 2000 and was raised in the village of Ustryky-dolishni near the Sian River, now Ustrzyki-Dolni in Poland, part of the population that was "repatriated" after World War II. He reportedly enjoyed the song very much and often led singing at

weddings and parties [Mys'ko-Pasichnyk 2023]. (25) Self-reported on the internet, these are not exactly specialist ethnographic documentations like many from the early twentieth century, but they do shed light on the trajectory of the "Tsisareva" song text. Numerous sentences and phrases demonstrate clear continuity with the early oral versions and especially the mid-century second redaction. They also generally maintain the traditional scenic structure established by 1900. They are consistently shorter than the early versions and mostly consist of brief rump scenes: two lines each of scenes three, four, five, and six in the traditional order [see Romanart 2009; Shapiro 2022; MKLvivkavamuzklub 2023; Mys'ko-Pasichnyk 2023; Seniv 2024; Ielyzaveta Bavars'ka 2024]. The first two scenes are absent, and the song incipit therefore changes to "Наша пані цісарева" [Our lady the Empress]. These six versions all share a sentence like the Zhurakivs'kyi text, disrupting the six scenes slightly: "Бодай тую Швайцарію Кров нагла залєла. | Була б наша цісарева Аж до дзісяй жила" [May that Switzerland get flooded suddenly with blood. | Our empress would then have lived even until today]. The first line of this final exclamation is transposed from scene three into scene six. This closure is intentionally absurd, as the Empress would be some 180 years old by now.

The mid- and later-twentieth century texts provide strong evidence of continuing processes of oral transmission and innovation. None of the texts listed here are identical, though some of them are repeated in more than one site online. The image of the empress undressing is repeated in many of the recent variants—"Шати зняти" [to take off her splendid clothing] is wonderfully euphonic. The resort town where she was attacked is identified as "карелсбадські води" [Karlsbad waters], referring to the famous Czech spa Karlovy Vary, which was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in Empress Elisabeth's lifetime. This altered location appears in all nine versions of the fourth redaction. This makes the continuing references to Switzerland in scene six illogical and her death in a foreign land anachronistic. The two references to Karlsbad waters in variants of the second redaction and in a fragment by William Niniowsky recorded by Medwidsky [1978: 35] in Edmonton all imply an interwar timing for this geographical slippage, one that became traditional and now dominates completely.

Most of the versions in this redaction are written in a more modern Ukrainian language and orthography than the early songs, perhaps with a few remnants of Upper Sannian dialect [надсянський говір], where Mys'ko was born, though they feature many active and playful injections of Polish and German words into the text: *zwei secund'i* [two seconds], *ganz* [very], шпиндель [spindle], юж [already], and найсвєнтша [most holy]). The earlier texts also include words from other relevant languages, but apparently because they were common in the normal vocabulary of those singers. In this redaction by contrast, the words clearly function as intentional code-switching to conjure the distant exotic Austro-Hungarian setting and lighthearted impropriety. Overall, these texts continue the tendency of a more convivial and parodic tone. This aesthetic is consistent with a significant revival/reinvention of the батяр movement in the city of Lviv and

elsewhere, in Polish and Ukrainian artistic circles starting from the late 1980s. The assassin is consistently called a "батяр нехрещений" [unbaptized hooligan] in the texts of the fourth redaction, indicating a traditional meaning for the word батяр, but also possible playfulness with moralizations about it. This coincided with the demise of official Soviet Socialist Realism. The "Tsisareva" song seems to have re-risen in part in association with that aesthetic trend [Stefanchuk 2024].

Scant Influence of the Published Texts

As noted above, we postulate printed media as significant informational sources for the composer(s) of the "Tsisareva" song text in the days and months after the empress's demise. At this point, no such published sources have been identified. The 1907 and 1914 published versions of the "Tsisareva" song text could have been duplicated in many copies and distributed widely and quickly. (26) Though these booklets are rare a century later, paper copies were not as ephemeral as oral performances. One might imagine that published media may have been powerful catalyst for the continued transmission of the song and thus a major influence after 1907 and in the post-war context. (27) However, except for one brief mention that a rural couple enjoyed reciting the verse "Наша пані цісарівна" [Our lady the Princess] by heart in the 1960s and 1970s [Liuba 2015], we have no direct evidence of such mediated interaction for this song.

Despite this important potential, and undoubtedly the aspirations of the authors and publishers, these mediated texts seem not to have influenced the orally translated texts hardly at all. If some twenty lines of the oral versions up to that time were the same as in the 240 published lines in 1907, it is apparent that the literary text copied the vernacular lines and not the other way around. Significantly, there is very little evidence of any influence of the remaining 220 lines of literary text on the later orally transmitted versions. The additional lines and themes in the publication simply did not inspire vernacular singers. A few possible exceptions are discussed below.

In the Burman and Elyjiw versions of the second redaction, we find a tableau in scene two in which the Emperor actively suggests that the Empress should go to the baths. This resembles a moment in the 1907 publication. That text depicts her being ill from mourning her son Rudolf's death (nearly ten years after the fact), and doctors advising her to go to a spa for therapeutic bathing [Pisn' Rusko-narodna 1907: lines 49-56]. In numerous texts from the interwar period on, the murderer is called "Лукин" [Lukyn]. His name, even in this corrupted form, is not found in any of the pre-1918 vernacular documents, but only in the published verses. The captain of the ship is sometimes called its "mayor" [Franko 1900: both Zhylavyi and Hnatiuk versions; Shukhevych 1902; Dei 1972: 174], a possible transposition because one of the doctors who is reported to have attended to the Empress was a Dr. Mayer. In several newer texts, the Emperor learns of the killing by "телеґрам" [telegram], a word that is found previously only in the 1907 poem [Shapiro 2022; Ielyzaveta Bavars'ka 2024; Seniv 2024]. These minor potential influences from the published texts were adopted, became popular, and are

retained in newer versions into the fourth redaction. As our sources for the fourth redaction are themselves from the internet, evidence of mediated interaction among them is more substantial. Considering the power of media technologies on folklore and popular culture in the nineteenth century, and how it is increasing today, their small influence on the "Tsisareva" song until the fourth redaction is remarkable.

Overall, in the past 125 years, the four redactions are strongly identifiable and consistent within their time period. Almost all documentations of the first redaction were created in the first decade after the assassination. The second redaction belongs primarily to the interwar period and rarely up to the 1960s. The third redaction is not as well defined, with only two instances fixed, and is also less chronologically circumscribed (documented in 1969 and 2009). Versions of the song documented since the 1990s belong almost exclusively to the fourth redaction. Each redaction, therefore, seems to have spread over space much more than it spread over time. Most singers in each generation learned the redaction most popular during their time and not the redaction that might have been known by their parents. We see, then, that "horizontal" transmission dominates, the song being learned from peer to peer much more often than from a significantly older singer to a younger one. This pattern conflicts directly with Kolessa's and Dei's assertions that song-chronicles rarely left their source localities and these researchers' emphasis on intergenerational transmission.

This dominant pattern of horizontal transmission has only a few exceptions: two documented examples of the first redaction were sung in the 1960s by interviewees in the village of Kosmach [Dei 1972: 515]. We imagine that this was associated with an active local male singing tradition in that specific locality in the mountains, frequent opportunities to perform informally, and a local appreciation of good memory and tradition. These songs were sung by seventy- and eighty-year-olds at the time they were recorded. The only other examples of strong "vertical" transmission, consistency over long periods of time, are found in Canada. We will discuss the Canadian variants of the song texts in a second article describing the results of this study.

Conclusion

In this first half of our twin articles on the "Tsisareva" song, we concentrated on its text and context in Ukraine. The general outlines of the song's history are clear. The song thrived in vernacular settings among Ukrainian speaking populations of the Habsburg Empire. The song was not taken up into the "national" Ukrainian song repertoire with its characteristic literary influences, active promotion, tendencies to standardization, editorial influence, published authority, fixed texts, and ideological conformity. Thus, the "Tsisareva" song continued to change rather organically over the subsequent 125 years through informal oral transmission and was periodically given new momentum as social and political conditions evolved. Four clear redactions of the song are identifiable.

This analysis of the "Tsisareva" text in Ukraine is significant in several ways. Firstly, it is notable that this vernacular song (and presumably others) diffused horizontally (over space) much more intensely than vertically (over time and generations). The changes over time are important; they have implications for understanding traditional culture, but also the history of the scholarship. We have noted several instances of lay persons as well as scholars using quotations from the fourth redaction to try to comment on attitudes of "the folk" immediately after the assassination, when the first redaction would have been dominant. Our study has shown that the words and the meaning of the song had changed significantly over that time span. Historians have long recognized that it is important to focus on documents from the relevant period to make historical observations. Too often, however, this has not been applied equally to vernacular sources. The lingering Romantic tendency to assume that "traditional" songs are "timeless" and unchanging must finally be rejected as anachronistic.

The observation that the "Tsisareva" song texts changed significantly over time in western Ukrainian territories but remained unchanged among Canadian emigrants appears to reinforce the longstanding cliché assertion that cultural elements tend to be more conservative and archaic on the peripheries of a cultural sphere, in the diaspora, farthest from the centers of cultural creativity and innovation. This conservatism might seem to contradict our first conclusion above and our insistence that vernacular songs need to be understood in their specific cultural timeframe. We propose to resolve this apparent inconsistency in the second part of this two-article publication. In the upcoming text, we examine the "Tsisareva" song from two additional angles. First, we explore the context in which the Canadian prairie versions circulated and were recorded. Several factors seem to have facilitated and reinforced this conservatism in practice. In this light, the conservatism was an active phenomenon rather than passive inertia. Secondly, most importantly and most innovatively, we introduce musical and performance characteristics into the analysis. While the texts of the song remained generally unchanging, the melodic features and the singing styles in the Canadian prairie recordings reveal that the "Tsisareva" song there did reflect powerful and complex transcultural adaptations after all. The song has undergone important shifts on both continents, in both cultural contexts, however these were changes of a very different kind.

NOTES

1 A reference to the *Neue Freie Presse* newspaper from 13 September 1898, Wien.

2 For example, the extensive Polish Wikipedia article on the empress, in a long list of "Commemorations," notes that there is a Ukrainian language song about the assassination but does not mention a Polish one [Elżbieta Bawarska 2024]. At least one version of a song about Empress Elisabeth's assassination

has been documented in German, in Lower Austria, though it is not similar [Gamsjäger und Deutsch 2025: 20-22]. Empress Elisabeth was a renowned Hungarophile, and one might expect similar expressions in that part of the empire. Our initial explorations of that possibility have not resulted in success but are admittedly incomplete at present.

3 Published early documentations are listed below. Unpublished variants were reportedly recorded by Iu. Rohuzhyns'kyi (1900), Luka Harmatii (date unknown), and an unknown collector (1909) [Dei 1972: 515].

4 Such introductory and concluding segments are not uncommon in songs about current events [Dei 1972: 28-39]. Several other versions of the "Tsisareva" song also contain them.

5 The three additional texts recorded within a decade of the Empress's assassination, which Dei [1972] mentions but for which he does not provide the texts, are also assigned to this redaction of the song, his "Variant A," and thus likely start in the same way.

6 The profile of the singer is found in Klymasz´s fieldwork indices as KLY-P-1.77. The sound file can be accessed here: https://archives.ukrfolk.ca/index.php/a-nash-tsisar-tsisarivno.

7 We have not been able to identify any "original" publication to date, and no such early published text is noted by Franko, Rozdol's'kyi, Liudkevych, Shukhevych, Hnatiuk, or Dei. The 1907 published version shares some features with a broadside ballad, but it seems to have been produced only after the song was already widely popular and stable.

8 Certainly, another exception to the typical intimacy of song-chronicles are songs about emigration, such as those published by Hnatiuk [1902-1903], in which singers in western Ukrainian territories sang about events even farther from their own homes, in Brazil, the United States, and Canada. However, in these cases, some of those involved did travel to the scenes of the events depicted. Personal travel and lived experience seem much less relevant for the "Tsisareva" song.

9 Indeed, when Volodymyr Hnatiuk initially reported on this song in 1900, he apparently removed the first six lines, corresponding with our scenes one and two, commenting that they are not well connected with the main subject of the assassination. This would be consistent with the hypothesis that the widespread song scenario was a composite. He displaced these lines into a footnote. Oleksii Dei disagreed and re-connected these lines in his publication of Hnatiuk's documentation [1972: 514]. Since all nine pre-1908 texts include versions of scenes one and two, the link among these first lines and the assassination was strong. On the other hand, these two scenes were almost unanimously dropped again in later redactions.

10 This itself is not an unusual trope for this genre of songs [Dei 1972: 21-25].

11 Admittedly, some of these details may have been inspired by the countless rumors and conspiracy theories that abounded in print and in gossip, e.g., she had a heart attack, she was poisoned, it was an Italian monarchist plot, etc.

Conspiracy theories and gossip, however, are genres of folklore as well and may have tended in similar directions.

12 This element, mis-identifying the Empress as a princess, is intriguing in that it occurs only in a minority of cases, but very widely dispersed geographically and chronologically (1900, 1901, 1964, 1964, 1969, and 2015). This pattern suggests polygenesis for this feature. In addition to the early versions by M. Hnatiuk and in Pecharna, it is found in two of the Canadian texts, as well as a version by B. Husak (singer) and M. Starovoit (collector) in the village of Strilka, Starosambirsk county [Dei 1972: 175, 514], and in an online inquiry by a woman, who called herself "Liuba," who remembers her grandparents reciting such a verse [Liuba 2015].

13 It is possible that a description of the murder weapon, потроєний пильник [a three-sided file] first became re-imagined as затроєний пильник [a poisoned file], was an example of linguistic ambivalence rather than a descriptive exaggeration, however the word потроєний [three-sided] never appears, even in the earliest texts.

14 However, due to recording practices at the time, only the first verse of the song was typically recorded, leaving out the rest of the text and music. This allowed for an accurate capture of the initial melody, but musical variations and subsequent verses were left unrecorded.

15 A polemic about the folk versus literary origins of another early Ukrainian Canadian set of texts, immigration songs published by Teodor Fedyk, is reflected in Medwidsky [1992]. His conclusion that texts reflect hybrid authorship was foreshadowed by Hnatiuk [1902: 12]. Entire volumes of "folk songs with literary origins" were later collected and published, and their histories have become part of school curricula in Ukraine [see Boiko 1978].

16 Also known as Countess Marie Louise Larish von Moennich and Countess Marie Larish.

17 Geneva was outside the borders of the enormous Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and the fact that she died outside her realm was expressed as very problematic for the 1907 poet. The earlier vernacular versions did indeed note that she died "на дорозі" [on the road], a grievous matter in folk perceptions, and included vocabulary such as "держава" [country] and "в сім краю" [in this land], but mostly as vague geographic concepts. From Yasenivs'kyi's perspective after emigrating to North America, the political boundaries of the Austro-Hungarian realm were not as relevant as they were for the Habsburg patriot of 1907.

18 We propose that this motif may have been included in early versions of the song which have not been preserved. We think it was less likely to have been added in later years when awareness and discussions of those comets would have faded. Alternately, this theme may have been appended to the song in 1910, the year in which the Great Daylight Comet and Halley's Comet both aroused trepidations. Further evidence in the form of additional early texts would be required to resolve this question.

19 Medwidsky's 1978 article presents only an English translation. The article was translated into Ukrainian and published in *Narodoznavchi zoshyty* in 2010. Unfortunately, the translation does not provide Niniowsky's nor Elyjiw's Ukrainian originals but only consists of new re-translations from Medwidsky's English back into contemporary Ukrainian. These re-translations are not useful for this analysis.

20 Personal conversations with Adriana Helbig indicate that the song was known in several cities in the United States in post-World War II Ukrainian immigrant communities. Other than via migration itself, informal correspondence across the Iron Curtain was severely restricted, and singers were extremely unlikely to write about this song across the Atlantic during the Cold War. Thus, their versions did not likely acquire post-war features from Ukraine. In informal conversations, Medwidsky described singing the song with his friends in North America in the 1950s and 1960s, particularly with his compatriots in the Plast organization. Medwidsky reported that some of the versions he heard had "an ironic tone" as well.

21 Two additional variants of this phrase are offered by commenters to the text on pisni.org.ua [Romanart 2009].

22 Perhaps other versions were collected, but they have been lost or remained inaccessible in archives. Neither was the song discussed much in research. When Liuba asked for information on this song online in 2015, the best answer she received was a reference to Medwidsky's 1978 Canadian article, translated into Ukrainian and republished in Lviv in 2010.

23 Except for the Ukrainka collection mentioned above [1971]. Unless intentionally excluded, the song should have been expected in Soviet anthologies of historical songs or ballads.

24 The Husak text plays with ambivalence. It is not clear whether the third daughter kissed the horse or her father. Similarly, it is not clear if he should shoot her or himself in the buttocks. In the later version by Roman Bil', it is clear he should shoot himself.

25 The song attracted the attention of Volodymyr Pasichnyk, who composed a multi-voice choral arrangement, which has recently been performed by the Nadsiannia choir, as well as the Галицький Академічний камерний хор [Galician Academic Chamber Choir] [Mys'ko-Pasichnyk 2023; MKLvivkavamuzklub 2023].

26 The 1907 booklet seems to have been popular, as suggested by a separate typesetting and printing, using the same 240 song lines, perhaps by a different publisher. We have not yet been able to ascertain the date or place of publication of this alternate edition. Medwidsky suspects it was in Winnipeg [1978: 32; Surmach 1978].

27 Much folklore research indicates the power of mediated transmission on folkloric texts/memes and their diffusion. Literary influences about Ukrainian folk songs have also been studied extensively [see Boiko 1978].

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