The Girl He Left Behind:

Women in East European Songs of Emigration (1)

Robert A. Rothstein, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

The story is told of an Irish bandmaster serving with a British regiment in southern England. As a result of his flirtations, he was always bidding farewell to some victim of his charms when the regiment moved on to a new posting. Whenever he was so occupied, his band would strike up the old Irish tune, "The Girl I Left Behind Me." Actually, the question of the Irish or English provenance of the melody is controversial, although there is no doubt that the words and music go back two hundred years or more, and that the text has undergone folklorization, now showing up as a cowboy song, now as the marching song of the Seventh U.S. Infantry. One version contains the stanza

The dames of France are fond and free,
And Flemish lips are willing,
And soft the maids of Italy,
While Spanish eyes are thrilling.
Still though I bask beneath their smile,
Their charms quite fail to bind me,
And my heart falls back to Erin's Isle
To the girl I left behind me. (2)

A rather different situation is reflected in the songs that are the subject of the present paper, Eastern European songs of emigration. "Eastern European" here means that we will be examining songs from Galicia, Bukovina, Zakarpattia, Slovakia and that territory sometimes called yidishe landle (the areas of Poland and the Pale of Settlement inhabited by speakers of Yiddish. The songs that we will consider are in Yiddish, Slovak and Ukrainian (including — or as well as — Rusyn, Lemko, Hutsul). In theory the situation of emigration from Eastern Europe to the New World was straightforward: Jewish men went to America to earn enough money to be able to send shifkarvin (tickets for passage by ship) back home for their wives and children, while Slavs — at least those going to the United States — went to earn enough money to be able to buy land at home.(3) Our songs reflect both theory and reality.

Who sang these songs, and where and when did they sing them? Unlike the Irish soldier song and its variants, they were often in a woman's voice, although, as we shall see, there were also many songs expressing men's outlook. They were mostly collected in the Old Country or (for some of the Yiddish songs) in the New World from singers who learned them in the Old Country, although there
were also songs collected (and sung) in the United States and Canada. They date from the period of mass emigration to North America (roughly 1880-1920), although some of the Yiddish songs refer to (perhaps earlier) internal migration to big cities.

The attitude toward America was sometimes optimistic. In a Yiddish lullaby, for example, sung to a child whose father has left for America, the mother sings

\[
\begin{align*}
Dos \ amerike \ iz \ far \ yedn, & \quad \text{That America, people say,} \\
\text{zogt men, gor a glik} & \quad \text{Is a joy for everyone,} \\
un \ far \ yedn a gan-eydn, & \quad \text{And a paradise for Jews,} \\
\text{epes an antik.} & \quad \text{A wondrous place.}
\end{align*}
\]

America is so wonderful, she continues, that people eat challah (yeast-leavened, white egg bread) during the week (not only on Friday night). This lullaby actually has a literary origin, having been written by Sholem-Aleikhem in 1892, but it entered the folk repertoire so rapidly that by the time of publication of the first collection of Yiddish song texts in Russia in 1901, Ginzburg and Marek's \textit{Evreiskie narodnye pesni v Rossii}, five different correspondents submitted it to the editors as an anonymous folksong.\(^4\)

Optimism, however, hit up against reality, and we see passionately negative attitudes toward the New World. In one of the most popular Yiddish songs of immigrant life in America, "\textit{Di grine kuzine}" ("The Greenhorn Cousin"), the newly arrived cousin blesses "the golden land." Years later, with long sweat-shop hours behind her, the cousin has a different attitude: "Az brenen zol Kolombuses medine!" (May the blazes take Columbus's land!).\(^5\)

Another Jewish wife, whose husband had gone to America to seek his fortune six years before, leaving her with three children, curses him for not writing and blames "di bitere amerike" (bitter America) for bringing many unhappy people to the point of tears.\(^6\) Several songs collected in Ukraine and Canada begin with the lines

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Oi Kanade, Kanadochko,} & \quad \text{Oh, Canada, dear Canada,} \\
\text{iaka zh ty zradlyva,} & \quad \text{How treacherous you are.} \\
\text{Ne idnoho cholovika} & \quad \text{You have separated more than} \\
\text{Z zhinkou rozluchyla.} & \quad \text{One husband and his wife.}\(^7\)
\end{align*}
\]

A song from Eastern Slovakia portrays America as a land of temptation:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Či ti idzeš, šejahoj,} & \quad \text{Are you coming, young man,} \\
\text{Ej pěneži šporovac,} & \quad \text{To save up money,} \\
\text{či ti idzeš dzivčatka l'ubovac?} & \quad \text{Or are you coming to make love to the girls?} \\
\text{Pre pěnež l'echko život strati,} & \quad \text{You'll easily lose your life for money,} \\
\text{A za dzivči mil'i boch zapłaci.} & \quad \text{And our dear God will pay you back for the girls.}\(^8\)
\end{align*}
\]
Let us turn now to several of the themes that run through these songs of emigration. We shall consider in turn the following themes:

1) The husband dies in America or on the way back home.
2) The husband succumbs to temptation in America.
3) The wife succumbs to temptation back home.
4) "Equal opportunity temptation"
5) In the Yiddish songs, the situation of the agune, the abandoned wife.

Although the usual intention of Slavic migrants seems to have been to earn enough money to buy land at home, sometimes the husband sent for the wife to come join him in America. The songs that tell such stories, however, do not typically have a happy ending. Sometimes the wife is unhappy, disappointed with life in the new country. One such wife, for example, contrasts conditions in Manitoba, where there is no church or korchna (tavern) and "no-one even dies," with life at home, where she goes from church to a wedding, from the wedding to the tavern, from the tavern to a christening, and from the christening to pomynky (a wake). Her husband replies that she should not complain since Canadian women are thin and pale while she is "well fed like a pig" (A ty syta, iak bezroha).(9)

More often the ending is more tragic: the wife arrives to find her husband dead or injured. A Slovak song from Eastern Slovakia, for example, tells us:

A jak vona pres to morjo prešla,
   ta už muža živoho nenašla.
em totu krev, co z ňoho kkapala,
   a tak nad ňim horko zaplakala. (10)

When she crossed the ocean, She found not a living husband, But only the blood that had dripped from him, And she wept bitterly over him.

In a similar Ukrainian or Rusyn song from the same area the wife asks his coworkers:

-Vy, panove, ei, proshu vas pro Boha,
   Povichte mi, ei, de mii muzh tu skonav?
-Skonav vin tu, ei, na toi syvoi skali,
   Zabyly ho huntsuty anhlychany. (11)

"You gentlemen, I ask you for God's sake, Tell me where my husband died here." "He died here on that gray hill; English [i.e., American] scoundrels killed him."

In a variant of the song published by Hnatiuk the dead husband himself explains that the Americans killed him because he did not want to pay for a lot of beer for them.(12)

Another Slovak song that presents the image of the wife weeping over her husband is also narrated by a dead or injured husband:

Ked majnera zabije, l'ebio jeho potluče, When a miner is killed or injured,
jak ta jeho mlada žena prehorko plače. How bitterly his young wife weeps.

In a twist on the usual situation, this song is addressed to the narrator’s mother in the Old Country, whom he blames for sending him to America:

Teraz možeš, mamčuš moja, za tim banovac: Now, mother dear, you can regret it:
ňebudzem ja u Europi vecej gazdovac. I’m not going to farm any more in Europe.
Naj vam pon Boh zaplaci, že sce me tu visla i, May God repay you for having sent me here,
že sce še tak za tu častku ve ice bal’i.(13) For being so greedy for that piece of land.

Greed plays a role as well in a song from Eastern Slovakia (two long variants in Slovak, a shorter one in Ukrainian/Rusyn) about the death of a migrant returning from America. The song starts with the narrator recounting how he prayed before sailing from New York (or simply from America) and continues with a graphic account of death at sea with the deceased being thrown overboard, where

Ribi z ňoho celo okusuju, Fish gnaw on his body;
kosci joho po morju pl’ivaju. His bones float on the ocean.

When his wife gets a letter with a black seal from the ship’s captain, she weeps bitterly, but his sister and brother react differently:

Šestra z bratom vel’ku radosc mal’i, [His] sister and brother were joyful
že z gaz dovstva u ž vecej dostal’i.(14) that they got more of the farm.

Earlier we saw America portrayed as a land of temptation. In one Slovak song, when the emigrant in America complains that he hasn’t had any mail from his beloved back home “od forti d ulaja,” she explains:

Ja ci pisac ňebudzem, bo ja I’m not going to write to you,
rad ľej tam pojdzem, because I’d rather come there,
bo ja čula, že ti trimaš Because I’ve heard that you have
frajirki šidzemi!(15) seven girlfriends!

The wife in a song reprinted by Hnatiuk from the Ukrainian-American newspaper Svo boda writes from home to her husband, telling him to come home quickly:

Bo my lysty idut’, zhe trymash kokhanky. Because I’m getting letters that you have lovers.
Ne trymam kokhanky, lem I don’t have lovers, just one English-woman,
iednu Anhlichku, Who has been carrying me in her
Shto una nia nositi trei roky heart for three years.
ul sercu. She gave me 800 dollars
Una my davala 800 doliarei, So that I should marry her right away.
Zheby ia sia zhenyv iz n’ov
kam naiskorei.
A ia i povidav, zhe mam v krai zhenu;  But I told her that I have a wife at home
Ona my povila, zhebym ne            She told me that I shouldn't worry about
dzvab o niu.                        her.
A ia i povidav, zhe mamv kraiu dity;  I told her that I have children at home;
Ona my povila, zhe nych tobi po tim.(16) She told me that that's not important.

In a Ukrainian/Rusyn song from Eastern Slovakia the singer has her suspicions confirmed by an
emigration agent:

Ahent pishe: "Ponahliai sa,
Bo tvi myli zhetaryl sa!"
Zhetaryl sa pro frairky,
lest' v Chikahu shunmy divky.(17)
The agent writes: "Hurry up,
Because your beloved has become a rake!"
He's become a rake because of the girls;
There are attractive girls in Chicago.

Sometimes it is the husband himself who reveals how he has been behaving when he has to explain
why he has returned home with so little money. One has brought back only ten dollars; all the rest, he
confesses, "ia propyl v Hamerytsi z babamy" (I drank up in America with the babes).(18) Another
provides a more detailed explanation:

Ne mam ve'lo, lem paru sto
doliariv,
Bo mi reshtu v Hamerytsi zostaly.
V Hamerytsi shunmy divky byvaiut,
Kazhdyi vecher na shpatsirku volaiut.

I don't have a lot, only a couple
hundred dollars,
Because the rest remained in America.
In America there are attractive girls;
They invite you for walks every evening.

Kazhdyi vecher na shpatsirku volaiut,
Doliarivky z kysheni stiahaiut.
I ia khodyl dakoly na shpatsirku,
Bo ia tezh mal v Hamerytsi frairku.(19)

They invite you for walks every evening;
They pull dollars out of your pockets.
I also went for walks around
Because I too had a girlfriend in America.

We find more graphic details in a song published in Uzhhorod in 1942:

Tak ia tu v Amerytsye hazhuiu:
V kazhdu pedu u salon'e notsiuiu,
U salon'e na anhi tskei postsel,
Z anhlychkamy shumn'e oblapaney.(20)

This is how I live in America:
Every payday I spend the night at
the saloon,
At the saloon on an English bed,
Beautifully fondled by English girls.

A rather cynical version was collected in Ukraine from an informant who came from the Lemko
region of Southeastern Poland:

Dobre tomu v Hamerytsye, khto
ma zhinky dvi:
edna v kraiu, pry zvychainu,
a druha pri m'ni.
Dobre mu sia povodyt, do
roboty ne khodyt,
K hustye pere, iisty varyt, vin

Things are good for the man in
America who has two wives;
One ordinary one back home,
and a second one here with me.
He has a good life; [he] doesn't go
to work,
[She] washes her kerchiefs, cooks
v lizhku lezhyt.(21) food; he lies in bed.

Of course there is another side to the story, told in such songs as the following, collected in Eastern Slovakia:

Dobri ie to tym nevistam v kraiu, Things are good for those women
Khtory muzhiv v Amerytsi maiut. back home
Muzhi robiat, pretiakhko pratsiuut, Who have husbands in America.
A piniacz do kraiu shkuiut. Their husbands work very hard
And send money back home.

Shikvie iii, iak virnyi hazdnyi, They send money to their good
Zheby ona kupyla osmyny. housewife
Ale ona na osmyny ne dbat, So that she would buy some land.
Lem ked ona vse novy chyzhmy mat. But she doesn't care about land,
Only that she have all new shoes.

Not only does she buy new shoes instead of land, but she goes dancing and invites the boys home to eat and drink, even if that means that she has to send her children to the neighbors' house to sleep. In the morning her head hurts so she cannot make breakfast for the children, who complain:

A vy, tatu, v tym dalekim sviti, And you, daddy, in that distant world,
Ne znaiete, iak nam tiazhko You don't know how hard it is for
zhyvy, us to live.
Pryd'ie, tatu, ta nam fryshiekh date, Come [home], daddy, and give us
Uvydyte, iaku zhenu mate.(22) breakfast;
You'll see what kind of wife you have.

Another husband, who has heard about his wife's behavior at home, reminds her of the oath they took when they each put two fingers on the Bible and suggests that if she said her prayers at night and in the morning, she would not forget about the Sixth Commandment. The wife has a ready answer:

Oi nikoly ia u vecher patsery ne Oh, I never say my prayers at night,
moviu,
Bo kum tak skoro prykhodyt', Because my kum comes over so
shcho ia til'ko steliu. soon that I can only make the bed.

[...]
Rano chasu znov ne maziu Again in the morning I don't have
patsery movyt,
Ta bo meni trebe skoro u petsu time to say my prayers,
palvut.(23) Because I have to quickly light

In a song collected by Filaret Kolessa in the Lemko region in 1929 the wife does not spend her husband’s hard-earned money on shoes, but on cigars for the boys. She also has more explaining to do. When she asks her husband to come back home and not to make his children wait for him, he is
surprised to hear about children since he has not slept with her for seven years. She has a creative answer, however:

*A ia shaty reibala, o tobi
  ia dumala. (2)*

*I was washing clothing, I was
  thinking about you,*

*Tady ia, mii muzhu. (2)*

*And that, my husband, is when I got
  pregnant.*

Several songs — both Ukrainian and Slovak — describe the husband's return from America. In some he indeed finds that his wife is pregnant:

*Už on idze už je na sred valala,*

*He's already coming, he's already
  in the middle of the village.*

*žena muža pod oblačkom čekala,*

*His wife was waiting for her husband
  under the window,*

*hej, žena muža pod oblačkom
  čekala,*

*Yes, his wife was waiting for her
  husband under the window*

*a svuj bruščok s fartuškom prikrivala.*

*And hiding her belly with her apron.*

When he sees this sight, he decides to return to America. (25)

Even without the obvious signs of unfaithfulness, the husband sometimes decides to go back to America because of what he has heard about his wife:

*Zheno moia mlada, iak zhe-s'
  sa khovala?*

*My young wife, how have you
  behaved?*

*Lustry povidavuť, zhe-s'
  fraitra mala.*

*People say that you had a lover.*

*Byty tia ne budu, svita ti daruiu,*

*I won't beat you, I'll ignore the
  whole thing;*

*Vytky ia pryitkhav, nazad
  mashyrutu.*

*I'm marching back to where I
  came from.*

*Svoii drubni dity beru
  v Ameryku,*

*I'm taking my little children to
  America*

*By tu ne zostaly na bidu
  velyku.*

*So that they don't remain here in
  great poverty.*

*A ty, zheno moia, rob iak
  sama znaisesh,*

*And you, my wife, do what you like;*

*Vece ti od mene isenia
  ne dustranes. (26)*

*You won't get another cent from me.*

Another husband writes from America, threatening to kill his wife:

*Mam doma revolver, co šejsc raz*  

*I have a revolver at home that will
But then he decides to spare her life for the sake of the children and will simply stay in America and be a ladies' man. (27) This is an example of what we referred to earlier as "equal opportunity temptation." Another example comes from Kolessa's 1929 Lemko collection, which consists of just four lines:

\[
\begin{align*}
Mii\ muzh\ v\ Hamerytse\ vuhlja \\
Ei,\ a\ ia\ sama\ doma,\ tryman\ sy \\
-fraitia. (2)
- Trymai sobi, trymai, shak ia \\
\quad ti\ ne\ speram,
Ei,\ shak\ ia\ sia\ domodu\ do\ tebe \\
\quad ne\ zberam. (2)(28)
\end{align*}
\]

My husband is gathering coal in America, And I'm alone at home; I have a lover.
"Have yourself [a lover], I'm not stopping you,
After all I don't intend to come home to you."

Two longer variants, one collected in Slovakia in the 1970s and another collected among the Rusyns in Yugoslav Vojvodina in the 1950s, have the same conclusion, which, however, is preceded by a bar-room conversation among miners in America. They are talking about returning to the Old Country because people there think that in America you can just rake in money. Instead you have to work hard underground, like little worms:

\[
\begin{align*}
A\ iak\ ia\ ne\ budu\ pid\ zeml’om\ robyty, \\
Hei,\ bude\ moia\ zhena\ i\ bosa\ khodyty.
\end{align*}
\]

And if I don't work under the earth, My wife will go around barefoot...

\[
\begin{align*}
A\ iak\ ia\ zapochwu\ pid\ zeml’om\ robyty, \\
Hei,\ bude\ moia\ zhena\ topanky\ nosyty.
\end{align*}
\]

But if I start to work under the earth, My wife will wear shoes.

\[
\begin{align*}
V\ topankakh\ khodyty,\ krasni\ oblikaty, \\
he,\ a\ ku\ tomu\ mozhie\ i\ fraitia\ maty. (29)
\end{align*}
\]

She'll wear shoes, dress beautifully, And maybe even have a lover.

Except for a few early comments, we have not mentioned Yiddish songs. That is because the themes that we have found in the Slavic material are generally absent from the Yiddish material. The notion of the temptations of a distant place is present, as in a song from the 1901 Ginzburg and Marek collection, in which two lovers are parting. He is leaving Kovno gubernia to go to Odessa, and she is crying:

\[
\begin{align*}
V\ azoy\ zol\ ikh\ nit\ veynen, \\
V\ azoy\ zol\ ikh\ nit\ klogn, \\
Az\ du\ verst\ fun\ mir\ azoy\ fremd? (30)
\end{align*}
\]

How can I not cry, How can I not complain, When you are going to be so alien to me?

In a literary song first published in 1868, Mikhl Gordon's "Der get" ("The Divorce"), the wife wants a divorce from her husband who has gone to the big city of Poltava and "geyt à aprən fun yidishn veg"
Indeed the issue of divorce was central to many Yiddish songs about migration since in traditional Jewish practice only the husband could grant a divorce, and a wife abandoned by her husband without a divorce (an agune in Yiddish) could not remarry under Jewish law. I. G. Orshanskii, author of the first article in Russia about Yiddish folksongs (1867), attributed Jewish migration to poverty and to "the misfortunes of family life." He argued that early arranged matches led to unhappy marriages, to divorce and to young men fleeing from "tiazhesti brachnykh uz" (the hardships of marital bonds), and pointed to the numerous ads in Jewish newspapers of the time looking for information about missing persons. The ads were placed by parents, brothers, but especially by agunes.

Writing nearly seventy years later, the Soviet folklorist Z. Skuditski characterized the main theme of Yiddish songs about (e)migration as "the situation of women whose husbands have migrated (to other cities or countries) and left them and their children at home without means of support." In one of the songs in Skuditski's collection an agune says that paper would not suffice to describe the pain in her heart, and even if paper sufficed, her hand would not be able to bear it. She ends with thoughts of death:

_Yungerheyt shtarbn_  
_to die at an early age_

_iz on a sakone, _
_is less dangerous_

_eyder tsu blaybn_  
_than to remain_

_a yunqe almone._  
_a young widow._

_Vos heyst an almone, _
_a widow is when_

_az der man shartbi avek, _
_your husband dies;_

_vos heyst an agune, _
_an agune is when_

_– _

_der man varfi avek._(34)  
_your husband throws you away._

Another abandoned wife is tormented as well by gossip:

_Oy, layt zogn, layt zogn_  
_oh, people say, people say_

_az ikh hob dem man fartribn ü_  
_that I drove my husband away._

_Got, er veyst dem gantsn emes, _
_god, he knows the whole truth —_

_az ikh bin an agune gebibn._(35)  
_that I have been left an agune._

Yet another wife is bitter as she imagines her husband in America drinking the best wine and beer while she is left behind with two small children "like a beggar by the door." She tells her children:

_Dayn tate iz geforn keyn Amerike_  
_your father went to America_

_un getz dort shpatsirm af di beler, _
_and there dances at balls._

_mikh hot er ibergetozt bay_  
_me he left at Rokhele Shapiro's_

_Rokhele Shapiro, _

_kh'zol ba ir vashn di teler._  
_to wash her dishes for her._(36)

The wife mentioned earlier who cursed her husband for not writing her had a specific kind of
letter in mind (since she had not received any other kind either):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Efsher hostu dort} & \quad \text{Perhaps you have there} \\
\text{a tsveyte oyf mayn ort,} & \quad \text{Another in my stead.} \\
\text{fargin ikh dir di} & \quad \text{I shan't begrudge you those} \\
\text{amerikaner glikn,} & \quad \text{American joys.} \\
\text{du zolst nit meynen,} & \quad \text{Do not suppose} \\
\text{az ikh vel nokh dir veynen,} & \quad \text{I will weep for you,} \\
\text{ober a get darfstu mir dokh shikan,} & \quad \text{But a divorce you must send me.} \\
\text{nem ayn a miese-meshine} & \quad \text{May you perish} \\
\text{in der goldener medine,} & \quad \text{In the golden land.} \\
\text{mir vet Got a tsveytn gebn,} & \quad \text{God will give me a second} \\
\text{ikh ver poter fun aza tsore,} & \quad \text{And I will be rid of such an affliction.} \\
\text{fun mir davn vayb Khaye-Sore\`a} & \quad \text{From me, your wife Khaye-Sore\`a.}\end{align*}
\]

Not all abandoned wives are as assertive as Khaye-Sore\`a; more often the songs simply express the wish for a divorce or regret that the missing husband has not sent one, as in the following song collected in North America by Ruth Rubin:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Oy, ongespart on elnboygn,} & \quad \text{Oh, leaning on her elbow,} \\
\text{ziyst zikh a froy, shpet baynakht,} & \quad \text{A woman sits late into the night.} \\
\text{taykhn trenn rinen fun ire oyn,} & \quad \text{Rivers of tears flow from her eyes.} \\
\text{zi ziyst dokh keseyder un trakht.} & \quad \text{She sits there thinking, thinking.}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Mayn man iz geforn glikn zukhn} & \quad \text{My husband has gone to seek his fortune} \\
\text{in kolumbuses land.} & \quad \text{In Columbus's land.} \\
\text{halve volt er mir khotsh a get} & \quad \text{Oh, if only he had at least sent me a} \\
\text{geven shiken,} & \quad \text{divorce,} \\
\text{ikh zol nit zayn in aza bitern shand.} & \quad \text{So I wouldn't be in such a bitter state.}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Oy mentshn, mentshn, ir forf dokh avek,} & \quad \text{Oh, people, people, you are leaving,} \\
\text{ir forf mit shifn un mit a ban.} & \quad \text{You are going on boats and by train.} \\
\text{fregt dorn vos er hot mir} & \quad \text{Ask him there why he left me} \\
\text{gelozt a viste agune,} & \quad \text{a solitary agune,} \\
\text{oib ir zet ergets mayn man.} & \quad \text{If you see my husband somewhere.}\end{align*}
\]

In some of the songs the husband does send a divorce by means of a messenger:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Gut-ovnt, shvester Dvoyre,} & \quad \text{Good evening, sister Deborah,} \\
\text{mayn kumen iz nit gut.} & \quad \text{My coming is not good.} \\
\text{Dayn man fun amerike} & \quad \text{Your husband from America} \\
\text{shiki dir op a get.} & \quad \text{Is sending you a divorce.}\end{align*}
\]

In one somewhat unusual song (with numerous variants), the messenger is a bird, whom the husband has left behind to keep him informed about his wife. Eventually the bird flies in search of the husband and brings back a divorce. In one variant the husband and wife are a royal pair:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Azoy vi di malke hot genumen} & \quad \text{When the queen took the divorce in her} \\
\text{dem get in der hant,} & \quad \text{hand,} \\
\text{azoy hot zi zikh ongehoyn} & \quad \text{She started banging her head against the}\end{align*}
\]
tsu klapn mitn kop in der vant, wall.
azoyvi zi hot ongehoyn dem
get leyenen.
hot zi ongehoyn biter tsu veynen. (40) She began to cry bitterly.

Finally it should be noted that sometimes in the Slavic material, but more commonly in the Yiddish material, the "girl he left behind" is his mother, as in a song that Eleanor Gordon Mlotek called "one of the most beloved songs of the immigration era on both sides of the Atlantic," Solomon Shmulewitz's "A brivele der mamen" (A Letter to Mother), which even inspired a Yiddish film of the same name. Its tear-jerking chorus begins:

A brivele der mamen
zolstu nit farzamen,
shrayb geshvind, libes kind,
shenk ir di nekhrome. (41)

A little letter to mother,
Don't be late with it.
Write quickly, dear child;
Give her the gift of consolation.

Except for two or three popular songs, our examples have come from the extant collections of Slavic and Yiddish folksongs. The dangers inherent in treating folklore too literally as a historical source are well known, but these songs provide a human dimension to phenomena already well documented in the historical and statistical record.

NOTES

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 1999 National Convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies (St. Louis).


3. In his 1902 study of new folksongs Volodymyr Hnatiuk distinguished three groups of emigrants. The earliest and largest emigration was to the United States and consisted mostly of poor people who intended to find work in America, earn a little money and then return to the Old Country. The emigrants to Brazil of the mid-1890s, on the other hand, sold all they had at home because they intended to stay in the New World. Many, however, found the working and living conditions in Brazil unsuitable or even unbearable. The third wave of emigration was to Canada, which was also viewed as a place of permanent settlement. See "Pisemny novotvory v ukrains'ko-rus'kii narodnoi slovesnosti," Zapysy Naukovogo tovarystva im. Shevchenka 50 (1902):1-37, 51 (1903):38-67. The introductory section of the article, without the song texts, was reprinted in V. M. Hnatiuk, Vybrani statti pro
nacionalny tvorchist' (Kiev, 1966), pp. 78-95. (Hnatiuk's observation about the three streams of emigration are on pp. 1-2 of the original publication and 78-79 of the republication.)


5. Ibid., 142. The song, with words by J. Leiserowitz and music by A. Schwartz, dates from 1922. If not a folk song, it is at least an evergreen.


7. *Bud zdrava, zemlyte. Ukrains'ki narodni pisni pro emihratsiyu*, comp. Sofia Hrytsa (Kiev, 1991), pp. 68-73. Hnatiuk 54-55 published a longish song text (no. 43) that ends with a similar bitter formula:

   Oi Kanado, Kanadochko, iaka ty zradlyva,
   Bodai ty sia, ty Kanado, nikomu ne snyla.

   Oh, Canada, dear Canada, how treacherous you are;
   May no-one dream of you, Canada.

According to the newspaper *Ruska Rada*, from which Hnatiuk reprinted the text, it was written by a young emigrant from Bukovina who sent it in a letter home from Manitoba so that his family would have no illusions "*pro kanadis'ki harazdy*" (about Canadian prosperity). The line about treacherous Canada is also found in a song collected in 1939 in Zakarpattia that ends with the sentiment:

   Oi ne treba v chuzhim kraiu harazdu shukaty,
   U riadnomu lehshe zhyty, lehshe i vmyratty.

   Oh, one shouldn't look for prosperity in a foreign land;
   In one's native land it's easier to live and easier to die.

*(Spivanky-khroniky i Novyny*, ed. O. I. Del and S. I. Hrytsa (Kiev, 1972), pp. 158-60. See also pp. 156-57.)


9. Hnatiuk 52 (no. 41). Also *Spivanky-khroniky*... 158.

10. evehlšt 568.

11. *Bud zdrava*... 86.

12. Hnatiuk 28-29 (no. 16).

13. evehlšt 576.


15. evehlšt 578.
16. Hnatiuk 31-32 (no. 21).
17. Bud zdrava... 119.
18. Ibid., 99.
19. Ibid., 106.

20. F. Potushniak, "Pěsn pro Ameryku," Lyteratura nedélja 2 (1942): 262. The orthography of this weekly published in Hungarian-occupied "Kárpátalja" (Subcarpathian Rus') used the Cyrillic letter iat', here transliterated by "e".

21. Bud zdrava... 118.
22. Ibid., 109.

23. Hnatiuk 33 (no. 24). A kum is the father of one's godchild or the godfather of one's child. The stove that has to be lit in the morning is the large clay or brick stove that is used for heating as well as cooking.

24. Bud zdrava... 112. Hnatiuk reprints a similar text that was collected in Pennsylvania in 1901 (33-34, no. 24). The song quoted above, in which the husband reminds his wife of the Sixth Commandment, generalizes that while husbands in America work like mules and send their last penny to their wives at home, "zhinsky za se iz kumamy dity priplodzhaitf" (the wives are producing children with their kumy).

27. ěvehiľk 578

28. Bud zdrava... 114.
29. Bud zdrava... 127-8, 130-1

34. Ibid., 118-9.
35. Ibid., 115.


41. Mlotek, *Mir trogn* à144-5.