

Notes

<sup>1</sup> In Evans's collection, we find a liberal selection of 18th century literary ballads such as Tickell's "Lucy and Colin" (1725), Goldsmith's "The Hermit, or Edwin and Angelina" (c. 1761), Mallet's "Edwin and Emma" (1762), Percy's "The Hermit of Warkworth" (1771), Mickle's "Hengist and May" (1784) and others.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. J. G. Lockhart, *Memoirs of Sir Walter Scott*, III (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1900) 417.

<sup>3</sup> Lockhart, I, 113-14.

<sup>4</sup> From *Reliques*, III.

<sup>5</sup> From Thomas Evans, ed., *Old Ballads, Historical and Narrative*, IV (London: Printed for T. Evans, 1784). Quotations from Mickle are from this edition.

<sup>6</sup> From Miriam Allott, ed., *The Poems of John Keats* (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1970). Quotations from Keats are from this edition.

<sup>7</sup> Arthur Hallam's words to W. B. Donne in 1831, in Christopher Ricks, ed., *The Poems of Tennyson* (London: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1969) 362. Quotations from Tennyson are from this edition.

<sup>8</sup> 'Preface to the First Edition of Poems (1853),' in Kenneth Allott, ed., *The Poems of Matthew Arnold* (London: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1965) 592.

<sup>9</sup> *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, 603.

<sup>10</sup> "Eliot, T. S.," Margaret Drabble, ed., *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, Fifth Edition (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985) 312.

<sup>11</sup> *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, 598.

<sup>12</sup> Frank Kermode and John Hollander, eds., *The Oxford Anthology of English Literature*, II (New York: Oxford UP, 1973) 6.

<sup>13</sup> From *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*.

<sup>14</sup> "Letter to T. S. Eliot, 13 March 1956," P. H. Butter, ed., *Selected Letters of Edwin Muir* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1974) 181-82.

<sup>15</sup> From R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones, ed., *Lyrical Ballads* (1963; rpt. London: Methuen, 1971). Quotations from *Lyrical Ballads* are from this edition.

<sup>16</sup> L. C. Wimberly, *Folklore in the English and Scottish Ballads* (1928; New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1965) 227.

<sup>17</sup> From M. G. Lewis, ed., *Tales of Wonder*, I (London: W. Bulmer and Co., 1801).

Her heart struck at her side,  
And burst—low bow'd her listless head,  
And down she sunk, and died. (189-200)<sup>17</sup>

Traditionally, the story did not end with the death of the *dramatis personae*, but afforded them a happy reunion. "Prince Robert" (Child 87A) is the story of a horrific mother who opposes the wedding of her son; she kills him with poisonous wine, and the bride with a curse that her heart shall burst in three. The third stanza before last goes like this:

She's turn'd her back unto the wa,  
And her face unto a rock,  
And there, before the mother's face,  
Her very heart it broke. (69-72)

The bride's heart bursts, and she dies as Ulla in Mickle's poem, but in the traditional version these closing stanzas disperse a morbidly sentimental aftertaste:

The tane was buried in Marie's kirk,  
The tother in Marie's quair,  
And out o the tane there sprang a birk,  
And out o the tother a brier.

And thae twa met, and thae twa plat,  
The birk but and the brier,  
And by that ye may very weel ken  
They were twa lovers dear. (73-80)

This is a lyric metamorphosis commonly observed in tradition, while in the sophisticated poetry the simple and lyric acceptance of tragic life without wordy frills is left far behind, and we come to an epoch of full-scale Gothic imagination by the end of the eighteenth century.

And in that manor now no more  
Is chearful feaste and sprightly balle;  
For ever since that drearye houre  
Have spirits haunted Cumnor Hall. (101-12)

Structurally, the central monologue is sandwiched by the elicitation of Gothic mood, the story being after all of “[t]he haunted tow’rs of Cumnor Halle” (120). The spirit never haunts a place according to tradition. It comes out of the grave at midnight with the specific intention of visiting a living person, and goes back to the place of rest before dawn. It is always treated as “a corporeal revenant,”<sup>16</sup> and as one of the *dramatis personae*. There is no lingering tone, in consequence, of horror centering around death.

The theme of anguish was to be largely developed under the coming vogue of Gothic horror-ballads. *Tales of Wonder*, M. G. Lewis’s collection of ballads in two volumes, was printed by W. Bulmer and Co. in London, and published in 1801. Of the 60 pieces in two volumes, “Alonzo the Brave and Fair Imogine” and 18 others were ballads written by Lewis himself, the others being five by Scott (“The Fire-King” and others), seven by Southey (“Bishop Bruno” and others), along with assorted others. One from Mickle was chosen, “The Sorceress, or Wolfwold and Ulla,” which tells the story of Ulla, princess of Northumbria, searching for her lover Wolfwold who went to fight the Danes. Ulla goes to a sorceress to ask his fate; the witch with her dreadful spell invokes the dead Wolfwold:

Behind the altar’s livid fire,  
Low from the inmost cave,  
Young Wolfwold rose in pale attire,  
The vestments of the grave.

His eye to Ulla’s eye he rear’d,  
His cheek was wan as clay,  
And half cut through his hand appear’d  
That beckon’d her away.

Fair Ulla saw the woeful shade,

In traditional narrative poetry the folk as the audience were always posited in objective detachment apart from the story, or participated in it through the refrains sung in chorus; while in the world of poets there was no guarantee of the folk appreciating sophisticated poetry, and so the poets devised a new-made variation of the dialogue technique to obtain an audience for their narratives.

III

Another deviation from tradition in “Cumnor Hall” is the emphasis on Gothic atmosphere. The opening stanzas loved by Scott before the speaker's monologue starts are effective enough to combine a Gothic mood and the speaker's state of anguish:

The dewes of summer nighte did falle,  
The moone (sweete regente of the skye)  
Silver'd the walles of Cumnor Halle,  
And manye an oake that grewe therebye.

Nowe noughte was hearde beneath the skies,  
(The soundes of busye lyfe were stille,)  
Save an unhappie ladie's sighes,  
That issued from that lonelye pile. (1-8)

And after the long monologue the poem moves towards its conclusion with some more Gothic atmosphere:

The death-belle thrice was hearde to ring,  
An aerial voyce was hearde to call,  
And thrice the raven flapp'd its wyng  
Arounde the tow'rs of Cumnor Hall.

The mastiffe howl'd at village doore,  
The oaks were shatter'd on the greene;  
Woe was the houre—for never more  
That haplesse countesse e'er was seene.

The speaker in "sick'ning grieffe" turned away from the audience on the one hand, while on the other an audience as questioner was newly devised by the Romantic poets. "The Thorn" by Wordsworth, "The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere" by Coleridge, and "La Belle Dame sans Merci" by Keats were all new reconfigurations of literary ballads which became representative in that a questioner comes on the stage and draws out the story from the other party. A questioner in "The Thorn" asks, "Now wherefore thus, by day and night, / In rain, in tempest, and in snow, / Thus to the dreary mountain-top / Does this poor woman go?" (78-81),<sup>15</sup> and "I" as narrator answers, "I cannot tell; I wish I could; / For the true reason no one knows," but he tells Martha's tragedy entirely through his imagination. The wedding guest in Coleridge is stopped by an ancient mariner, and he asks, "By thy long grey beard and thy glittering eye / Now wherefore stoppest me?" (3-4); "There was a Ship," the mariner begins forcefully, and the wedding guest "cannot chuse but hear" (22). The questioner in Keats asks, "Oh, what can ail thee, knight-at-arms, / Alone and palely loitering?" (1-2), and carefully extracts the reason why. In all of these cases the questioner plays the subordinate role of emphasizing an almost monologic story. In the traditional ballads, on the other hand, one never comes upon the monologue as such. The speaker is always separate from the narrator, and so he/she is either one of the protagonists or a behind-the-scenes protagonist. "Edward" (Child 13), next to "Lord Randal" in Child's arrangement, for instance, is the story of patricide, and it follows exactly the same pattern of dialogue found in the preceding ballad, and in the last stanza Edward, in answer to the questioner, discloses the dreadful secret of the murder:

'And what wull ye leive to your ain mither deir,  
                                 Edward, Edward ?  
 And what wull ye leive to your ain mither deir,  
                                 My deir son, now tell me O.'  
 'The curse of hell frae me sall ye beir,  
                                 Mither, mither,  
 The curse of hell frae me sall ye beir,  
                                 Sic counseils ye gave to me O.'  
                                 (Child 13B; 49-56)

Children dear, was it yesterday  
(Call yet once) that she went away?  
Once she sate with you and me,  
On a red gold throne in the heart of the sea,  
And the youngest sate on her knee.  
She combed its bright hair, and she tended it well,  
When down swung the sound of a far-off bell.  
She sighed, she looked up through the clear green sea;  
She said: 'I must go, for my kinsfolk pray  
In the little grey church on the shore to-day.  
'Twill be Easter-time in the world – ah me!  
And I lose my poor soul, Merman! here with thee.'  
I said: 'Go up, dear heart, through the waves;  
Say thy prayer, and come back to the kind sea-caves!'  
She smiled, she went up through the surf in the bay.  
Children dear, was it yesterday? (48-63)<sup>13</sup>

So long as a poem is occupied by such self-regarding emotions, there is no room for the audience to participate in it. This sort of rejection of the audience has become typical of modern poetry, and one could say that the history of sophisticated poetry in general, including literary balladry, is the history of losing the audience. This was a crucial reason why Edwin Muir maintained an interest in the ballads; he wrote to Eliot as follows:

I have been interested for long in the world of the ballads and the world out of which they came; the fact that they solved the problem of the audience for poetry, which is so impossibly difficult to-day, (there is great poetry, as you know among them). I want to study the question of the audience: the ballads and folk-songs had their audience, which among the peasantry was everybody, and the court poetry (I can't find a more adequate term) also had its audience, which did not interfere in the least with the other; and all this happened in a sense naturally. This all has a bearing on society, and the difference between the society in which this could happen, and our own.<sup>14</sup>

Arnold, who feels that this “morbid” state is not only his alone but the general state of literature in his time, proclaims his ‘Classicism,’ by which he means the importance of learning from the ancients “how unspeakably superior is the effect of the one moral impression left by a great action treated as a whole.”<sup>9</sup> Arnold as an able critic of classical stance incisively analyzes the contemporary situations of literature, reminding us, towards the end of the following quotation, of the impersonality theory of poetry by Eliot, who has in fact been called “the M. Arnold of the 20th cent.”:<sup>10</sup>

We have poems which seem to exist merely for the sake of single lines and passages; not for the sake of producing any total impression. We have critics who seem to direct their attention merely to detached expressions, to the language about the action, not to the action itself. I verily think that the majority of them do not in their hearts believe that there is such a thing as a total impression to be derived from a poem at all, or to be demanded from a poet; they think the term a commonplace of metaphysical criticism. They will permit the poet to select any action he pleases, and to suffer that action to go as it will, provided he gratifies them with occasional bursts of fine writing, and with a shower of isolated thoughts and images. . . . [H]e needs rather to be perpetually reminded to prefer his action to everything else; so to treat this, as to permit its inherent excellences to develop themselves, without interruption from the intrusion of his personal peculiarities; most fortunate, when he most entirely succeeds in effacing himself, and in enabling a noble action to subsist as it did in nature.<sup>11</sup>

Arnold as poet, however, could not practice what he had preached. He was of Romantic constitution, receiving “his psychological education from Romantic poetry.”<sup>12</sup> He published his first collection of poems, *The Strayed Reveller and other Poems* anonymously in 1849, in which is found one of his literary ballads, “The Forsaken Merman.” This is a story of a merman betrayed by a woman of the human world, corresponding to a Danish ballad, “Agnes and the Merman.” Except for 23 lines in the middle, the entire 143 lines consist of nothing but the forsaken merman’s monologues to his forsaken children:

Oh God, that I were dead!' (81-84)

In "Mariana in the South" a similar technique is adopted; the last four lines of the first stanza,

But 'Ave Mary,' made she moan,  
And 'Ave Mary,' night and morn,  
And 'Ah,' she sang, 'to be all alone,  
To live forgotten, and love forlorn,' (9-12)

are repeated as incremental repetitions until the last refrain in the last stanza:

And weeping then she made her moan,  
'The night comes on that knows not morn,  
When I shall cease to be all alone,  
To live forgotten, and love forlorn.' (93-96)

In the above examples the heroine awaiting her lover in vain pines away. The mood is subjective, and the emotion is self-regarding. This accords with the internalizing trend of literature in general since the Romantic period. The most symbolic indication of all can be found in Matthew Arnold's preface to the first edition of his *Poems* (1853), in which he explains the reason why he excluded his "Empedocles on Etna," anonymously published the year before:

What then are the situations, from the representation of which, though accurate, no poetical enjoyment can be derived? They are those in which the suffering finds no vent in action; in which a continuous state of mental distress is prolonged, unrelieved by incident, hope, or resistance; in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done. In such situations there is inevitably something *morbid*, in the description of them something *monotonous*. When they occur in actual life, they are painful, not tragic; the representation of them in poetry is painful also.<sup>8</sup> (emphasis added)



II

The central motif of “the unvisited lover” and its own tone of monotony are eagerly picked up by the Romantic poets. Isabella in Keats’s “Isabella, or The Pot of Basil” (1818) waits in vain for Lorenzo, who, her brothers tell her, “had ta’en ship for foreign lands, / Because of some great urgency,” (226-27)<sup>6</sup> though they have actually murdered him:

His image in the dusk she seemed to see,  
And to the silence made a gentle moan,  
Spreading her perfect arms upon the air,  
And on her couch low murmuring, ‘Where? Oh, where?’ (237-40)

After the pot of basil with Lorenzo’s head hidden in it is stolen by her brothers, the poem ends by recording how she “pined,” and “died forlorn, / Imploring for her basil to the last” (497-98).

Keats’s poem in turn influenced Tennyson, who wrote two literary ballads on the same subject, “Mariana” (1830) and “Mariana in the South” (1832) “as a kind of pendant to his former poem.”<sup>7</sup> In both poems Tennyson skillfully handles refrains to emphasize the subject. In “Mariana” the last four lines of the first stanza,

She only said, ‘My life is dreary,  
He cometh not,’ she said;  
She said, ‘I am aweary, aweary,  
I would that I were dead!’ (9-12)

are repeated in the succeeding stanzas with only slight changes in the first line of the refrain: “The night is dreary” (st. 2) → “The day is dreary” (st. 3) → “My life is dreary” (st. 4) → “The night is dreary” (st. 5) → “My life is dreary” (st. 6); “the day” never comes after the third refrain, and the last refrain in the last stanza changes largely to tell of her ultimate resignation:

Then, said she, ‘I am very dreary,  
He will not come,’ she said;  
She wept, ‘I am aweary, aweary,

means of which we observe the tragedy of life from a sufficiently objective distance. And this objectivity provides a central momentum that has transmitted traditional ballads from generation to generation in different ages and places.

The stronghold of objective detachment is gradually invaded in the literary ballad by far longer monologues by the speakers as time goes on. In Mallet's "Margaret's Ghost" nine stanzas in the total seventeen are occupied by the speech of Margaret's ghost; she is a sort of pioneer complainer in the history of literary ballads:

"This is the dark and dreary hour,  
When injur'd ghosts *complain*;  
Now yawning graves give up their dead,  
To haunt the faithless swain." (25-28; emphasis added)<sup>4</sup>

The speaker in "Cumnor Hall" advances further along these lines: she is abandoned by Leicester, who never comes back from sporting at the court, lured, she imagines, by beauty or ambition. She remembers how she was happy before she met him, and thinks that the estate of the village maidens is far happier than her own: "To smile for joye – than sigh for woe – /– To be contente – than to be greate" (71-72).<sup>5</sup> Her speech conveying her state of anguish occupies 21 stanzas of the total 30 (more than two thirds of the total 120 lines) before she pines away:

". . . knowe, when *sick'ning grieve* doth preye  
And tender love's repay'd with scorne,  
The sweetest beautye will decaye—  
What flow'ret can endure the storme?" (37-40; emphasis added)

It will not be too much to say that the whole poem takes on the form of a monologue, almost going beyond the normative limits of the ballad as narrative poetry. The narrator or a speaker in the tradition has been anonymous in the sense of lacking individual emotions, while here we encounter a peculiar tone of monotonous harping.

The poem as well as the novel is based on the tradition of the tragic fate of Amy Robsart, the unfortunate lady who was secretly married to the Earl of Leicester (?1532-88), known as Queen Elizabeth's favourite, and then abandoned, and, according to legend, later murdered by him. Cumnor Hall is an old country house near Oxford where Amy was immured while Leicester sported at the court of the Queen.

In our discussion, however, Mickle's literary ballad is significant not for its contribution to Scott, but for its two characteristic deviations from tradition: the speaker in the languid state of anguish, and the Gothic atmosphere, both of which are to open a pathway leading to the High Romantic.

The breach of faith in love is, of course, a popular theme in traditional ballads. The narrator tells the story with objective detachment. The *dramatis personae*, when they come on the stage, never indulge in vain regrets for what has happened. Lord Randal in "Lord Randal" (Child 12A), when he comes back from the greenwood, asks his mother to make his bed soon, without telling why. The mother worries over what has happened, and asks questions about where he has been and whom he has met. Judging from the informations she has got, she says that he has been poisoned by his "true-love," and he replies, "O yes, I am poisoned; mother, mak my bed soon, / For I'm sick at the heart, and I fain wad lie down," (23-24) closing the first half of the dialogues between mother and son. In the second half we hear instantly a typical dialogue of nuncupative will; the mother asks her son what he leaves to his family, and ultimately she asks and gets a reply:

'What d'ye leave to your true-love, Lord Randal, my son?  
What d'ye leave to your true-love, my handsome young man?'  
'I leave her hell and fire; mother, mak my bed soon,  
For I'm sick at the heart, and I fain wad lie down.' (37-40)

"Hell and fire" as his bequest should be interpreted as a curse, quite different in quality from the "milk kye," "gold and silver," and "houses and lands" left to his mother, sister, and brother respectively in the preceding nuncupative will; it is the only line of the total 40 which tells directly of Lord Randal's violent passion.

This is a typical example of tradition in which we hear no complaints from the betrayed party. It is a superb narrative technique of controlling emotions, by

## The History of Literary Ballads (6) – “Cumnor Hall” and the Speaker in ‘sick’ning griefe –

Mitsuyoshi Yamanaka

### I

“Cumnor Hall” by William Julius Mickle, first published in *Old Ballads, Historical and Narrative, with Some of Modern Date*, 4 vols. enlarged 1784 (first pub. 1771) edited by Thomas Evans,<sup>1</sup> is well-known as the poem which provided the central theme for Scott’s 1821 novel *Kenilworth*, the title of which he altered from *Cumnor Hall* only at the insistence of the publisher.<sup>2</sup> J. G. Lockhart in his *Memoirs of Sir Walter Scott* refers to Scott’s strong interest in Mickle’s ballad as follows:

A schoolfellow, who was now, like himself, a writer’s apprentice, recollects the eagerness with which he thus made himself master of Evans’s Ballads, shortly after their publication; and another of them . . . remembers, in particular, his rapture with Meikle’s [sic] Cumnor Hall, which first appeared in that collection. . . .

‘There is a period in youth,’ he [in his Preface to *Kenilworth*] says, ‘when the mere power of numbers has a more strong effect on ear and imagination than in after-life. At this season of immature taste, the author was greatly delighted with the poems of Meikle and Langhorne. The first stanza of Cumnor Hall especially had a peculiar enchantment for his youthful ear -- the force of which is not yet (1829) entirely spent.’ Thus that favourite elegy, after having dwelt on his memory and imagination for forty years, suggested the subject of one of his noblest romances.<sup>3</sup>