Scandals of the Ballad

The entry for "The Ballad" in The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature somewhat vehemently states that "the genuine ballad" has "these special marks of character":

(1) It is a narrative poem without any discernible indication of personal authorship; (2) it is strong, bare, objective and free from general sentiments or reflections; (3) it was meant originally for singing, and, as its name implies, was connected at some time with dancing; (4) it has been submitted to a process of oral tradition among unsophisticated people fairly homogenous in life, habit, and outlook, and below the level at which conscious literary art appears.

The History goes on to explain that "no verse of this sort can be produced under the conditions of modern life" and that "the three hundred and five ballads represented by some thirteen hundred versions in F. J. Child's collection (1882–98) set the patterns which later revivals and recoveries tended to follow."1

If we begin to unpack this account, we find, in fact, not so much the definition of a genre but another, far more ambivalent, history. We find that a genre can arise in a particular historical context and can just as particularly disappear. We find that the literary tradition, in rescuing a "folk" tradition, can just as surely kill it off. We find that, in order to imagine folklore, the literary community of the eighteenth century had to invent a folk, singing and dancing "below the level" of "conscious literary art." And, perhaps the same thing, we find that the advent of modern literary scholarship, with its tasks of genealogy—the establishment of paternity and lines of influence—and its role in the legislation of originality and authenticity, depended upon the articulation of a "folk" literature that "literature" was not.

The eighteenth-century development of an "author" and the eighteenth-century crisis in authenticity thus must be situated within a history of the establishment and legislation of spheres of originality and accountability for writing. Focusing broadly on the period between the Scottish vernacular revival of the early part of the century and the criticism of Robert Chambers more than a hundred years later, this essay examines the development of a ballad genre that often supplanted the oral tradition and of a ballad scholarship that arose as the cure for the anxiety produced by this supplanting—an anxiety centered around the period's various "ballad scandals." In the early part of the century, we find writers such as Allan Ramsay eagerly considering almost any "song" or "poem" as an example of the traditional ballad, but by the 1840s we find writers such as Cham-
bers doubting the authenticity of nearly everything. It is not so much that the ballad scandals of the eighteenth century were the products of rules regarding forgery, authenticity, plagiarism, and originality as that the ballad scandals helped produce such rules. In order to understand how the contradictions of literary ballad production erupted at this time, we might begin by looking at why one would want to "collect" folkloric forms such as the ballad in the first place.

Verbal art was collected artifactually since the sixteenth century for a variety of reasons: to establish a corpus of texts that would reflect nationalist impulses and hence lend validity to a vernacular heritage in contradistinction to a classical one; to "rescue" forms that seemed to be disappearing—i.e., to effect a kind of archaeology of speech forms parallel to the rescue of what is properly known as "material" culture; to place such "specimens" as curiosities, characterized by fragmentation and exoticism, against the contemporary and so use them to establish the parameters of the present, much as any form of collecting does. However, the collector's attempt to transform speech into writing resulted and continues to result in a set of quite vivid contradictions regarding the collecting impulse.

First of all, the conversion of speech into writing, while a change in form, is not a matter of producing a fixed form; instead we might say that the transformation of oral forms into collected, written forms is always a matter of releasing the oral from such fixity. Such a separation of speech from its particular moment may result in a singular text, but this text goes on to become symptomatic. It is a fragment of a larger whole that is a matter not only of other versions but of the entire aura of the oral world—such a world's imagined presence, immediacy, organicism, and authenticity. Thus it is important to note the materiality of the signifier regardless of its oral or written form: the notion that writing endows the oral with materiality is another facet of the collector's interest in establishing the ephemerality of the oral, an interest that puts the oral in urgent need of rescue. In other words, the writing of oral genres always results in a residue of lost context and lost presence that literary culture imbues with a sense of nostalgia and even regret. We might consider the writing of folklore in this sense to be, then, a method for making oral genres extinct, just as the zeal for trophies might ironically (although this is an irony with its own sweet pleasures of acquisition) both celebrate and eradicate a species. Consequently these appropriations invest the oral with a new, and necessarily literary, mythology.

Because language is not a matter of wresting form out of nature, our sense of the differences between orality and writing cannot rest upon such a simple juxtaposition of ephemerality and materiality. This "ephemerality" of speech has nothing to do with the intrinsic qualities of folkloric forms. In fact we might just as easily suppose that the features of folkloric forms (and such a list is always a matter of reduction)—the "presence" of the speaker, the foregrounded materiality of the signifier in nonsense verses, phonemic "choruses" and burdens, mixed performance modes such as the cante-fable, the realization of the affective rela-
tions of speaker and hearer in call and response, and the generalized collaboration of all such oral performances—make them enduring, "written" into the world, so much as "erased from memory" as the literary tradition might sometimes have it. For here materiality, the collected form, invents an ephemerality that legitimates its own sense of temporality and subjectivity. In the eighteenth century, this contradiction in the process of writing the world—which we may see as a certain crisis in the notion of representation—generates its own set of solutions to the problems of the material reproduction of writing.

Why and how does authenticity become an issue? First, it is clear that authenticity is possible as a concept only in a situation that, in fact, has an external history. The problem of authenticity arises in situations where there is a self-conscious perception of mediation, a sense of distance between one era and another, one world view and another; a sense of historical periodization, transformation, and even rupture. The term authentic explores this problem from its inception in Greek, Latin, and Old French, in all cases implying the notion of firsthandedness—the Greek meaning "one who does a thing himself, a principle, master, autocrat" and being the meaning carried over and assimilated in the sixteenth century. From the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century emphasis upon the authenticity of the Bible, the sixteenth-century sense of "firsthand" becomes opposed to "copying," to a sense of authentic documents, and to the seventeenth-century sense of "authentic laws." Jonathan Swift's "Drapier's Letters" of 1724-25, for example, contain a reference to "some short plain authentick Tract [that] might be published, for the Information both of petty and grandjuries."³

The artifactualization of the ballad is cotermious with the commodification of literature: the broadside dates to Wynken de Worde and the onset of printing in England. And although the notion of authenticity does not extend to these early broadside productions in their context, a problematic of authenticity does emerge once the historical sensibility of antiquarianism is combined with the materiality of printed ballads. Yet authenticity becomes most foregrounded in its encounter with contradiction—from the sixteenth-century crisis regarding the copies of mechanical reproduction to the eighteenth-century search for a merger of speech and context, for a utopian ballad world characterized by "survivals" and thus by transcendence over past and present.

The external history of the ballad is thus inextricably bound up with the emerging notion of the ballad as artifact and the crisis in authenticity that results from the severing of this artifact from its performance context. In collections ranging from the sixteenth-century Bannatyne manuscript⁴ to the Sherburn Castle collection and Samuel Pepys's two thousand ballads, based on a previous collection by the antiquarian John Selden, we see early examples of this impulse toward artifactuality.⁵ These are largely broadside collections, for the materiality of the broadside places it among other potential antiquities even though of course the ballads of the oral tradition were for the most part of older vintage. It is not
until the eighteenth century that the method of collecting from oral tradition becomes predominant as a response to the crisis of authenticity brought about by imitation and artifactuality. Moreover, the notion of authenticity here is significantly influenced by the history of eighteenth-century ballad collecting itself. Thus we can characterize the features of the "traditional" ballad, but to do so is to recapitulate, as Vladimir Propp did with the folktale, those features that were formulated by means of the collecting process. In other words, there is no "natural" form here—but rather a set of documents shaped by the expectations that led to their artifactualization in the first place.

When the literary culture reproduces folklore, the result is a seepage of inauthenticity from the stranded folkloric form to the stranded subjectivity of the author. For autograph literature, the authenticity of "Volkspoesie" must always be derivative—the possibilities are a matter of the collected artifact, or, in a desperate attempt at appropriation, the collected collective. Consider, for example, the ushering in of "untutored" geniuses during this period: Stephen Duck, the poetical thresherman, "discovered" by Lord Macclesfield; Henry Jones, the poetical bricklayer, "discovered" by Chesterfield; James Woodhouse, the poetical shoemaker, urged on by Samuel Johnson; Ann Yearsley, the poetical pig woman of Bristol; and James Hogg, the Ettrick shepherd/bard, here resisting his invention by Sir Walter Scott:

I must confess that, before people of high rank, he [Scott] did not much encourage my speeches and stories. He did not then hang down his brows, as when he was ill pleased with me, but he raised them up and glowered, and put his upper lip far over the under one, seeming to be always terrified at what was to come out next, and then he generally cut me short, by some droll anecdote, to the same purport of what I was saying. In this he did not give me fair justice, for, in my own broad homely way, I am a very good speaker, and teller of a story too.6

James Beattie's "shepherd swain" as minstrel approaches realization in these examples. Yet, as we know from the "discoveries" of talent scouts, the "natural" is always denatured by discovery and history becomes a kind of novelty act. As Allan Ramsay so perceptively noticed in his preface to The Ever Green: A Collection of Scots Poems (1724): "I hope also the Reader, when he dips into these poems will not be displeased with this Reflection, that he is stepping back into the Times that are past, and that exist no more. Thus the Manners and Customs then in Vogue, as he will find them here described, will have all the air and charm of Novelty: and that seldom fails of exciting Attention and pleasing the Mind." By the middle part of the eighteenth century, the tautology of discovery lay in its recovery of a national identity, a tracing back to a point of origin that would be the very landscape of the present. On 25 April 1763, Thomas Percy wrote to his friend Lord Hailes, David Dalrymple, with reference to his (Percy's) "Miscellaneous Poems Relating to the Chinese": "I am much mistaken if we are not on the eve of some great discoveries that will surprise the world."8 For Percy and others this great tautological "discovery" would center more and more on the ballad and its con-
tingent subjectivity—a ballad most often providing an etiological narrative of a subject "bound" by history, and a ballad performed by a "minstrel" author completely immersed in a context of (imaginary) feudalism. The ballad's historical exoticism promised, via the theory of minstrel origins, an authentic authorship and a legitimating point of origin for all consequent national literature. But all of this depended upon the invention of a historical rupture, a separation that would enable the "discovery" of the ballad and the authentication of that discovery as in fact a recovery.

To trace these developments of the ballad "scandals" is not necessarily to rely on some true or more authentic account of the history of the ballad as a genre. For it is impossible to separate the genre from this external history, impossible to locate some purer form outside of this tradition. Indeed, it is a methodological imperative to avoid such a search, for constantly to seek an intrinsic form is to recapitulate the very tragedies of the scandals themselves. And it is equally difficult to preserve a domain of scholarship outside of these valorizations of historical modes; as the ballad scandals make clear, scholarship itself often arises in response to a crisis in authenticity—here representing its own interests in teleology, replicability, and documentation. The scandal of the ballad is in its very revival: the production of a ghost, freed of a history that scholarship will take on as its duty to supply.

It is difficult to talk about the ballad as having a particular set of immutable characteristics. One can speak of ballad meter and then begin to list the many "traditional" exceptions, and one can speak of ballad thematics, but to do so is simply to fix the antithesis of an infinitely possible parody. Yet it is possible to speak of a genre without reducing the concept to a kind of abstracted history of rules, and to do so is to recognize that the concept of the genre is always emergent historically. One can thus outline a historical process whereby what is valued and thereby made permanent within the genre becomes foregrounded and conclude that the genre emerges as a form and thereby develops its permutations through time. In other words, what is "variation" gets determined by the mutual specification of what is "stored." Furthermore, the discourse regarding a genre—including its valuations, its imitations, parodies, revivals, and disparagements—should be considered as the appearance of certain aesthetic problems that, once brought to completion, will also be likely to disappear.9

MacEdward Leach's summary of ballad history offers a gloss on these problems: "Ballads as a form, as a distinct genre . . . emerged in England and in most of West Europe in the late Middle Ages and in this form the ballad continued to be composed and to exist in diminishing numbers through the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries."10 More specifically, the period of generation for the traditional ballad is generally agreed to extend from the middle of the sixteenth century to the end of the seventeenth; those appearing on broadsides and in broadside style reached their peak in the period from 1750 to 1850, and
throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries we see the emergence of imitations, forgeries, and scholarship in a complex interrelation. Imitation arises as a scandal, forgery as a style of genius, and scholarship as a cure.

Putting aside a persistent and appropriately gothic rationale for the minstrel origins of the ballad, Leach concludes that "the evidence from numerous records as far back as the Middle Ages points rather to the middle class [as the ballad folk]: small farmers, shoemakers, village schoolteachers, nursemaids, tinkers, wives of small tradesmen, innkeepers, drovers." Leach contends that the broadside, too, is a middle-class form and one even more directly tied to middle-class modes of production. For the broadsides themselves took their final shape in the offices of printers who employed hack writers to churn them out; often thousands of copies were printed. As a genre that emerges at the point of transition between a feudal and capitalist/industrial order, the ballad moves from its so-called traditional narrative form to the mixed modes of the broadside—which include such narrative ballads as well as songs, lyrics, dirges, and elegies—and thence to a form characterized by either revival or imitation.

The internal process of ballad making, like the process of forming any genre through time, is a matter of syncretism and mixed modes, of novelization in the sense that conflicting social values and social forms come into play. This mixing is evident formally as varieties of song genres are incorporated into broadside productions and as narrative distance is replaced by lyricism in the sense that temporality is deemphasized in favor of argument. And this mixing is evident thematically in the changing structural and social relations portrayed by the ballad through time. A. L. Lloyd gives examples of a thematics of cross-class sexual relations and a profusion of lower-class heroines, comparing the feudal lady and the foot page in "Glasgerion" and the bourgeois lady and the sailor in "Jack the Jolly Tar." Although this is not the place for a full thematic analysis of the ballad, it is important to note that the thematic of the genre is breaking into a discursive heterogeneity homologous to the transformations of the form itself within its historical milieu. Lloyd’s examples stand in contrast to the traditional ballad’s concerns with incest and adultery. If incest, adultery, and domestic murder appear as the taboos of an insulated and even "pure" ballad form, alterity and multiplicity of voice appear as the transgressions of the ballad’s later developments.

We see as well in the ballad’s external history an interest in crossing boundaries. The climactic moment of "discovery," when one finds, as one might find a true love or secret self, a "genuine" ballad singer and his or her repertoire; the transference from performer to author and back again; the revival of ghosts through genealogy; and the very concrete metaphor of "the border" in the Anglo-Scots tradition—all serve as examples supplementing such thematic crossings. In his "Essay on the Ancient Minstrels," Percy points out this recurrence of "the border" as place of origin:
I cannot conclude this account of the ancient English Minstrels, without remarking that they are most of them represented to have been of the North of England. There is scarce an old historical song or Ballad wherein a Minstrel or Harper appears, but he is characterized by way of eminence to have been "of the North Countrie": and indeed the prevalence of the Northern dialect in such compositions, shews that this representation is real. On the other hand the scene of the finest Scottish Ballads is laid in the South of Scotland; which should seem to have been peculiarly the nursery of Scottish Minstrels. In the old song of Maggy Lawder, a Piper is asked, by way of distinction, Come ye frae the Border?—The Martial spirit constantly kept up and exercised near the frontier of the two kingdoms, as it furnished continual subjects for their Songs, so it inspired the inhabitants of the adjacent counties on both sides with the powers of poetry. Besides, as our Southern Metropolis must have been ever the scene of novelty and refinement, the northern countries, as being most distant, would preserve their ancient manners longest, and of course the old poetry, in which those manners are peculiarly described.\footnote{14}

For Percy this task of antiquing the region is tantamount to an erasure of the border as separation and hence the melding of a "national" (i.e., "British") tradition.

Percy deserves attention here not simply because he was the "compiler/author" of the Reliques of Ancient English Poetry but because his ambivalence regarding compilation and authorship is a key to the role of the ballad revival in the invention of literary scholarship. Before Percy, ballads had been printed by Ambrose Philips (A Collection of Old Ballads, 1723–25)\footnote{15} and Ramsay (The Ever Green, 1724; and The Tea-Table Miscellany, 1724) and occasionally imitated: Lady Wardlaw’s infamous "Hardyknute," David Mallet’s "William and Margaret," William Shenstone’s "Jemmy Dawson," John Gay’s "Molly Mog," Matthew Prior’s "The Thief and Cordelier."\footnote{16} If the ballads themselves do not always employ the thematics of nationalism,\footnote{17} such a thematic nevertheless often accompanies the gesture of collecting. When the Scottish chancellor, James Ogilvy, earl of Seafield, signed the Act of Union in 1707 he made his famous declaration, "Now there’s ane end of ane old song," and throughout the period the ballad continues to negotiate the border between two mutually exclusive nationalistic claims (one "Scottish," the other "British") at the same time as it poses its erotics of transgression. Ramsay writes in his preface to The Ever Green: "When these good old Bards wrote, we had not yet made use of imported trimmings upon our Cloath, nor of foreign Embroidery in our Writings. Their Poetry is the Product of their own Country, not pilfered or spoiled in their Transportation from abroad: their Images and nature, and their Lanskips domestick; copied from those Fields and Meadows we every Day behold."\footnote{18}

Despite the doubts of the meticulous Joseph Ritson, Percy did hold in his possession a collection of ballads dating probably to the mid seventeenth century and, of course, the story of his acquisition of this collection is legendary. As John W. Hales and Frederick Furnivall wrote in the foreword to their edition of the folio manuscript, Percy found the manuscript "lying dirty on the floor under a Bureau in the Parlour of his friend Humphrey Pitt of Shifnal in Shropshire,
being used by the maids to light the fire. He begged it of Mr. Pitt and kept it unbound and torn till he was going to lend it to Dr. Johnson. Then he had it bound in half-calf by the binder, who pared off some of the top and bottom lines in different parts of the volume.”

The mixed attitudes of this “rescue” reflect the eighteenth century’s varying sensibility toward ballad texts. Following the somewhat hedged admiration of Sidney (“Apology for Poetry”) and Addison (The Spectator no. 70, 1711), the ballad’s valuation is a matter of mixed judgments. Ramsay, in his introduction to The Tea-Table Miscellany, blithely explains, “My being well assured how acceptable new words to known tunes would prove, engaged me to the making verses for above sixty of them . . . about thirty more were done by some ingenious young gentlemen.” In a note to the folio manuscript, Furnivall and Hales record that before Percy learned “to reverence the manuscript,” as he says, “he scribbled notes over its margins and put brackets for suggested omissions in its texts. After he reverenced it, he tore out of it the two leaves containing its best ballad, ‘King Estmere,’ which he had evidently touched up largely by himself. As to the text, he looked on it as a young woman from the country with unkempt locks, whom he had to fit for fashionable society.” They add that “he puffed out the 39 lines of the ‘Child of Ell’ to 200; he pomatumed the ‘Heir of Lin’ till it shone again; he stuffed bits of wool into ‘Sir Cawline’ and ‘Sir Aldingar’; he powdered everything.” At the end of his career, long after he had made many claims for the authenticity of his versions, Percy still held that “without [such emendations] the collection would not have deserved a moment’s attention.”

It is clear that throughout Percy’s literary endeavors authenticity is not a value in itself and is certainly not a consideration equal to that of aesthetic value or taste. Percy’s first letter to Thomas Warton describes the folio manuscript and his plans for it and asks Warton to send him ballads “but such as have some higher merit than that of meer antiquity.” Even more suggestive is a postscript to Warton in a subsequent letter saying,

I cannot prevail on myself to close up the packet without mentioning a wish, that has been long uppermost in my heart, it is (pardon the liberty I take) that you would complete the Squire’s Tale of Chaucer.—It is a task worthy of your genius, and to which I know none of our present poets equal, but yourself;—that pleasing cast of antiquity which distinguishes your compositions would be finely adapted to such a subject. Let me add, the undertaking would do no injury to your reputation. Besides; the novelty of such a performance would be a means of recovering to poesy that attention which it seems in great measure to have lost.

The notion of “touching up” and a consciousness of the ways in which documents transcend their immediate historical circumstances is evident as well in Percy’s practices regarding his own letter writing. Percy would ask his correspondents to return his letters, whereupon he would frequently “correct” them. The point here is that for Percy integrity is bestowed by closure and not by a proximity to a state of nature still incomplete as a cultural invention. Percy’s rather Menar-
dian suggestion to Warton should be juxta posed with his requests to Warton (18 June 1763) and to Lord Hailes (17 April 1763) that they finish “The Child of Ell”: “You will also observe that the conclusion even of this copy is wanting. I am tempted to add a few stanzas of my own by way of conclusion and would beg your opinion whether I shall make it end happily in the Old Baron’s being reconciled to the match or otherwise,” he wrote to Hailes. After Percy himself wrote an ending for the ballad (3 November 1765), he asked Lord Hailes “to perfect and improve it.”

For Percy what is unfinished here is not simply the individual ballad but the history of a national literature, which men of letters are obliged to complete or fill out in a variety of ways, including invention and imitation. Percy is writing from a sensibility within which the notion of individual genius is not so important as the notion of the integrity and antiquity of a national tradition. His first letter to Warton makes it clear that his interest in the ballad has to do with a desire to show the English origins of the Arthurian cycles. And on the eve of the publication of The Reliques (2 June 1764), he writes that his collection is nearly complete: “I wish, sir, you would furnish me with a subject for a general frontispiece: this is a favor I am soliciting from all my friends. It shall be in the Gothic style, no classical Apollo, but an old English Minstrel with his harp.” Here is the antiquarian motivation that we find from William Camden’s Britannia foreword: the sense of a national culture and the impulse to legitimate that culture through documents and artifacts. And here we see the recurring motif of a role for the author, a role that at this point gets “authored” as the location of the performing subject within an imaginary feudalism—in other words, an inversion of the conditions of authorship in the literary culture of the late eighteenth century. For whereas the feudal world is imagined as one where the author’s position is a natural one in which the organic validity of the minstrel and his discourse arises from his position within a social matrix, the eighteenth-century author, caught between the decline of patronage and the rise of commercial publishing, finds himself or herself producing a discourse gradually legitimated by a system of property and separation. The emergence of copyright rules will sever his or her body from his or her discourse and legitimate that discourse by the intricate structures of more discourse—the law.

In fact Percy’s project here echoes James Macpherson’s, for The Reliques satisfied, in an albeit skewed manner, the eighteenth-century search for an English epic. Macpherson’s ambitious plan to create an analogous epic for Scotland was accompanied by a more limited agenda designed to establish the genealogies of certain clans, such as the Campbells. (Hence we might suppose the passionate defenses of Macpherson’s own authenticity put forward by Hugh Campbell.) Percy, the bishop son of a grocer, held a similar interest in setting an account of the Percy family genealogy, and his ballad imitation, “The Hermit of Warkworth” (1771), is “a tribute to the ancient line of the Percies.”

In looking at the ballad imitations it is thus obvious that ballad and epic
become confused as genres precisely because of the relation between the “minstrel theory” and this imperative of genealogy. Percy’s frontispiece of the “old minstrel” is explicated in his prefatory remarks to The Reliques: “The reader is here presented with select remains of our ancient English Bards and Minstrels, an order of men, who were once greatly respected by our ancestors, and contributed to soften the roughness of a martial and unlettered people by their songs and music.”

The minstrel origins theory legitimates thereby the professional status of the bard/author; it legitimates the notion of a national literature and its corollary genesis in the naturalized categories of feudalism; it poses the security and fixed identity of patronage against the flux and anonymity of the literary marketplace; and it allows such a decorous mixture of form and theme that the ballad becomes imitable in a variety of genres—epic, lay, elegy, and tragedy. This emphasis on the martial quality of the ballad is a constant feature of the imitation and no doubt speaks to the ballad revival’s hope to uncover a continuous and unified national tradition. Percy wrote to Thomas Warton on 28 May 1761, “Ballads about King Arthur... seem to have been as current among our plain but martial Ancestors, as the Rhapsodies of Homer were among his countrymen.”

But this picture contrasts sharply with the themes of the ballad as collected from oral tradition, for, risking generalization, such traditional ballads constantly explore the psychological tensions of the family, the humor of social stratification, and the tragic dilemma of individual desire pitted against the social good.

The character of the minstrel thus becomes as marvelous and opportune an invention as that of the ballads themselves. In his “Essay on the Ancient Minstrels,” Percy includes a sixteenth-century description of a “personation” of an “ancient minstrel” who entertained Queen Elizabeth at Kenilworth Castle, “his cap off; his head seemly Tonster-wise,” and he adds that along with other venerable customs of the ancient Lord Percys, the presence of minstrels attached to the House of Northumberland was continued by the “late Duke and Duchess.”

This dual etiology of the feudal ballad in the cultures of the monastery and the court must have appealed to a bishop with bardic aspirations, just as the schoolboy tonsure and robe of Thomas Chatterton were to abet the invention of his fifteenth-century alter ego, the poet-monk Thomas Rowley.

But the ballad imitator is confronted by the irony of all costuming; the contamination of the natural, the dissolution of the integrity of the underlying category. The labor of simplicity is always belabored. In 1759, in his “Enquiry into... Polite Learning,” Goldsmith recommends, “Let us, instead of writing finely, try to write naturally.” and John Aikin’s “Essays on Ballads and Pastoral Songs” of 1774 give directions for making modern imitations: “simplicity in thought and style, to the avoidance of both vulgarity and over-refinement.” Such suggestions put the author into a certain jeopardy. Thus we find John Pinkerton (alias Robert Heron) in his pseudonymous “Letters of Literature” (1785) noting that “perhaps in fact nothing can be more heroic and generous in literary affairs than a writer’s ascribing to antiquity his own production; and thus sacrificing his own fame to...
give higher satisfaction to the public." Considering the historical milieu of these remarks, we find that Pinkerton's renunciation is equally a piece of self-promotion and a recapitulation of the crux of the ballad imitation—that is, the fact that the nostalgic collapse of the author into history is always ironically underlain by the discursive invention of that history and its corollary—an "inauthentic" subjectivity bolstered only by the referentiality of a proper name that it continually hopes to escape. Neither costume nor pseudonym nor false moustache can enable one to flee the inevitable separations of temporality.

Pinkerton's remarks are more plea than theory for a more pressing reason. In August 1778, an anonymous commentator on Chatterton's Miscellaneous Prose and Verse had announced, "He deserves to be branded as the worst of impostors, who obtrudes anything upon the world, under the venerable name of antiquity, which has not an honest title to that character." By 1784 Joseph Ritson was drawing similar claims against Pinkerton, denouncing him in the Gentleman's Magazine as a forger "to be ranked with other Scottish impostors like Lauder and Macpherson." Just as Ossian had inspired many "folkloric" imitations, so did the exposure of Macpherson contribute to the development of an apparatus of exposure—a scholarship that would be equipped to examine the materiality of documents and their internal structures and thematics in an effort to situate them in their "proper" historical context. We see this consciousness in Johnson's letter to Boswell of 25 February 1775, where he explains that there is no written "Erse" and reprimands Boswell for his ingenuous appreciation of "ancient" Scottish poetry: "You then are going wild about Ossian. Why do you think any part can be proved? ... Macpherson is, so far as I know, very quiet. Is that not proof enough? Everything is against him. No visible manuscript; no inscription in the language; no correspondence among friends; no transaction of business, of which a single scrap remains in the ancient families." What is missing here is evidence, the accumulation of materials authenticated by learning that will place the author's claims within the legal matrix. But Johnson also felt that such works should be dismissed on their lack of aesthetic qualities alone. He said of Ossian that such verse might be written by "many men, many women, and many children." Reciprocally, Percy is said to have been particularly annoyed by Johnson's parody of "The Hermit of Warkworth":

I put my hat upon my head
And walked into the Strand
And there I met another man,
With his hat in his hand.

Pinkerton had, of course, completed in his Scottish Tragic Ballads a second part to "Hardyknute," the ballad composed by Lady Wardlaw and Ramsay that was to become the most scandalous of all the ballad scandals. Pinkerton had claimed that this ballad, which was first published in a folio sheet at Edinburgh in 1719, dated
to "the end of the fifteenth century," a date he was sure was appropriate for "the antique parts of this noble production."\textsuperscript{46} Following further publication in Ramsay's \textit{Ever Green} and \textit{Tea-Table Miscellany}, "Hardyknute" was accepted by Percy for the second edition of \textit{The Reliques}.\textsuperscript{47} In a letter of 1 August 1763 to Lord Hailes, Percy writes, "The Ballad of Hardyknute being about to be sent to the press, among the pieces for the second Volume of Mr. Dodsley's Collection of ancient Ballads, I have thrown together a few lines by way of introduction: which, as they are chiefly extracted from a Letter you formerly honored me with, I think it incumbent on me to submit for your corrections."\textsuperscript{48} Percy explained in a headnote, "She professed to have discovered it written on shreds of paper; but a suspicion arose that it was her own. Some able judges pronounced it modern, and the lady in a manner acknowledged it to be so by producing the last two stanzas beginning 'There's nae light.'\textsuperscript{49} Thus for Dalrymple and Percy the aesthetic merits of the ballad were not necessarily linked to its antiquity; in fact, Percy's note to the ballad makes clear that Lady Wardlaw is the author and has been proven to be by her addition of "matching stanzas." But by the early nineteenth century her authorship of this ballad had contaminated the confidence placed in all "traditional" ballads, and Robert Chambers declared in \textit{Chambers' Edinburgh Journal} for 1843 that at least twenty-five traditional ballads were composed by her, adding,

I have arrived at the conclusion that the high-class romantic ballads of Scotland are not ancient compositions—are not older than the early part of the eighteenth century—and are mainly, if not wholly, the production of one mind. Whose was this mind is a different question, on which no such confident decision may for the present be arrived at; but I have no hesitation in saying that, from the internal resemblances traced on from Hardyknute through Sir Patrick Spence and Gil Morrice to the others, there seems to me a great likelihood that the whole were the composition of the authoress of that poem—namely Elizabeth (Halkett) Lady Wardlaw of Pitreavie.\textsuperscript{50}

This was a border crossing that would not be tolerable. Yet it is obvious that the motivation of Lady Wardlaw (1677–1727) and her later compatriot Caroline Oliphant, the Baroness Nairne (1766–1845), was quite different from that fueling other ballad imitators. In Scotland, the production of ballad literature by aristocratic women, often done pseudonymously or anonymously, was part of the political and aesthetic production of the home and not part of a literary circle's attempts to validate a national literary tradition. We find here the Jacobite desire to turn back the clock of history within a domestic scene miming the artisanal culture of feudalism. Norval Clyne writes that Lady Wardlaw "pretended she had found this poem written on shreds of paper employed for what is called the bottoms of clues. The authoress was described by her relations as 'a woman of elegant accomplishments, who wrote other poems, and practiced drawing, and cutting paper with her scissors, and who had much wit and humour, with great sweetness of temper.'"\textsuperscript{51} Indeed, it might be wise to reconsider all ballad imitators as a
variety of fancy paper cutters and embroiderers writing from their vernacular allegiances rather than as "an order of men" in a "martial" context. We are reminded of Percy's find under the bureau, as well as Thomas Chatterton's mother's interest in the bundles of parchment manuscripts from St. Mary Redcliffe's: "for use for new thread papers." In a letter from Robert Purdie, regarding her song "The Mitherless Lanne," Baroness Nairne is advised:

If it meets the author's approbation I should like the word children left out as it gives the Idea of something so trifling. The song is really pretty and will be sung by grown up people with much pleasure. Besides this, Mr. Dun says (for I have seen him this Evening) that the first part is too low set for children, as he offers his name as having put the accompaniment this will be in favor of the sale, but this is only if quite agreeable to the Ladies.

For at least two generations, Scottish gentlewomen produced songs in the vernacular: the works of the first wave of song writers, Lady Wardlaw and Lady Grizel Baillie (1665–1746), were recorded in collections such as Ramsay's Tea-Table Miscellany. The works of the second group, Jean Elliot of Minto, Baroness Nairne, Alicia Cockburn, Susanna Blamire (who was in fact from Cumberland, but acquired her taste for Scottish songs on visits to Perthshire), and Lady Anne Barnard, often in fact entered into the oral tradition. The ballad is thus constantly being rescued not so much from "history" but from a generalized oblivion of the feminine—the maids lighting the fire, Lady Wardlaw playing "clues," the Baroness composing "trifling" children's songs, and Mrs. Chatterton's sewing.

Once we look beyond the invention of the minstrel tradition, we find, in fact, a genre predominantly continued by women in both its "authentic" and imitated forms. "To the Jacobite gentlewomen of Edinburgh we owe many of our best known Scottish songs. Baroness Nairne was of the old Jacobite and Episcopal family of the Oliphants of Gask, and lived at Duddingston. . . . Mrs. Cockburn, the author of 'The Flowers of the Forest' lived at one time in a close on the Castle Hill. . . . also Baroness Nairne was the sister of Scott's friend Mrs. Keith of Ravelston"—so reads a turn-of-the-century guidebook to Edinburgh. In his book on "The Balladists," John Geddie similarly cites Lady Anne Barnard's compositions. Furthermore, the majority of the singers of traditional ballads donating versions to contemporary collectors and anthologists were women. Just as Lady Wardlaw and Baroness Nairne were often the focus of discussions of scandals of the ballad, so were such "natural" souls as Mrs. Farquhar and Mrs. Brown of Falkland the focus of ballad restoration in works such as Scott's Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border.

Although ultimately no one but Chambers came to take seriously the idea that Lady Wardlaw had written all the traditional ballads of Scotland, his theory illustrates a change that had occurred by the end of the eighteenth century regarding authenticity and orality, a change resulting in a new emphasis upon collecting from oral tradition. Yet such a "science" of collecting from life rather than from documents had its own ambiguities and slippages. Alan Bruford, in

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his study of Alexander Carmichael's treatment of oral sources, argues that late into the nineteenth century the imperative of writing down an "informant's" actual words was not yet keenly felt:

True, Campbell of Islay and his collectors tried to take down and then publish the storyteller's words as accurately as they could, given the difficulties of writing from dictation. But his predecessors, from the Brothers Grimm on, had had no more scruples about "correcting" or "improving" a story to fit it for the printed page than Burns had about writing new verses for a bawdy folk-song or Scott about inventing a line or two (at least) to patch up an incompletely remembered ballad.

A writing seeking to erase itself as writing, a writing dreaming of animation—this becomes the "ethic" of a science of folklore. Yet the shadow of the mark continues to haunt this writing. Bruford notes of Carmichael: "The only way in which Carmichael seems an exception ... is the thoroughness with which, having taken down a complete text, he revised every sentence, almost as if he were trying to evade copyright restrictions."^57

Perhaps the most serious blow to documentation in the eighteenth century was struck by the Rowley controversy. The exposure of Thomas Chatterton's elaborate and imaginary invention of a Bristol past necessitated the invention of a machinery for exposure, a machinery of scholarship. Just as Percy played a part in the attribution of "Hardyknute" to Lady Wardlaw, so did he play a part in uncovering Chatterton's hoax, and in both cases he expresses admiration for the literary skills of "the impostors." On 6 September 1773 he wrote a postscript to a letter to Thomas Barrett-Lennard, Lord Dacre, explaining that the forged Rowley documents (two parchments that William Barrett had given to Dacre to show to Percy) were coming to London via Robert Chambers, who was on his way to India:

After all tho' I think from the style of the Composition arises as Strong Evidence that the Poetry cannot be ancient, as does even from the forged spurious Writing, itself—yet still it may be highly deserving of Publication, not only on account of the Poetical Merit of the Poems, but also to show what human Invention is capable of performing: And I am persuaded that if all the undoubted Pieces of Chatterton were collected into a Volume, they would prove him not only capable of writing these Poems attributed to Rowlie, but considering his early youth and the disadvantage of his Education, to have been one of the greatest geniuses that ever existed in the World—For my own part, I would subscribe to such a publication with as much pleasure as if the Pieces could be proved to be Rowlie's own: and would lend all the assistance in my power to promote the sale and formation ['"execution" crossed out, at first writing, in one of Percy's corrections] of such a work."^58

In the slip of "execution" and the remedy of "formation" we all see the moral ambiguities faced by the teenaged Chatterton as he experimented with yellow ochre and an antiqued handwriting: the ambivalence of the frame tale in Horace Walpole's works; the mixtures of invention, collection, and supplementarity in
the publications of Ramsay and Pinkerton as well as Percy; the promulgation of a genius untutored within the literary tradition itself.

In a letter to William Mason on 25 May 1772 Walpole wrote,

Somebody, I fancy Dr. Percy, has produced a dismal dull ballad, called "The Execution of Sir Charles Bawdin," and given it for one of the Bristol Poems, called Rowley's—but it is a still worse counterfeit, than those that were first sent to me; it grows a hard case on our ancestors, who have every day bastards laid to them, five hundred or a thousand years after they are dead. Indeed Mr. Macpherson, etc., are so fair as to beget the fathers as well as the children. 39

The aristocracy of the ballad was envisioned as a pure and uncorrupted one—the ballad was to be steeped in history, yet locked within an impenetrable feudalism, hence an arrested history. Thus despite the ballad's actual place in history—its absorption of the ongoingsness of temporality via details, innovations, borrowings, fragmentation, and changes in form—and despite the evident appearance of the ballad within contemporary traditional culture, the collectors and anthologists of the ballad continued to look for an uncorrupted and seemingly transcendent form. In expressing his doubts about the Scottish ballads, Chambers had criticized "Sir Patrick Spens" (which he refers to as "Spence") as especially dubious and most likely to be another of Lady Wardlaw's compositions, writing that "cork-heeled shoes, hats, fans, and feather beds, in addition to the inapplicability of the ballad to any known event in Scottish history" were anachronistic details showing the inauthenticity of the ballad. 40 Such a statement betrays a lack of understanding of oral tradition and as well notes the consequences of a purely textual scholarship of the ballad. As James Hogg wrote to Scott regarding "Lord William": "I am fully convinced of the antiquity of this song; for, although much of the language seems somewhat modernized, this must be attributed to its currency, being much liked, and very much sung in this neighborhood. I can trace it back several generations, but cannot hear of its ever having been in print." 41

The ballad arrested, integral, and impervious is the ballad as artifact, and thus, ironically, those ballads which most fulfill the eighteenth-century ballad ideal are precisely those ballads so carefully "pomatumed" and "stuffed." These "ballads in drag," as we might call them, find their most exaggerated and exemplary forms in such fabrications as Chatterton's "Bristowe Tragedie" and Scott's "Lay of the Last Minstrel," for these works take on a scenic relation to history in which all roles are carefully articulated. In contrast to the terse narrativity of the traditional ballad, history is arranged here as a location of pageantry and spectacle in which performer, audience, and narrative are mutually enfolded in a decorative "pastness." Here the ballad is a device for recreating context, and the only true ballad tragedy is the constant failure or breakdown of that device, its impossible relation to authenticity. 42 These two works in fact put the problems of "staging" folklore into high relief for us.
Turning first to "The Bristowe Tragedie," we must consider it in light of Chatterton's biography, particularly as it establishes the relation between the poet Rowley and the patron William Canynge which Chatterton comes to seek in a number of patron/father figures. And we must consider the work as well in light of Chatterton's entire oeuvre, as just one in a series of "documents" designed to validate an imaginary Bristol history. Yet there are several features of its structure and thematic that are relevant to its status as a ballad scandal. For among the many qualities that distinguish it from the traditional ballad, the most dominant is its relentless spatiality—a spatiality continually tied to the transcendent view of "Kynge Edwarde." Here symmetry replaces repetition: the symmetry of the pageant; the symmetry of the crowd's reciprocal tears in response to the hero's blood; and, most dramatically, the closing alignment of the four symmetrical parts of the body upon the four points of the town. One might contend that the ballad internalizes the problematic of the imitation by continually artifactualizing history. Bawdin's speech of apotheosis claims:

'Whatte tho', uphoisted onne a pole,
'Mye lymbes shall rotte ymne ayre,
'And ne ryche monument of brasse
'Charles Bawdin's name shall bear;
'Yett ymne the holie booke above,
'Whych e tyme can't eate awaie,
'There wythe the servants of the Lorde,
'Mye name shall lyve for aie.'\(^5\)

The book offers a transcendent, if forever arrested, form of life once the body is itself a relic, the voice dispersed, and the organic made textual.

We find an analogous scenario in the structure of Scott's "Lay of the Last Minstrel," which, though not properly a ballad imitation, must be considered as a kind of manifesto, or perhaps parting statement, of the ballad revival spurred by Percy and that revival's concomitant invention of the minstrel figure. As in "The Bristowe Tragedie," the aristocracy becomes the proper audience of the narrative: "The Maid's pale shade, who wails her lot," "The phantom Knight, his glory fled," "The Chief, whose antique crownlet long/Still sparkled in the feudal song," these "all mourn the Minstrel's harp unstrung,/Their name unknown, their praise unsung."\(^6\) Even more strikingly, the "lay" is formed by the juxtaposition of the frame sections situating the minstrel's context within the rather conventional love story of divided houses and with what might be seen as the dominant narrative—the theft and reclamation of the mystical book of the wizard Michael Scott. This book, taken from Scott's grave,

Would not yield to unchristen'd hand
Till he smear'd the cover o'er

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With the Borderer's curdled gore;
A moment then the volume spread.\textsuperscript{66}

Brought to life by death, this mystical book must be seen as an analogue to the persistently gothic architecture of the "lay" itself: Melrose Abbey's arrested life ("Nor herb, nor floweret, glisten'd there, / But was carved in the cloister-arches as fair," "Thou would'st have thought some fairy's hand / Twixt poplars straight the ozier wand, / In many a freakish knot, had twined; / Then framed a spell, when the work was done, / And changed the willow-wreaths to stone")\textsuperscript{66} becomes the antithetical complement to the minstrel's skill at awakening the dead: "In sooth, 'twas strange, this old man's verse / Could call them from their marble hearse."\textsuperscript{67}

It is obvious that this must be "the last minstrel"; otherwise there might be no reason for Scott to exist to invent him, for these reciprocal "awakenings" project an imagined history that Scott, as a national "figure," must relentlessly supply.\textsuperscript{68}

These texts, the culmination of the ballad scandals, in turn awake the question of why the ballad had such an appeal as a genre to be revived, for the ballad as it existed in popular tradition did not fit this scenario of feudalism and arrested, sentimentalized nature. Nevertheless there were intrinsic features of the ballad tradition that made it an appropriate solution to the problems of authorial subjectivity at the onset of the widespread mechanical production of literature.

First, the location of voice within character in the ballad—a voice inseparable from the ongoingness of dialogue—situates the ballad in antithesis to the spatiality and stasis of the document and the document's devices of framing. Consider, for example, the dialogue/testament form of a ballad such as "Edward," which was recorded in Percy's \textit{Reliques} (1.59):

\begin{quote}
"Why dois your brand sae drap wi bluid, Edward, Edward,
Why dois your brand sae drap wi bluid,
And why sae sad gang yee O?"

"O I hae killed my hauke sae guid, Mither, mither,
O I hae killed my hauke sae guid,
And I had nac mair bot hee O."
\end{quote}

In Percy's version, the ballad tells the story of a patricide, and Edward's testament states that his mother will receive "the curse of hell" for her "sic counseils." A ballad such as "Edward" immerses one immediately in a voiced context: the ballad singer in turn takes the form of each of the "characters" in a ventriloquistic fashion. Even when a traditional ballad works by means of third-person narration, the speaker "voices" quotes and makes statements with the authority of an observer in context or witness. The ballad is thereby a form continually marked by immediacy—immediacy of voice, immediacy of action, immediacy of allusion.

Second, the dissolution of the performing self in the performance style (the
Anglo-Scots tradition of holding the body rigidly still and letting the ballad speak through one's self) promises a total immersion of personality in context that is the antithesis of the literary author's separation from both the local and the living presence of audience. It is not merely that the ballad occurs "out loud," as would be the case with any folkloric form, but as well that we have the appearance of tradition speaking through someone. Now other forms, particularly proverbs, also work this way, and we might note as well that the novel's dialogism analogously, in the eighteenth century if not in later practice, presents a world that seems to come to life beyond the signature of any particular authorial style or voice. But the ballad singer is praised for fidelity, not for originality. The panoply of ventriloquized voices presented in the novel is still attributed to the authority of a central consciousness: the novelist is here a kind of puppeteer. For writers such as Scott the ballad came to represent an idyllic context of representation in which the Scottish tradition would "voice" Scott himself—the inverse of the animation of ghosts that was his true stock in trade.

Third, the ballad's erotic of transgression, its exploration of the subject's tragic relation to the social, and its recurrent closure of death transformed by testament all contributed to its value for eighteenth-century literary culture. What endures, according to the progress of ballad narrative, is the form of the recanting—the testament of the genre itself. "What will you leave?" "What shall I tell?" These common ending refrains of the ballad emphasize that the true hero of the narration is the one who distributes the inheritance and the message. Here, ultimately, was a role for the eighteenth-century author quite different from that offered by patronage, professionalism, and the parodies of ventriloquism. But this role was destined to collapse into self-parody because of its impossible claims of authenticity. We might invert the Cambridge History's contention and assert that "no life of this sort can be produced under the conditions of modern verse." For history itself is always a mixed mode, traversing the "integrity" of the authorial subject in a drama that nonetheless has all the features of a relentless, perhaps even authentic, tragedy.

Notes

The completion of this essay was aided by the kind assistance of the curators of the British Library, the National Library of Scotland, the Edinburgh University Library, the Folklore Archives of the School of Scottish Studies at Edinburgh—particularly Alan Bruford, director of the archives, and Joan MacKenzie, the archive secretary—the Inter-Library Loan Department at Temple University's Paley Library; and by a grant from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation.


3. See *OED*, s.v. "authentic."

4. See *Ancient Scottish Poems: Published from the Manuscript of George Bannatyne, 1568* (Edinburgh, 1770).


Since time immemorial art has sought to redeem and promote the particular. Accomplished works everywhere were those in which specificity was pushed to the limit. Granted, general concepts of aesthetic genres kept cropping up in the form of norms, but they were probably always inspired by didactic considerations reflecting a desire to abstract universal characteristics from important works so as to be able to obtain a general standard for judging others. Of course, these characteristics did not have to be what was most essential in those works. Still, a genre can be said to store up part of the authenticity of individual works.


13. One is reminded of Jane Gallop's discussion of Freud's "Dora," where Gallop writes:

Sexual relations are with someone whose alterity is limited within the confines of a larger circle. Exogamy, marrying outside the larger circle is equally a violation of the incest taboo. Marriage outside of class or race might represent a contact with a non-assimilable alterity, thus like actual incest bringing unmitigated heterogeneity within the family circle. Freud's nurses and governesses might represent just such otherness, the very otherness that can also be represented by the violence of class conflict.


15. The 1727 copy of these volumes in the British Library has Percy's marginal notes.

16. See R. S. Forsythe, "Modern Imitations of the Popular Ballad," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 13 (1914): 88–97, esp. 89–90. Forsythe presents a taxonomy of ballad imitations by theme, but he also makes a useful distinction between imitations of ballad form and imitations of specific ballads. This raises interesting questions regarding the poet's apprenticeship by "copying" and, at the same time, prohibitions against plagiarism.

17. Indeed it can be argued that the popular ballad always espouses a local politics over a politics of the state. Leach points out that ballads are usually concerned with "local battles," rarely with "great battles," and that "fully half the ballads can be classified under the subject category: local happenings of a dramatic character"; *Ballad Book*, 15.


21. Allan Ramsay, *Tea-Table Miscellany: A Collection of Choice Song, Scots and English*, 14th ed., 2 vols. (reprint ed., Glasgow, 1876), viii. The index to the volume is marked as to "new words by different hands; the author's unknown; old songs; old songs with additions."


25. Percy to Warton, 26 August 1762, Percy correspondence, no. 42560, ff. 97.

26. Scandals of the Ballad
Ironically, this constant “covering” has had the effect of obscuring Percy’s personality, as Bertrand Bronson complains in “A Sense of the Past: The Percy Correspondence,” *Facets of the Enlightenment: Studies in English Literature and Its Contexts* (Berkeley, 1968), 173–86, esp. 186.

27. Percy to Warton, 18 June 1763, Percy correspondence, no. 42560, ff. 121; and Percy to Warton, 24 November 1763, referring to this letter.


29. Percy to Hailes, 3 November 1765, Percy-Hailes correspondence, no. 32, 331, ff. 41.

30. Percy to Warton, 2 June 1764, Percy correspondence, no. 42560, ff. 129.

31. See Foucault, “What Is an Author?”, 124–25: “But it was at the moment when a system of ownership and strict copyright rules were established (toward the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century) that the transgressive properties always intrinsic to the act of writing become the forceful imperative of literature.” For Foucault this marks the author’s entry into transgression; analogously we note the move from this mid-century imitation of oral forms to romanticism’s more free renditions of them. Mark Rose, in “Author as Proprietor,” argues that at the same time the law was undergoing “a period of increasing idealization and rationalization in legal thinking” (59). As my forthcoming work contends, it is not surprising that this idealization of legal discourse accompanied the invention of genius, any more than that the Critical Legal Studies Movement’s current attack on such formalist theories of law accompanies the poststructuralist critique of the author. See Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *The Critical Legal Studies Movement* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), 2, for an attack on formalist approaches to the law.


33. Quoted in Hustvedt, *Ballad Criticism*, 188. See the Percy correspondence, no. 42560, which includes a notebook of Percy’s on poets and painters (a book linking him further to the interests of Walpole and Chatterton) accompanied by a family tree of the Percies.


35. In his 1880 edition of Percy’s *Reliques*, Walford adds the further comment: “Doubtless what was true in one country was true more or less in every other; as the manners of each people become more refined, their ballads come to embrace a wider range of subjects. The songs were no longer confined to the rehearsal of deeds of valour, but began to include all sorts of tales of adventure, wild and marvellous, and occasionally became the vehicle of sentiment and passion” (19).

36. Percy to Warton, 28 May 1761, Percy correspondence, no. 42560, ff. 67.

37. Percy, *Reliques*, lii. He notes, however, the already fallen status of the minstrel in this “personation”: “Toward the end of the sixteenth century this class of men had lost all credit and in Elizabeth’s 39th year a statute was passed by which ‘minstrels, wandering abroad’ were included among ‘rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars’” (lv).

38. See E. H. W. Meyerstein, *A Life of Thomas Chatterton* (New York, 1930), 36: “The uniform of the Hospital was a blue robe, with an orange-colour lining, a band, and a blue bonnet, with orange-colour stockings; each boy had a number, wore a brass badge bearing the founder’s crest, a dolphin; and he ‘had the tonsure.’ In that last bare fact, I believe, lies the genesis of Thomas Rowley, the monk.” Meyerstein also notes that the tonsure is shown in Nicholas Pocock’s 1784 sketch of the child Chatterton being conducted by Genius to her altar, with St. Mary Redcliff in the background.

George Steevens must again make his appearance for a memorable trick played on the antiquary Gough. This was the famous tombstone on which was engraved the drinking-horn of Hardynkute to indicate his last fatal carouse, for this royal Dane died drunk! To prevent any doubt, the name, in Saxon characters, was sufficiently legible. Steeped in pickle to hasten a precocious antiquity, it was then consigned to the corner of a broker’s shop, where the antiquarian eye of Gough often pored on the venerable odds and ends; it perfectly succeeded on the “Director of the Antiquarian Society.” He purchased the relic for a trifle, and dissertations of due size were preparing for the “Archaeologia”!

D’Israeli adds in a note that he has “since been informed that this famous invention was originally a flim-flam of a Mr. Thomas White, a noted collector and dealer in antiquities. But it was Steevens who placed it in the broker’s shop, where he was certain of catching the antiquary.” Steevens plays a role in many scenes of inauthenticity, taking part in the exposure of W.H. Ireland’s Shakespeare forgeries and Chatterton’s Rowley poems, yet as well himself forging a letter of George Peele describing a meeting with Shakespeare. And Steevens also invented the fabulous “Upas” tree, alleged to be described by a Dutch surgeon who was at Samarang in 1773. This tree was said to have existed in Java, with properties so poisonous as to destroy all animal and vegetable life to a distance of fifteen or sixteen miles around it—an appropriate symbol perhaps of the forger’s “blasted” relation to historical context.

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58. Percy to Lord Dacre, 6 September 1773. Percy correspondence, no. 32, 329, 1762–
1795, ff. 75. Percy was, in fact, given to interesting slips, as when he often wrote
“Islandic” rather than “Icelandic” when mentioning northern epics.
59. HoraceWalpole to William Mason, 25 May 1772, in *Horace Walpole’s Correspondence with
28 of *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole’s Correspondence*, ed. Lewis (New Haven, 1955),
34–36.
60. Robert Chambers, *The Romantic Scottish Ballads: Their Epoch and Authorship* (1849; 
61. James Hogg to Walter Scott, quoted in Clyne, *Romantic Scottish Ballads*, 28–29. See also 
62. Obviously the “pageantlike structure” of these works speaks to the hybrid gothicism
of Ossian and, even earlier, to the neoclassical epics of Sir Richard Blackmore, Richard
Glover, William Wilkie, James Ogden, and John Ogilvie. In contrast, Chatterton’s
sense of humor in his work as a whole, if not in “The Bristowe Tragedie” particularly,
should not be underrated. When we consider the wildly parodying possibilities of
Chatterton’s “Ossianics” as “copies” of “genuine” Macphersons, we realize Chatterton
was shrewdly aware of the Ossianic as style. Donald Taylor quotes from a parody Chatterton
sent to John Baker on 6 March 1769 written two days after the composition of
“Ethelgar,” his first published Ossianic piece: “My friendship is as firm as the white
Rocks when the black Waves roar around it [sic], and the waters burst on its hoary top,
when the driving wind ploughs the sable Sea, and the rising waves aspire to the clouds
teeming with the rattling Hail; so much for Heroics: to speak in plain English, I am
and ever will be your unalterable Friend”; *Thomas Chatterton’s Art: Experiments in Imagined
History* (Princeton, 1978), 273. For further discussion of the relation between
ballad and epic, see Ralph Cohen, “On the Interrelations of Eighteenth-Century Literary
Forms,” in *New Approaches to Eighteenth-Century Literature*, ed. Phillip Harth (New
York, 1974), 33–78; and Walter Morris Hart, *Ballad and Epic: A Study in the Development
of the Narrative Art* (New York, 1907; reissued 1967).
65. Ibid., 87. 66. Ibid., 65–67. 67. Ibid., 132.
68. From the costume novel to the feudal accoutrements of Abbotsford, Scott’s role in the
culture becomes more and more that of an archivist charged with the invention of the
archive. It is not surprising to see Scott rushing to the still warm scene of Waterloo for
the express purpose of gathering souvenirs.
69. See Roger Abrahams, “Patterns of Structure and Role Relationships in the Child
Ballad in the United States,” *Journal of American Folklife* 79, no. 313 (July–September
1966): 448–62; and Roger Abrahams and George Foss, *Anglo-American Folk Song Style*
views himself as a voice for whatever piece he is performing: he places himself in the
background, letting the piece speak for itself.”