

but rather a different order of values from that which we expect to determine the structure of poetry.

have been more purely an instrument. Most of us are interested in the form for its own sake —not apart from the content, but because we aim at making something which shall first of all *be*, something which in consequence will have the capability of exciting, within a limited range, a considerable variety of responses from different readers. For Kipling the poem is something which is intended to *act* —and for the most part his poems are intended to elicit the same response from all readers, and only the response which they can make in common. For other poets —at least, for some other poets —the poem may begin to shape itself in fragments of musical rhythm, and its structure will first appear in terms of something analogous to musical form; and such poets find it expedient to occupy their conscious mind with the craftsman's problems, leaving the deeper meaning to emerge, if there, from a lower level. It is a question then of what one chooses to be conscious of, and of how much of the meaning, in a poem, is conveyed direct to the intelligence and how much is conveyed indirectly by the musical impression upon the sensibility —always remembering that the use of the word 'musical' and of musical analogies, in discussing poetry, has its dangers if we do not constantly check its limitations: for the music of verse is inseparable from the meanings and associations of words. If I say then, that this musical concern is secondary and infrequent with Kipling, I am not implying any inferiority of craftsmanship,

tiates his 'verse' from 'poetry' is the subordination of musical interest." It is known that Eliot criticised Matthew Arnold for the same reason. In 'The Music of Poetry' (1942) he makes clear his own stand: "I think that a poet may gain much from the study of music: how much technical knowledge of musical form is desirable I do not know, for I have not that technical knowledge myself. But I believe that the properties in which music concerns the poet most nearly, are the sense of rhythm and the sense of structure. I think that it might be possible for a poet to work too closely to musical analogies: the result might be an effect of artificiality; but I know that a poem, or a passage of a poem, may tend to realize itself first as a particular rhythm before it reaches expression in words, and that this rhythm may bring to birth the idea and the image; and I do not believe that this is an experience peculiar to myself. The use of recurrent themes is as natural to poetry as to music. There are possibilities for verse which bear some analogy to the development of a theme by different groups of instruments; there are possibilities of transitions in a poem comparable to the different movements of a symphony or a quartet; there are possibilities of contrapuntal arrangement of subject-matter" [*On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber & Faber, 1957), p. 38].

we do that melodious crown. We may remind them that the housemaid does not respect the piano-tuner as she does the plumber, and of the enmity that they have aroused among all poets. Music is the most impersonal of things, and words the most personal, and that is why musicians do not like words.

2. W. B. Yeats²³⁾

I may ask you to help a great project of mine by asking W. J. Turner down for the night. But that depends on how he views my project.... Here the poet F. R. Higgins and I (his head is full of folk tunes) are publishing at the Cuala Press a series of handpainted broadsides (2/6 each, edition limited to 350), in each a poem by a living Irish poet and a traditional ballad and the music for each and a picture for each. We want to get new or queer verse into circulation, and we shall succeed. The work of Irish poets, quite deliberately put into circulation with its music thirty and more years ago, is now all over the country. The Free State Army march to a tune called 'Down by the Salley Gardens' without knowing that the march was first published with words of mine, words that are now folklore. Now my plan is to start a new set of 12 next Spring with poems by English as well as Irish poets. I want to get one of Turner's strange philosophical poems set, let us say, for the bamboo flute (now taught in English schools) and I want Turner (who is a musical critic) to choose other poems and tunes. I have various ways of getting poems sung here. I want to make another attempt to unite literature and music.

3. T. S. Eliot²⁴⁾

I know of no writer of such great gifts for whom poetry seems to

23) *Letters*, 841. To Dorothy Wellesley, Sep. 25, 1935. In Sep. 8, 1936, Yeats writes to her again: "All our poets are contemporary poets, and all except York Powell are living.... I do not want *Broadsides* to be archaic.... I plan quite deliberately that about one fourth should reflect the modern mind where most subtle, but I do not want a larger portion than one fourth" (*Letters*, 862). The bound volume of *Broadsides* was issued from the Cuala Press in 1937.

24) *Kipling*, 18-9. In p. 35 Eliot affirms that "What fundamentally differen-

tion in attempting to convey no more to the simple minded than can be taken in on one reading or hearing. They are best when read aloud, and the ear requires no training to follow them easily. With this simplicity of purpose goes a consummate gift of word, phrase, and rhythm. There is no poet who is less open to the charge of repeating himself. In the ballad, the stanza must not be too long and the rhyme scheme must not be too complicated; the stanza must be immediately apprehensible as a whole; a refrain can help to insist upon the identity within which a limited range of variation is possible. The variety of form which Kipling manages to devise for his ballads is remarkable: each is distinct, and perfectly fitted to the content and the mood which the poem has to convey. Nor is the versification too regular: there is the monotonous beat only when the monotonous is what is required; and the irregularities of scansion have a wide scope. One of the most interesting exercises in the combination of heavy beat and variation of pace is found in *Danny Deevee*, a poem which is technically (as well as in content) remarkable.

MUSIC

1. W. B. Yeats²²⁾

Walter Pater says music is the type of all the arts, but somebody else, I forget now who, that oratory is their type. You will side with the one or the other according to the nature of your energy, and I in my present mood am all for the man who, with an average audience before him, uses all means of persuasion —stories, laughter, tears, and but so much music as he can discover on the wings of words. I would even avoid the conversation of the lovers of music, who would draw us into the impersonal land of sound and colour, and I would have no one write with a sonata in his memory. We may even speak a little evil of musicians, having admitted that they will see before

22) *E&I*, 267-68. 'Discoveries' (1906). In connection with ANONYMITY-1, we may also see Yeats's 'personal-impersonal' conflict, pivoting around the objective spirit of the ballad, in evidence here.

from the world in which "A man's a man for a' that," or where we are moved by reflections such as that

The hert's aye
The pairt aye
That mak's us right or wrang,

or that

The best laid schemes o' mice and men
Gang aft a-gley.

The ballads are, with respect to Burns, on a different level; the level of tragic acceptance. They are equally far from the world of the insulted and injured which tormented Dostoevsky's imagination. They lie on the other side of the great plateau of the eighteenth century, with its humanitarian passion and its vast hopes for mankind. And the early tragic world which they summon up was the poetic sustenance of the peasantry for hundreds of years.

This poetry has no sentimental appeal. It simply sets down life as it appeared to the peasantry: an ancestral vision simplified to the last degree. And this extreme simplification molded its style into an instrument of the communal imagination. That style is immediately recognizable and is indisputable as the style of a great poet. Its marks are brevity and strength. It plunges straight into the theme.... Its passion is sometimes touched with a sardonic irony. When the Daemon Lover is asked by his deluded sweetheart where he is taking her in his ship, he says

I'll show where the white lilies grow
On the banks o' Italie,

an alluring and magical image. But when the storm rises and she sees his cloven hoof, she asks again and he answers,

I'll show where the white lilies grow,
In the bottom o' the sea.

5. T. S. Eliot²¹⁾

What is unusual about Kipling's ballads is his singleness of inten-

21) *Kipling*, 10-11.

hold, as in a mirror, the colours of one's own climate and scenery in their right proportion; and, when I found my verses too full of the reds and yellows Shelley gathered in Italy, I thought for two days of setting things right, not as I should now by making my rhythms faint and nervous and filling my images with a certain coldness, a certain wintry wildness, but by eating little and sleeping upon a board. I felt indignant with Matthew Arnold because he complained that somebody, who had translated Homer into a ballad measure, had tried to write epic to the tune of 'Yankee Doodle.' It seemed to me that it did not matter what tune one wrote to, so long as that gusty energy came often enough and strongly enough.

2. W. B. Yeats¹⁸⁾

My generation, because it disliked Victorian rhetorical moral fervour, came to dislike all rhetoric. In France, where there was a similar movement, a poet had written, 'Take rhetoric and wring its neck.' People began to imitate old ballads because an old ballad is never rhetorical. I think of *A Shropshire Lad*, of certain poems by Hardy, of Kipling's *Saint Helena Lullaby*, and his *The Looking-Glass*.

3. W. B. Yeats¹⁹⁾

The writer of ballads must resemble Homer, not Virgil. His metaphors must be such things as come to mind in the midst of speech (the pen confounds us with its sluggish deliberation).

4. Edwin Muir²⁰⁾

The ballads are not popular but traditional; and they were born out of a tradition so ancient and so indisputable that it required no explanation, and had passed beyond opinion. So that you will never find in them those observations on human life which make the poetry of Burns so attractive and so popular. They are in a different world

18) *E & I*, 497. 'Modern Poetry' (1936).

19) *Letters*, 854-55. To Dorothy Wellesley, May 3, 1936.

20) *The Estate of Poetry*, pp. 13-14. See pp. 18-20 for further discussions on the tragic irony observed in 'Sir Patrick Spens.'

deal with common actions or incidents which involve a story, and the poems in the *Lyrical Ballads* where he carried it out were regarded by him as an experiment.... But the conscious aims of a poet, no matter how admirable, may not chime with his genius. Wordsworth did write some very fine poems dealing with "incidents and situations from common life." Among them are that great poem, "The Affliction of Margaret—," and, in a different manner, "Resolution and Independence," and "Michael," and all the Matthew poems. And, while he was writing "The Prelude," he showed again and again his fascination with incident and situation. But, except in a few poems of which "The Affliction of Margaret—" is the greatest, he seldom was content to tell the story simply as a story, was seldom disinterested as the makers of the ballads were. Perhaps he was too concerned with tracing "the primary laws of our being," a task which did not trouble Homer or the ballad-makers....

STYLE

1. W. B. Yeats¹⁷⁾

I wanted to write 'popular poetry' like those Irish poets, for I believed that all good literatures were popular.... I thought that one must write without care, for that was of the coteries, but with a gusty energy that would put all straight if it came out of the right heart. I had a conviction, which indeed I have still, that one's verses should

17) *E & I*, 4-5. 'What is "Popular Poetry"?' (1901). The 'gusty energy' which Yeats stresses here matured into a powerful style in his later poetry. In 'A General Introduction for My Work' (1937) he writes: "It was a long time before I had made a language to my liking; I began to make it when I discovered some twenty years ago that I must seek, not as Wordsworth thought, words in common use, but a powerful and passionate syntax, and a complete coincidence between period and stanza. Because I need a passionate syntax for passionate subject-matter I compel myself to accept those traditional metres that have developed with the language" (*E & I*, 521-22; see also his letter to H. J. C. Grierson, Feb. 21, 1926, *Letters*, 710, for the similar discussion).

As to Arnold's ballad controversy on translating Homer, see Mitsuyoshi Yamanaka, 'Matthew Arnold and the Ballad' (Japanese), *English and English-American Literature*, No. 8, 1973 (Yamaguchi University), 33-51.

stories.... One must always have lyric emotion or some revelation of beauty.

2. Edwin Muir¹⁶⁾

The tragic story affects us with unique power because it moves in time, and because we live in time. It reminds us of the pattern of our lives; and within that pattern it brings our loves, our passions, their effects, and unavoidable chance. Matthew Arnold urged that the representation of an action was essential for a great poem, and he may have meant something like this, since a story gives a more complete idea of our temporal lives than any other means that has been discovered. But with the disappearance of the greater audience the story has declined; some poets of our time have used it effectively: I think of Robert Frost and certain poems of T. S. Eliot. But the story, although it is our story, is disappearing from poetry.

It has been taken over by the novel, but expanded there into something quite unlike what it was when used in poetry. The old story was quite simple. It followed some figure —Odysseus, or Ruth, or King David— through time; and it remains the most pure image that we have of temporal life, tracing the journey which we shall take. The novel also tells a story in time, but it is almost as concerned with the relations which space imposes upon us; it deals, at its most typical, with society. It gives us a description or a report, not a clear image of life. The story conceived in this way is of very little use to poetry, and I cannot think of any instance in which it has been successfully used there. But the story in time was once one of the main resources of poetry, and it will be used again, if only because we lose so much by losing it.

This is the problem that troubled Wordsworth. In his *Lyrical Ballads* preface, ... he sets out his aim as a poet. ... His aim was to

16) *The Estate of Poetry*, pp. 29-31. See pp. 35-6 for further discussions on Wordsworth's deviation from the narrative nature. Cf. Mitsuyoshi Yamanaka, 'W. Wordsworth's Ballad Poems —*Lyrical Ballads*, the First and Revised Editions —' (Japanese), *Studies in the Humanities*, Vol. 40, 1976 (Fukuoka Women's University), 65-81.

for its own sake and for its own purposes. It would be a mistake, also, and a supercilious kind of mistake, to suppose that the audience for balladry consists of factory workers, mill hands, miners and agricultural labourers. It does contain people from these categories, but the composition of this audience has, I suspect, no relation to any social and economic stratification of society. The audience for the more highly developed, even for the more esoteric kinds of poetry is recruited from every level: often the uneducated find them easier to accept than do the half-educated. On the other hand, the audience for the ballad includes many who are, according to the rules, highly educated; it includes many of the powerful, the learned, the highly specialised, the inheritors of prosperity. I do not mean to suggest that the two audiences ought to be, or must be, two worlds: but that there will be one audience capable only of what I may call ballad attention, and a smaller audience capable of enjoying both the ballad and the more difficult forms of poetry. Now it is to the ballad attention that Kipling addresses himself: but that does not mean that all of his poems appeal only on that level.

STORY

1. W. B. Yeats¹⁵⁾

I think a kind of half ballad, half lyric, is your best manner, though I may only like this best because I think it is the kind of poem I like best myself — a ballad that gradually lifts ... from purely circumstantial to purely lyrical writing. If you work on you are quite sure to do finer and finer work just because you write in such a simple and circumstantial way. You build up from the ground instead of starting like most writers of verse with an insincere literary language which they can apply to anything. Try however, I think, to build about a lyric emotion. I only learnt that slowly and used to be content to tell

15) *Letters*, 322. To Mrs. Clement Shorter, June 21, 1899, on her *Ballads and Poems* (London: Bowden, 1899). This attitude of Yeats's towards the ballad is closely connected with ANONYMITY-1.

what limiting the meaning of the word 'ballad.' It is true that there is an unbroken thread of meaning connecting the various kinds of verse to which the term 'ballad' has been applied. In the narrative Border Ballad, the intention is to tell a story in what, at that stage of literature, is the natural form for a story which is intended to arouse emotion. The poetry of it is incidental and to some extent unconscious; the form is short rhymed stanzas. The attention of the reader is concentrated on the story and the characters; and the ballad must have a meaning immediately apprehensible by its auditors. Repeated hearings may confirm the first impressions, may repeat the effect, but full understanding should be conveyed at one hearing. The metrical form must be of a simple kind which will not call attention to itself, but repetitions and refrains may contribute an incantatory effect. There should be no metrical complications corresponding to subtleties of feeling that cannot be immediately responded to. At another stage of culture—as in Anglo-Saxon and in the elaborate forms of Welsh—poetry develops a conscious virtuosity, requiring a virtuosity of appreciation on the part of the audience: the forms impose upon the bard restrictions and obstacles in overcoming which he exhibits his skill. It must be remembered that this sophistication is not only present in what we call 'modern' literature or in the later stages of development of classical literatures such as those of Latin, Greek, Sanskrit, Persian, or Chinese: it is a stage sometimes reached in the poetry of peoples of lower cultures. And on the other hand, ballad verse is not simply a stage in historical development: the ballad persists and develops in its own way, and corresponds to a permanent level of enjoyment of literature. There is always a potential public for the ballad: but the social conditions of modern society make it difficult for the good ballad to be written. It is perhaps more difficult now than it was at the time when *Barrack Room Ballads* were written: for Kipling had at least the inspiration and refreshment of the living music-hall.

In order to produce the contemporary ballad, it is of no particular help to hold advanced social views, or to believe that the literature of the future must be a 'popular' literature. The ballad must be written

may not be conscious of it. Yet, if he is to communicate something of value, his attention must obviously remain fixed on the poem. For it is the poem that communicates with us; and it does this, in great poetry, long after the poet's death. Perhaps this is because poetry is itself the communication of something for which no other kind of speech can serve; it is certainly not because the poet sets out with the idea that he must communicate. The discussions of contemporary poetry are beset with false problems. The more perfectly achieved a poem is, the more fully it will be apprehended by those who read it. Deliberate intention, anything which distracts the poet from what he seeks to express, may become an obstacle to understanding. A folk song that sings for its own pleasure will give back to us for centuries the emotion out of which it was born. And a story which is thinking of nothing but the story will move us most when we forget or do not know who is telling it.

5. T. S. Eliot¹⁴⁾

There have been many writers of verse who have not aimed at writing poetry: with the exception of a few writers of humorous verse, they are mostly quickly forgotten. The difference is that they never did write poetry. Kipling does write poetry, but that is not what he is setting out to do. It is this peculiarity of intention that I have in mind in calling Kipling a 'ballad-writer' and it will take some time to make clear what I mean by that. For I am extending and also some-

14) *A Choice of Kipling's Verse*, made by T.S. Eliot with an Essay on Rudyard Kipling (London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 1941; rpt. 1967), pp. 8-10. This revaluation of Kipling may be "rather surprising coming from Eliot" [Seán Lucy, *T. S. Eliot and the Idea of Tradition* (London: Cohen & West, 1960; rpt. 1967), p. 69], but is invaluable as the only essay where we find Eliot referring to the ballad. In so far as we read him here Eliot himself seems to be not so positively involved in the ballad as Yeats and Muir. Even if there was no immediate or formative influence of the ballad on Eliot, there seems to be, as discussed in my 'Prefatory Note,' an interesting and close connection between other modern poets' inclination towards the ballad's anonymity and Eliot's impersonal theory of poetry. And his indication here of 'a conscious virtuosity' in both poet and audience does, it should be pointed out, correspond to Muir's 'critical faculty' of the ballad audience (see ANONYMITY-2).

At any rate Eliot's revaluation of Kipling as a ballad-writer is significant at least for the genealogy of the literary ballad.

a state of inspiration, or divine madness, or possession, is not born except with the assistance of art. Where Socrates does tell us something about poetry is when he inquires into Ion's state when he is reciting Homer, and the response he awakens in the ten thousand friendly persons. How account on any reasonable grounds for the tears and the painful beating of the heart? ... And why should the death of Sir Patrick Spens and the Scottish lords have been lamented for hundreds of years in the cottar houses of the Scottish peasantry?

The answer one would be most likely to give now is that the ten thousand friendly persons were moved by Homer's art as interpreted by Ion. And that is true; but it looks at the poetry only, and leaves out the audience who are participating in it. And the audience is part of the business, though we nowadays are disposed to ignore it, knowing that its part has become so small. Why should the ten thousand mourn for the fortunes of men and women dead long ago unless it was themselves and life and time that they mourned for? Yet for them to grieve even over such things, in a sort of supernumerary grief by which in a sense they were comforted, was not an act that could be accounted for or approved by pure reason, and it does not refute, but rather endorses Socrates' claim that poetry is a divine madness. The collective mourning gives a more adequate idea of the original nature of poetry than we have had ever since poetry has been understood more and more strictly as an art. The immediate participation of the audience in the poetry makes the strangeness of the poetic experience immediate and palpable, and restores to it something which it has lacked, except in dramatic tragedy, perhaps ever since the invention of printing.

4. Edwin Muir¹³⁾

The problem of communication is often discussed by poets and critics. In writing a poem should the poet have the conscious intention of communicating with his readers? This is a difficult question. Perhaps the intention to communicate is always there, though the poet

13) *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.

that they were not only a means of communication, but also a means of participation in something belonging to and shared by everyone. The idea that they were made up by a sort of committee is absurd; one has only to turn to the great ballads to realize how absurd it is. On the other hand, if we can think of their creation in time rather than in space, we realize that there was after all a cooperation in their making, for it is clear from the many versions of them that exist that they were not merely transmitted in a passive way, but modified in their transmission, often to their advantage. It may take hundreds of years to bring a ballad to its perfection, and many generations may participate in its making, and the critical faculty cannot help coming into play.

The critic as we know him did not, of course, exist in the time and the circle I am trying to describe. I fancy that it was not until poetry was written down that formal criticism could come into being. But it would be a mistake to imagine that before this the audience always listened to poetry uncritically. All that was given to the listener, it is true, was the run of the words and the tunes and the rhythms, the changing sequence of a story in the ballad, and the movement of feeling in a song. But the audience for spoken poetry had a more powerful memory than most of us have now. The listener's memory was his book, and he could turn over its leaves as we turn over our printed pages. Particular episodes in a poem, moving expressions of feeling, felicitous lines, would be recalled and repeated by the judicious listener (it is hard to account otherwise for some of the lines in the ballads), these lines would be discussed, excite wonder or praise, and eventually perhaps come to influence the development of spoken poetry—simply through the response to it. But it is misleading even to speak of the poem and the audience, when the audience may be both listening to the poem and shaping it, be both sharing it and transmitting it.

3. Edwin Muir¹²⁾

We know that the poet does attain part, sometimes the chief part of his excellence, by the rules of art, and that poetry, if conceived in

12) *Ibid.*, pp. 27-8.

produced an artistic personality in the modern sense of the word. Tom Moore was merely an incarnate social ambition. And Clarence Mangan differed merely from the impersonal ballad writers about him in being miserable. He was not a personality as Edgar Poe was. He had not thought out or felt out a way of looking at the world peculiar to himself. We will have a hard fight in Ireland before we get the right for every man to see the world in his own way admitted. Synge is invaluable to us because he has that kind of intense narrow personality which necessarily raises the whole issue.

2. Edwin Muir¹¹⁾

So far as we know, these anonymous songs and ballads rose among the peasantry and were made by them. The authors, if that is what they should be called, knew nothing of poetry except by inheritance. I have heard it suggested that these songs and ballads were created communally, a theory which may have arisen from the fact

and poems for inspiration, but we should search them for new methods of expressing ourselves. I think your work has gained much from study of old ballads, but this time you have tried to express feelings quite different from those habitual with you, and have as a result described things from without—more picturesquely than poetically" (*Letters*, 98). It is important to notice the fact that Yeats, the major modern poet perhaps most deeply steeped in the ballad world, was, from the very first, groping there for new methods of expressing himself. This is the conflict briefly mentioned in my 'Prefatory Note' between the modern ego and the ballad anonymity, which is an important aspect of study of the literary ballad in general. And in the case of Yeats we should be careful about how his modern ego stands under the mask of his 'artistic personality.'

11) *The Estate of Poetry*, pp.11-12. While Yeats was a poet who could not surrender himself to the ballad's anonymity (in spite of the fact that Muir shows how Yeats achieved greatness partly through his sense of public commitment; cf. footnote 10), Muir was a poet who stood endlessly for it. Throughout the book, originally the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures 1955-1956 at Harvard University, Muir deplores the gap between the public and the poet in the modern poetry. And by reminding us of the anonymous world of the ballad he expects us "to modify our contemporary notion of poetry as a rarified and special and often difficult thing" and to bring "a salutary effect on our criticism and our practice of poetry as well" (p.94).

To recognize the anonymity is to recognize the audience. Muir's pointing out here of the critical faculty of the ballad audience is very important as it indicates that the ballad is not an artless, merely archaic kind of song, but is a form of poetry, and can well be an object of appreciation.

remote enough for life there to have remained almost unchanged for two hundred years. In our farm-house in one of the smaller Orkney islands, there were not many books apart from the Bible, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and the poems of Burns. Except for Burns we had no poetry books, but we knew a great number of ballads and songs which had been handed down from generation to generation. These, sometimes with the airs traditionally belonging to them, were known in all the farms; there must have been hundreds of them. They were part of our life, all the more because we knew them by heart, and had not acquired but inherited them. They were not contemporary in any sense, but entered our present from the past. The only innovation in our ancestral life was the weekly visit of a little steamer and the weekly arrival of a local newspaper. The newspaper was mere "literature" to us, to be scrutinized almost as a modern critic of the more cautious kind might examine a poem; the songs and ballads were our real unquestioned sustenance and enjoyment. They were almost all Scottish, but, occasionally, perhaps because of the steamer, fashionable songs from London reached us.

ANONYMITY

1. W. B. Yeats¹⁰⁾

Irish national literature, though it has produced many fine ballads and many novels written in the objective spirit of a ballad, has never

rpt. 1972) for another reference to his childhood immersion in ballads, where he introduces an interesting note on the manner in which people sang ballads: "There was a great difference between the earlier and the later songs. The ballads about James V and Sir James the Rose had probably been handed down orally for hundreds of years; they were consequently sure of themselves and were sung with your full voice, as if you had always been entitled to sing them; but the later ones were chanted in a sort of literary way, in honour of the print in which they had originally come, every syllable of the English text carefully pronounced, as if it were an exercise. These old songs, rooted for so long in the life of the people, are now almost dead" (p.30).

10) *Letters*, 447-48. To John Quinn, Feb. 15, 1905. Years earlier, on Dec. 21, 1888, Yeats was already writing to Katharine Tynan: "I am not very fond of retrospective art. I do not think that pleasure we get from old methods of looking at things —methods we have long given up ourselves —belongs to the best literature.... I do not mean that we should not go to old ballads

them or their barbarous mountains, or their readers, who read and sang, and delighted in what they wrote, as men delighted in poetry of old before organs of enlightenment were ever heard of. It is centuries since England has written ballads. Many beautiful poems in ballad verse have been written; but the true ballad —the poem of the populace —she has let die; commercialism and other matters have driven it away: she has no longer the conditions.

For a popular ballad literature to arise, firstly are needful national traditions not hidden in libraries, but living in the minds of the populace. These Ireland has. Every ivy-matted tower carries its legend of stormy feud or love-lorn lady; every little round rath earth-piled its story of leprehaun and pooka; and over all brooks the one great dominant thought, love of country, while around that thought gather the long-remembered names of exiles.

Secondly, it is needful that the populace and the poets shall have one heart —that there shall be no literary class with its own way of seeing things and its own conventions. This condition Ireland has long had —whatever the people were the poets have been more intensely; were the people poor, they were poorer; did the people suffer, they suffered also. Did the people love their country, did not the poets keep alive that love through years of misfortune? They were one with the people in their faults and their virtues —in their aims and their passions.

Hence, long before the days of these little blue-paper-poem books, in the more Gaelic-speaking days, was a copious ballad literature going from mouth to mouth, for few could read. Since the time of Elizabeth (when English ballad literature began to die) have arisen in Ireland twenty-six Gaelic-speaking poets of fame, no less; and many a fameless one-song man

2. Edwin Muir⁹⁾

I was brought up in a group of islands on the north of Scotland,

9) *The Estate of Poetry* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1962), pp. 9-10. See pp. 28-30 of his *Autobiography* (London: The Hogarth Press, revised ed. 1954;

HERITAGE

1. W. B. Yeats⁸⁾

Behind Ireland fierce and militant, is Ireland poetic, passionate, remembering, idyllic, fanciful, and always patriotic. With this second Ireland only have I to do in this article, and what it writes and reads. I have here a row of little blue-paper-poem books—a whole ballad literature as foreign from all modern English ways as though it were of farthest Iceland and not of neighbouring Ireland, and unknown in name even to most Anglo-Saxon households.

Every now and then the world may read in the accredited organs of enlightenment that the ballad or dramatic poem, or something else, is obsolete. The writers of these little blue books wrote on regardless; but then, perhaps, the accredited organs of enlightenment never reached

8) 'Popular Ballad Poetry of Ireland' (1889), in John P. Frayne (ed.), *Uncollected Prose by W.B. Yeats*, Vol. 1 (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1970), 147-48. It goes without saying that Yeats's lifelong literary work was touched off by his awakening to the popular literary heritage of Ireland. His own active contributions in this field in his early period are important: he was a contributor and adviser to *Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland* (1888) ed. by John and Ellen O'Leary, and he edited *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (1888) and *Irish Fairy Tales* (1892), compiled into one volume under the title of *Fairy and Folk Tales of Ireland* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1973). About the first book he edited he writes, "It was meant for Irish poets. They should draw on it for plots and atmosphere" [Allan Wade (ed.), *The Letters of W.B. Yeats* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954), p. 88; hereafter abbreviated to *Letters*]. In those days Yeats had grand plans, never realized, for the publication of "a ballad chronicle of Ireland" ... selected from all the ballad writers and piece the poems together with short historical notes" (*Letters*, 201). Another essay, 'What is "Popular Poetry"?' (1901) vividly shows his passion for the national literature of the populace: "I thought one day—I can remember the very day when I thought it—'If somebody could make a style which would not be an English style and yet would be musical and full of colour, many others would catch fire from him, and we would have a really great school of ballad poetry in Ireland. If these poets, who have never ceased to fill the newspapers and the ballad-books with their verses, had a good tradition they would write beautifully and move everybody as they move me.' Then a little later on I thought, 'If they had something else to write about besides political opinions, if more of them would write about the beliefs of the people like Allingham, or about old legends like Ferguson, they would find it easier to get a style" [*Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1961), pp. 3-4; hereafter abbreviated to *E & I*].

held against one's pained obsession with personality."⁷⁾

Literary ballads are the products of poets who know that they cannot revive the original climate that produced traditional ballads, but are still fascinated by it. In order to know what such poems are, we must know what aspects of balladry poets are attracted by, and how those aspects are connected with their attitude towards poetry. In order to fully satisfy this inquiry of ours, study by example is not sufficient: it is both necessary and wise to listen to what poets say on the ballad.

This series of POETS ON THE BALLAD as 'study materials on the literary ballad' was prompted by the foregoing considerations. My principles of selection are similar to those in Richard Ellman and Charles Feidelson (ed.), *The Modern Tradition —Backgrounds of Modern Literature* (New York: Oxford U.P., 1965), which omits balladry from its otherwise comprehensive coverage of literary movements and terms. Each poet's comments on the ballad, from his essays, letters, journals, etc., are at times supplemented by footnotes. These selections are arranged by themes, not by authors, for convenience' sake. The selections are usually of sufficient scope to stand on their own, and their implications will often extend beyond the particular categories in which they have been placed. The classification of themes will be expanded as the series proceeds. Each article in this series is the result of ongoing research, and does not appear in the order in which it will be placed when the series is completed. Ultimately I plan to organize all these materials for book publication. Each series will have a prefatory essay. I will also publish larger independent studies on individual poets and their ballads elsewhere, some of which may be incorporated into the series in its book form. Thus the purpose of this whole project is to open an avenue into what may be called 'ballad poetics' which lies behind the individual poets' own poems and which can be found in the genealogy of the literary ballad as well.

7) 'A Prefatory Note' to James Scully (ed.), *Modern Poetics* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1965), p.11.

more deeply than any other scholar after him, realized this crucial problem of anonymity:

"The condition of society in which a truly national or popular poetry appears explains the character of such poetry. It is a condition in which the people are not divided by political organization and book-culture into markedly distinct classes, in which consequently there is such community of ideas and feelings that the whole people form an individual. Such poetry, accordingly, while it is in its essence an expression of our common human nature, and so of universal and indestructible interest, will in each case be differenced by circumstances and idiosyncrasy. On the other hand, it will always be an expression of the mind and heart of the people as an individual, and never of the personality of individual men. *The fundamental characteristic of popular ballads is therefore the absence of subjectivity and self-consciousness.* Though they do not 'write themselves,' as William Grimm has said, though a man and not a people has composed them, still the author counts for nothing, and it is not by mere accident, but with the best reason, that they have come down to us anonymous. Hence, too, they are extremely difficult to imitate by the highly civilized modern man, and most of the attempts to reproduce this kind of poetry have been ridiculous failures."⁵⁾ (Italics mine.)

Even if a poet pretends to be anonymous in form and content, his pretence itself is a fact of his 'self-consciousness' and implies his conscious attitude towards poetry. This will remind us of T. S. Eliot, whose famous impersonal theory that "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality" is supported paradoxically by his realization that "only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things."⁶⁾ Though Eliot himself refers to balladry neither in connection with this depersonalization of a poet nor in his essay on Rudyard Kipling as a 'ballad-writer,' his impersonal theory of poetry can well be applied to the general inclination of literary balladists. Their inclination towards the ballad's anonymity might be, we may go as far as to say, "a mask

5) Quoted from W. M. Hart, 'Professor Child and the Ballad,' Appendix to F. J. Child (ed.), *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Vol. V (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1965), 756-57.

6) 'Tradition and the Individual Talent,' in *The Sacred Wood* (London: Methuen, 1920; rpt. 1960), p. 58.

product and possession not of the common people of village or city but of sophisticated poets writing for literate audiences. They are printed poems rather than songs, and they have no traditional life. Despite great variations among individual examples, the literary ballads as a class are conscious and deliberate imitations of folk and broadside ballads."²⁾ Then he goes on to say, *after all* following Ker, that "In the field of balladry, definition by example has often been found more enlightening than abstract verbalizing. Thus one may begin by identifying as literary ballads such frequently anthologized poems as the following: Wordsworth's 'Lucy Gray,' Scott's 'The Eve of St. John,' Southey's 'The Battle of Blenheim,' Tennyson's 'The Charge of Light Brigade,' Rossetti's 'Sister Helen,' Housman's 'Is My Team Ploughing?' Hardy's 'Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave?' and Yeats's 'The Ballad of Father Gilligan.'"³⁾ But in the case of the literary ballad unfortunately, we do not have reliable and exhaustive, or even moderately *satisfactory*, anthologies to serve as the basis of a definition of the form. That is why Laws's 'A List of Literary Ballads'⁴⁾ for example, though it is a very useful piece of work, is not in any way definitive, and, as he concedes, many pieces have been omitted because they do not fit *his* definition of balladry. In this sense, definition by example may go on working to a certain extent, but beyond that it certainly becomes insufficient, and cannot provide a trustworthy basis for judgment on whether a certain old or new poem can be classified as a literary ballad.

The difficulty and ambiguity of studying literary ballads comes from the very fact that they are the products of sophisticated poets. They are pieces of poetry in their own right as well as imitations. The relative emphasis given these two aspects of the form depends upon which aspect of balladry interests the individual poet. Yet however much a poet's interest gravitates towards imitation he can never annihilate himself into the anonymity of balladry. Child himself, far

2) G. Malcolm Laws, Jr., *The British Literary Ballad* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1972), p. xi.

3) *Ibid.*, p. 1.

4) *Ibid.*, pp. 149-61.

STUDY MATERIALS
ON THE LITERARY BALLAD

POETS ON THE BALLAD (1)

—W. B. Yeats, Edwin Muir, and T. S. Eliot—

Mitsuyoshi Yamanaka

A PREFATORY NOTE

‘What is a ballad?’ In answer to this question W. P. Ker, one of the greatest ballad scholars, ventured to say ‘in spite of Socrates and his logic’ that “A ballad is *The Milldams of Binnorie* and *Sir Patrick Spens* and *The Douglas Tragedy* and *Lord Randal* and *Child Maurice*, and things of that sort.”¹⁾ And various scholars—one is always bound to be met by the trouble of definition—have tried to give their own answers: among many others G. L. Kittredge in his one-volume abridgement of F. J. Child’s collection (1904), F. B. Gummere in *The Popular Ballad* (1907), Louise Pound in *Poetic Origins and the Ballad* (1921), G. H. Gerould in *The Ballad of Tradition* (1932), M. J. C. Hodgart in *The Ballads* (1950), A. B. Friedman in *The Ballad Revival* (1961), and David Buchan in *The Ballad and the Folk* (1972). All of these epoch-making studies and definitions of the ballad I shall forgo repeating here. But the point which is common to all is that when they speak of ballads, they usually mean such poems as are found in the five volumes of Child’s *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1882-98) and other supplementary collections by the succeeding collectors. In spite of varied definitions based on a variety of those poems they can *at least* brandish their anti-Socratic logic of Ker’s in so far as they have the resources of a definitive collection to fall back on.

Then ‘what is a literary ballad?’ In answer to this question G. Malcolm Laws, Jr. ventures to say that “[The literary ballads] are the

1) W. P. Ker, *Form and Style in Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1966), p. 3.