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# 1

## Collecting Ballads and Resisting Radical Energies: Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*

Walter Scott conceived of his first major publication, the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, in the early 1790s. Throughout that decade and into the first 3 years of the nineteenth century, he worked with a number of collaborators at accumulating a substantial range of ballad versions and archival material. These he used in what was intended to be an authoritative and definitive print version of oral and traditional Borders ballad culture. For the remainder of his life Scott continued to write and speak with affection of his 'Liddesdale Raids' and 'forays', the ballad collecting and research trips that he made into the Borders country mainly during the years 1792–1799.<sup>1</sup> J. G. Lockhart, his son-in-law and biographer, describes the compilation of the *Minstrelsy* as 'a labour of love truly, if ever there was', noting that the degree of devotion was such that the project formed 'the editor's chief occupation' during the years 1800 and 1801.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, Lockhart takes care to state that the ballad project did not prevent Scott from attending the Bar in Edinburgh or from fulfilling his responsibilities as Sheriff Depute of Selkirkshire, a post he was appointed to on 16 December 1799.<sup>3</sup> An affinity between literary production and legal administration endured throughout Scott's life, and the two are constantly interrelated within his work in ways which emphasize his belief in civic responsibility.

The initial two volumes of the *Minstrelsy*, respectively subtitled 'Historical Ballads' and 'Romantic Ballads', were published in January 1802. A supplementary third volume followed in May 1803. In the third edition, published in 1806, Scott systematically rearranged the order of the ballads and made a number of additions. From that point, although there would be some changes in future editions (mainly to the notes), most of the ballads and their accompanying notes were in place. It is these early editions of the *Minstrelsy* that I am chiefly concerned with,

because I want to read Scott's editing and publishing of the ballads in relation to the collection's initial political and cultural context. However, the fifth edition of 1830 contains two of Scott's most important pieces of literary criticism: his 'Introductory Remarks on Popular Poetry and on the various collections of Ballads of Britain, particularly those of Scotland' and 'Essay on Imitations of the Ancient Ballad'.<sup>4</sup> As part of the paratextual framing material that is such a feature of Scott's work, these essays are important. Both were written after Scott's transition from translator and editor, through narrative poet to novelist, and together they constitute a more emphatically literary complement to his original introduction, which comprised a lengthy historical survey of Borders society. I shall comment on the developmental significance of the essays at various points during the analyses that follow.

The *Minstrelsy* was compiled in the period leading up to, during and in the aftermath of the events of the Terror, during years of the rise to power of Napoleon and at a time when Britain was sporadically at war with France, or existing in a state of uneasy peace. Indeed, publication of the first edition occurred at a time when Britain was ready to declare war yet again on France. In terms of home context it was written by a man who had chosen law as his profession, and set against a background of contrasting radicalism on the one hand and virulent anti-jacobin activity on the other. From the early 1790s, there were a number of notorious high-profile treason and sedition trials of radicals in England and Scotland, and many more that were less well known. Whilst High Treason was the most serious charge, carrying a capital penalty, a wide range of other charges was utilized in order to control public and covert political activism. Outside the courts, unofficial anti-jacobin intimidation became increasingly commonplace throughout the decade and on into the nineteenth century, and was often very violent.

Scott expressed unequivocal support for Edinburgh Judge Braxfield's hardline clampdown on radical activists in the mid-1790s and showed little sympathy for the convicted men.<sup>5</sup> In letters to his aunt Christian Rutherford during his attendance of the treason trials of Robert Watt and David Downie in the autumn of 1794, he spoke of sitting in court from seven o'clock one morning until two o'clock on the following day, sustained by 'some cold meat and a bottle of wine' so that he would not miss the proceedings, and of staying on in Edinburgh 'to witness the exit of the ci-devant Jacobin Mr. Watt'.<sup>6</sup> Watt and Downie were tried during September and October for 'organizing a plot for a general rising in Edinburgh, to seize the Castle, the Bank, the persons of the Judges, and proclaim a Provisional Republican Government'.<sup>7</sup> Thus, they were regarded

as agitators plotting against the economic, judicial and administrative structures at the very heart of the nation. Watt, a physician and an illegitimate son who had taken his mother's name, was the more socially disadvantaged of the two defendants. Interestingly, Scott considered his case the more compelling despite commenting in his letter of 5 September that the evidence against each was 'quite the same'. Possibly, a class agency influenced his attitude, as it indeed seems to have affected the sentencing process. Watt was hanged and decapitated on 15 October. Downie, a financier, was also convicted but later reprieved. The trials and Watt's desperate attempts to avoid execution have been documented by John Barrell.<sup>8</sup> Scott acquired a copy of the published *Declaration and Confession of Robert Watt, written, subscribed, & delivered by himself, the Evening before his Execution* – a last attempt by Watt to obtain a reprieve – and in a letter to his aunt described Downie's reprieve as a 'matter of general regret' before beginning his next paragraph with a reference to 'the striking appearance' and 'accuracy in firing' of the Royal Edinburgh Volunteers.<sup>9</sup>

Scott's keen involvement in the formation in 1797 and subsequent training of the Edinburgh Volunteer Light Dragoons militia testifies to his support for the suppression of radical activity by means other than that available through the courtroom, and outside of and away from it. Scotland witnessed the formation of a number of volunteer militias during the last years of the eighteenth and first years of the nineteenth centuries. Even Robert Burns, who had been known for his republicanism and radical disposition, joined the Dumfries Volunteers in 1795, shortly before his death the following year. The common aims of these militias were to resist invasion by France, should it occur, and to suppress radical activity and street protest at home. Scott composed a number of songs for the Edinburgh Volunteers' use, including 'The War Song of the Royal Edinburgh Light Dragoons' in the 'Imitations of the Ancient Ballad' final section of the *Minstrelsy* for the third edition of 1806. The banner-waving, bugle-blowing martial imagery of the 'War Song' perfectly mirrors the masculine, martial themes of the Historical Ballads of the first section, with its rallying call 'To horse', and its exhortation to 'March forward, one and all!'.<sup>10</sup> But notably, the song recasts those themes for a modern world. Scott's prefatory note begins: 'the following War-Song was written during the apprehension of an invasion. The corps of volunteers to which it was addressed, was raised in 1797. . . . It still subsists. . . .'<sup>11</sup> The inclusion and positioning of the 'War Song' towards the end of the *Minstrelsy* demonstrates the tightness and the closure of Scott's overall, anti-radical narrative.

The looser morals and feminized sensual passions of the romantic and popular ballads are securely contained between the two outer, male-dominated groups.

After these remarks on the political and legal framework within which the *Minstrelsy* was compiled, I want to consider certain dominant themes from the pedagogical and intellectual environment of Scotland that particularly informed Scott's method. It then becomes possible to see how intricately these various contexts relate to one another and how, as a consequence, Scott's scholarly antiquarianism, his interest in medievalist romance and gothic tales and his detailed knowledge and love of the Scottish Borders region ultimately reflect upon a range of more modern concerns. For example, Robert Southey, writing to Scott after the first number of the *Quarterly Review* was published in 1809, believed he recognized his correspondent's hand in an article that concluded 'there is, we think, a considerable analogy between the present history of Spain and that of Scotland about the close of the 13th century'. The review drew parallels between Edward I of England and Napoleon, invoked the Battle of Bannockburn and ended with an exhortation to the kind of national spirit that could repel invasion and resist tyranny.<sup>12</sup> The comparativism behind such an equation of medieval, feudal Scotland and modern Spain was politically motivated, but nevertheless utilized a particular line of historicist thought that had been dominant throughout Scott's school and university years.

The intellectual schools that flourished during the course of eighteenth century in the Scottish Universities, and which we now know collectively as the Scottish Enlightenment, produced an extensive range of work in the fields of moral philosophy, social history, architecture and science. Central to this movement, which led Smollett to describe 1760s Edinburgh as a 'hot-bed of genius' where conversation with leading academics was as 'instructive as their writing', was the advancement of a range of innovative empirical studies that investigated the intricacy of relationship between fields that we now classify as social science and political economy.<sup>13</sup> Methodologies were laid down for understanding the processes of social, civic and economic development that involved the comparative examination of different cultures and societies. Amongst the most important premises to emerge from the Scottish Enlightenment was the consensus that human society develops through a series of recognizable and well-defined stages, to the most recent state of commercial civil society. Periods of stability, followed by crisis and defined in terms of socio-economic systems, were identified as marking a linear progression through each stage to the next. The transition from

feudalism, where local traditions and laws based on regional custom prevailed, to a centrally administered civil and commercial society, maintained through a national judicial system, was seen as the most recent, dynamic stage in a self-propelling and providential evolutionary process.

Theories concerning the stadial development of human society were proposed by almost all of those who were active within the Scottish Enlightenment schools, and were so influential that some elaboration is needed. Possibly the most favoured term in use now – Stadial Theory – was coined by John Millar in *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks* (1771). There was a high level of interaction between a number of philosophers from Scotland's main universities of Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen, with ideas continually being argued, built upon and expanded into publication. In *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), Adam Smith proposed that society passes through four stages, from an initial hunter-gatherer phase to civil and commercial society. Adam Ferguson explored similar theories in *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), emphasizing indulgence in luxury and the subsequent decline of martial vigour as the primary catalysts of crisis. Dugald Stewart, Scott's professor at Edinburgh University, introduced the more complex notion of 'conjectural history' in his *Dissertation: Exhibiting the Progress of Metaphysical, Ethical and Political Philosophy, since the Revival of Letters in Europe* (1815 and 1821). The *Dissertation* was written for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (to which Scott later contributed essays on Chivalry and Romance), and published as a single book some years after Scott's *Minstrelsy*, but Stewart had debated these concepts at his University and amongst the *literati* during the period in which Scott was working on the Border Ballads.<sup>14</sup> He, too, was especially concerned with the need to maintain the civic role of personal and public virtue, as a means of countering the potentially damaging effect of possessive individualism. As we will see, Scott advocates a similar outlook in the *Minstrelsy* through a choice of texts implying that Borders history is replete with moral example.

The question that vexed philosophers and political economists was how civil and commercial society might sustain the progressive line that it was following without risking collapse into decadence and/or individualism. Two main class-based strands of anxiety were notably emergent. Increased material wealth along with the abandonment of austere principles amongst the more wealthy members of society – and in the case of feudalism, the softening of martial hardiness due to indulgence in luxury – were determined as precursors of crisis in previous stages of

development.<sup>15</sup> The relationship between luxury, its part in past corruption of moral and civic duty, and the forms of modern anxiety that Scott was responding directly to is clearly determined in James Steuart's *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Oeconomy*.<sup>16</sup> Steuart defines luxury as a 'systematical' influence on the moral, physical, domestic and political spheres of everyday life. He maintains that its 'introduction' can be consistent with a rational and prudent society, but uses historical examples of ruined Empires and social systems to warn of its destructive potential when taken to excess:

The Luxury of those days was attended with the most excessive oppression. Extraordinary consumption was no proof of the circulation of any adequate equivalent in favour of the industrious: it had not the effect of giving bread to the poor. . . . In one word, luxury had nothing to recommend it, but that quality which *solely* constitutes the abuse of it in modern times; to wit, the excessive gratification of the passions of the great, which frequently brought on the corruption of their manners.<sup>17</sup>

It is essential to appreciate this civic concern with excessive indulgence, and to understand how it was believed to emasculate virtue within a male dominated society, because these are issues treated throughout Scott's and Byron's poetry. Displaced onto historic Scotland, or represented in the form of Eastern stereotypes, ideological notions of 'other' societies as pleasure-seeking and irresponsible are compared with modern Britain as a nation perceiving itself to be built on selective traditions of hardiness and sexual restraint. In Scott's case these comparisons tend to be treated relatively directly, emphasizing the importance of moral example. Byron's poetry takes a more ironical perspective on morality, particularly sexual codes of conduct and the repression of desire, as my later analyses in both Chapters 3 and 4 of this book will reveal.

At the opposite end of the social scale, indolence was a negative behavioural trait considered endemic within oriental society and, through stadial models of comparison, within poorer and more marginal British communities. Indeed, indolence – by definition contradictory to the development of a successful free market economy and commercial society – was commonly perceived to be one of the main reasons for the failure of Highland society to develop naturally into a modern, civil society (this is discussed in more detail in my next chapter). John Sinclair's *The Statistical Account of Scotland*, published in Edinburgh between 1791 to 1799 includes a number of reports that comment, under the heading

'Poor', on the manner in which communities on the Highland fringe had only latterly 'become industrious'.<sup>18</sup> Scott's Border Ballad editions and narrative poems address contemporary anxieties over social stability by describing a hardy and rugged, permanent landscape, within which the physical remains of a succession of past phases of social development are embedded. His poems invoke a Borders region replete with cultural history evidenced by Druid cairns, sites of battle, ruined buildings and topographical features associated with legend.

By the time of Scott's own formal education at High School in Edinburgh and Kelso, and later at University in Edinburgh under Professor Dugald Stewart, Enlightenment theories of the progression of human societies had come to comprise the backbone of social and historical studies. It is more than coincidental that interest in stadial theory reached its peak in the 1790s, which was the very period in which the *Minstrelsy* project was conceived. Scott came to know a wide range of academics and other intellectuals involved in the formulation, furtherance and debate of ideas on civil society and historical development through Edinburgh University, and later through the social environment of city clubs attended by men from the professions and the *litterati*. Apart from prominent figures such as Dugald Stewart and Baron David Hume (a specialist in Jurisprudence and the philosopher David Hume's nephew), both of whom he came to know socially and whose lectures he attended at University, he also personally knew both Adam Ferguson, whose work and publications on history and society were seminal within the Scottish Enlightenment, and Ferguson's son, also named Adam.<sup>19</sup> As P. D. Garside says in his study of the many Enlightenment influences on Scott, 'as a student in Edinburgh in the eighties and nineties, then, Scott would have been soaked with "philosophical" history'.<sup>20</sup> Given this environment, it should be little surprising that a readily identifiable period in Scottish history, immediately antecedent to his own day and seen as representing the movement from the barbarian past to the civilized present, would provide the superstructure around which the *Minstrelsy* was authored.

Economically and socially, Scott lived in a rapidly modernizing Scotland. The eighteenth century, and particularly the period since his birth in 1771, had been characterized by an increase in materialism and possessive individualism within an expanding commercial and manufacturing society.<sup>21</sup> Thomas Pennant described late 1760s Glasgow as 'the best built of any modern second-rate city I ever saw' and a place where 'Young Gentlemen of fortune' lived in fine housing designed 'in good taste', whilst the commercial environment and

fine marketplaces supported a thriving import, export and textile manufacturing trade:

Great imports of this city are tobacco and sugar. . . . Manufactures here are linnens, cambricks, lawns, tapes, fustians, and striped linnens; so that it already begins to rival *Manchester*, and has in point of the conveniency of its ports, in respect to *America*, a great advantage over it.<sup>22</sup>

Pennant's comparison of Glasgow as a rising rival to Manchester is particularly interesting. For example, he rhetorically moves from a conventional perspective of a Scottish city as second-rate by comparison with its English counterpart into a vibrant description of why that situation might be imminently reversible in a world of imperial expansion and seaborne trade. Scott owned the fifth edition of his widely known three-volume account of his 1760s travels in Scotland, and there is ample evidence within his work of its influence (particularly in the descriptions of the Highland landscape in *The Lady of the Lake* and *Waverley*, the first of which I will deal with in my next chapter).

An increase in the visibility of dispossession and poverty was a feature of the substantial migration of the displaced and unemployed rural poor towards the cities. The desire to share in the wealth being created was not, for example, adequately matched by employment opportunities. The discontent of the poor in urban Scotland, accompanied by the rise of the Corresponding Societies and networks of radical activity, thus became all the more frightening to those of the middling and aristocratic sectors of society in the wake of the mobilization of the *sansculottes* in France. These fears are recognized by Scott, and are confronted within the *Minstrelsy* from the safety and displacement of a historicized and contrastingly rural domain. The examples he posits, in the form of the ballads and their surrounding notes, evoke a period when clan loyalty and the unqualified acceptance of rank within feudal social structures prevailed.

The context of literary production within which Scott read and wrote is similarly important. It is difficult to ascertain with accuracy the number of ballad, song and vernacular poetry collections that were published in England and Scotland prior to the publication of the *Minstrelsy*, but those that became well known within the literary world and to the public well exceeded 40 over a period of some 70 or so years. The majority of these anthologies appeared in the second half of the century, and after 1760. Allan Ramsay's early eighteenth-century *The Evergreen* (1724) and

*The Tea-Table Miscellany* (1724–1737) each contain ballads and songs. Although not ballad collections in the strict sense, these volumes were seminal in the development of Scottish printed balladry. Ramsay provided inspiration and material that Scott used in revised form in the *Minstrelsy*. ('Johnie Armstrong' from *The Evergreen* and the covenanting ballad 'Lesly's March' from *The Tea-Table Miscellany* were included in the Historical Ballads section.) Indeed, as Lockhart notes, Scott wrote in the margin of his copy of the *Tea-table Miscellany* that the volume had belonged to his grandfather, and that 'Hardiknute... the first poem I ever learned – the last I shall ever forget' had been taught him from its pages before he was even able to read.<sup>23</sup> Along with Ramsay's collections, David Herd's *Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs* (1769, revised 1776) was a major influence on Scott and Robert Burns, and is particularly notable for its publication of ballads in fragment form, as well as for its fidelity to manuscript sources. Burns' *Poems, chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (1786) received a rapturous critical and popular reception later in the century, and firmly established the figure of the lyric song writer and collector and editor who was also a highly capable, creative working poet. Burns' national cultural status is such that his vernacular poems and songs (written in lowland Scots) overshadow his prolific output in the more formal, literary language of late eighteenth-century Scotland (English).<sup>24</sup>

Scott's tribute to 'the avowedly lyrical poems of [Burns'] own composition' is well known but, more importantly for the present chapter, his 'Essay on Imitations of the Ancient Ballad' also acknowledged the Ayrshire poet's dedication in restoring and creatively repairing old ballad fragments: 'The poet, perhaps, most capable, by verses, lines, even single words, to relieve and heighten the character of ancient poetry, was the Scottish bard Robert Burns. ... His genius contributed that part which was to give life and immortality to the whole.'<sup>25</sup>

Burns became increasingly involved in the collection of Scots song along with its music, and in the composition of lyrics, in the late 1780s and early 1790s. In this respect he constituted a major contrast with Scott, who collected ballads but chose not to publish airs. Furthermore, Burns' enthusiasm in collecting and submitting musical contributions for the early 1790s volumes of James Johnson's *The Scots Musical Museum* (1787–1803), and for George Thomson's *A Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs for the Voice* (1792, with annual revisions) was such that his most prolific phase of original poetic composition effectively came to an end. Although the collaboration with Thomson involved travelling within the Highlands and Borders regions in order to collect new material, when he turned to original poetic composition Burns

remained essentially a poet of south-western, Lowland Scotland rather than of the peripheral regions. His compositions, with their frequent treatment of love and courtship and lyrics portraying feeling, can be likened more readily to the Romantic Ballad category within the *Minstrelsy*. It is interesting and appropriate that Francis Jeffrey, reviewing the first edition of the *Minstrelsy* for the *Edinburgh Review*, cited by way of sanction Burns' earlier admiration for the ballad version by Mrs Cockburn of 'Flowers of the Forest'.<sup>26</sup> Scott included 'Flowers of the Forest' in adapted form and with a second part of his own composition in his Romantic Ballads category. He cites Burns as a source for a number of the ballad versions in that section.

In his review of Cromeck's *Reliques of Robert Burns, consisting chiefly of Original Letters, Poems and Critical Observations on Scottish Songs*, for the first number of the *Quarterly Review* in February 1809, Scott expressed disappointment that Burns had allowed his early romantic attraction to jacobitism (considered harmless half a century after Culloden, and consistent with Scott's own similar nostalgic dalliance) to transmute into jacobinism, with its republican and liberal agenda.<sup>27</sup> At a literary level, he lamented Burns' concentration on song. In assessing the significance of that review, it should be borne in mind that Scott had been instrumental in establishing the *Quarterly Review* following his indignation at the *Edinburgh Review's* Whig politics, and most notably after the *Edinburgh's* controversial review of Don Pedro Cevallos' *On the French Usurpation of Spain* in its October 1808 number. The 'Don Pedro Cevallos' article was acerbically critical of the class institutions of Britain, and called for reform of the constitution on the pain of 'more violent changes'.<sup>28</sup> The authority of monarchical rule was satirically attacked, and the spectre of mob 'insurrection' raised, anathema to Scott. Jeffrey, the editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, also reviewed Cromeck's 'Reliques of Robert Burns', for the January 1809 edition of the *Edinburgh*, and Scott's comments need to be located within the context of a politically conscious review environment.<sup>29</sup> In stating a preference for more serious poetic composition over song, and regretting that Burns' 'time and talents should have been frittered away' on the lyrics of 'small and insignificant' compositions – although he withheld outright condemnation of Burns' songs with the qualification that no one should 'suppose that we undervalue' them – Scott displays a class-consciousness within which excessive interest in popular song is charged with lower-class intellectual affiliation and, by association (in the light of the remarks on Burns' politics), with political delinquency.<sup>30</sup> Born and raised in Ayrshire, Burns was at heart always a poet and songwriter of contemporary, rural working-class society in

the central Lowlands of Scotland. Scott's antiquarian work, on the other hand, continually sought to represent the more peripheral Borders as a stylized and emblematic region, powered by rhythms of masculine, martial virtue with respect for rank dating at least as far back as the thirteenth century.

Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) had been the primary ballad collection produced in England in this entire period, and it would be difficult to overestimate the extent of its influence. The *Reliques* was referred to by virtually every ballad editor thereafter, and was acknowledged by Scott as his primary inspiration. Jeffrey, for the *Edinburgh Review* 38 years later in his article on Scott's *Minstrelsy*, reflected on what had become the general consensus: that in the 'publication of the *Reliques of Ancient Poetry* Dr. Percy conferred on literature an inestimable benefit'.<sup>31</sup> Several of Percy's ballads are from, or purport to come from, Northumberland – therefore they represent a minstrelsy drawn from the immediate other side of the Scottish/English border that Scott wrote about. Let us look more closely at Percy's antiquarian editorial methods.

The contrast between the English bias of Percy's *Reliques* and the Scottish focus of Scott's *Minstrelsy* seems self-explanatory, given the nationalities of the two editors. However, the differing treatment of the Borders country between England and Scotland by each writer reveals something more interesting about assumptions of power, and associated tensions, within the British Union. 'Sir Patrick Spence', which Scott eventually edited and extended to place first in the *Minstrelsy*, is the seventh of the 12 ballads in the first Book of Percy's three-volume collection. Despite the title of the *Reliques* defining the contents as *Ancient English* poetry, Percy classifies 'Sir Patrick Spence' in his index as 'a Scottish Ballad'. It is one of four so designated in that book. The other eight are mainly from Northern England, and more specifically from Northumberland. Thus, the English Ballads outnumber their Scots counterparts by two to one. It has become standard for the *Reliques* to be read as a collection edited in such a way that it constructs and authorizes a unified British ballad tradition, which offers a naturalized, cultural heritage support for a British Union. Indeed, one could argue that the inclusion of Scottish Ballads with dominant themes of aristocrats loyal to the Crown echoes the attendance of a large contingent of Scottish Lords, led by the influential Earl of Bute, at the Coronation of George III and Queen Charlotte on 22 September 1761, just 4 years before the *Reliques* was first published.<sup>32</sup> But the combination of the indexed declaration of the nationality of ballads that are other than English, and the balance of the actual

Border-country Ballads in book one, as we can see, unfurls the extent of the Anglo-centricism behind Percy's editorial strategy. To enclose Scottish Ballads (and Irish, Welsh and others) between covers that present them as ancient *English* relics reveals a bias of historical – as well as contemporary – superiority in favour of England as the dominant culture and nation. Significantly, Percy did not proceed to publication of the supplementary collection that he had intended to call *Ancient English and Scottish Poems*, and which would have given equal weighting at the point of cover and title to each nation.

The 'bardic nationalism' (to use Katie Trumpener's term) that denotes Percy's approach to history and text was important within the development of popular historical understanding towards the end of the eighteenth century. Indeed, his antiquarianism constituted a kind of literary *prospect* view, displaying all of the patriarchal and proprietorial tendencies that accompanied such a gaze. Nick Groom refers in his seminal study of the making of the *Reliques* to the way in which a certain kind of quaint 'Scottish ethnicity' was cultivated within England as a way of 'policing the other' – that 'other' being a contemporary Scotland seeking its share of power within an English dominated Union.<sup>33</sup>

The prose framework to the *Reliques*, and its strategies of control over the ballad texts, demonstrates the model that Scott began working with. If we leave aside the plates, the frame material consists of five distinct pieces of prose, all of which address a polite and educated readership to whom the dialect vernacular of ballad language was quaint and more or less unfamiliar. Three of the framing pieces are found in the first volume, where they precede the ballads. The first is Percy's dedication of his volumes to Baroness Percy, Countess of Northumberland. She was not related to Percy, who was the son of a Shropshire grocer. (Percy had 'improved' his name by emending the spelling to match that of the descendants of the heroic Hotspur.) The second is the preface, which proposes Percy's antiquarian recourse to the famous Folio manuscript and other scholarly sources and delineates his editorial principles and methods. The third is an essay on 'The Ancient English Minstrels', in which Percy stresses that the minstrels were men of creative genius and honourable nature, enjoying privileged social and intellectual patronage prior to the degeneration of their kind into late medieval, vulgar proponents of popular song. The fourth and fifth framing pieces are the indexes preceding each book's ballad texts and the glossaries of obsolete and Scottish words that conclude each. The glossaries, like the indexes, have a role to play in Percy's historicizing project. The juxtaposition of 'Obsolete' and 'Scottish' in the headings of the glossaries, for example,

further testifies to his Anglo-centric methodology: the main natural language of the nation that had most recently threatened English sovereignty is neatly consigned to the realm of linguistic antiquity and curiosity. (Gaelic doesn't feature in the *Reliques*.)

Walter Scott's framing techniques were more complex than those of Percy. The paratextual material of Scott's *Minstrelsy*, for instance, occupies as much space within the volumes as the ballads themselves. Not only are there introductory and interjected essays of considerable length and detail, but the ballads are surrounded and intersected by a plethora of notes that grew and were amended with each edition of the collection. Scott's miscellanea of indices, essays, notes and glossaries provides an authoritative framework to the *Minstrelsy* ballads, that like Percy's, 'polices' (to use Groom's terminology) the more controversial aspects of the ballad texts and their origins, at the same time that it conforms to protocol. But in the *Minstrelsy* the problem of 'otherness' is socially and morally defined, rather than specifically national, and is embedded within a historicized, mainly Scottish environment. The exercise of editorial authority in the *Minstrelsy* applies to the outlaw themes within the Historical Ballads, but becomes far more important as the collection moves into the dubious moral content of the Romantic Ballads.

In the Romantic Ballads section of the *Minstrelsy*, Scott's notes serve as a didactic gloss to the scandals and tragedies that comprise most of the ballad narratives. He presents the problems of corruption from within the essential fabric of the home culture of Scotland, and most notably in the fracture or dismissal of relationships central to the domestic sphere and the family unit. The dominant themes of the Romantic Ballads are sexual intrigue, jealousy, betrayal and murder. Whilst, indeed, the songs and ballads are collected from a range of archival and more modern sources, collectively they may be interpreted as parable-like representations of the damage caused to social structures by lack of self-control on the part of individually motivated characters. Of these ballads 'Jellon Game', from a version by Mrs Brown of Falkland, Aberdeen, 'Willie's Ladye', from Lewis's *Tales of Wonder*, and 'The Daemon-lover', which Scott attributes to the recitation of Hogg's father, William Laidlaw, are thematically and stylistically exemplary. Others in the section involve superstition, fabulous aspects of folklore, court rivalries and rapine without the strict codes of honour that were emphasized in the Historical Ballads.

Scott's note prefacing 'Hughie the Graeme', a ballad which narrates the execution at Carlisle of a Borders horse thief betrayed by his unfaithful wife, points out that the Graeme clan of the Debateable Land 'were said to be of Scottish extraction', and are alleged 'with their

children, tenants and servants [to be] the chiefest actors in the spoil and decay of the country'.<sup>34</sup> His endnote to that ballad is a comment on 'the morality of Robert Aldridge, Bishop of Carlisle' – friend of Erasmus, victim of the theft and suggested object of Graeme's wife's affections – which stresses that his 'political and religious faiths were of a stretching and accommodating texture'.<sup>35</sup> There is no corresponding defence of Maggie Graeme's character. The words of her husband Hughie stand alone to define her for Scott's readers:

Fare ye weel, fair Maggie, my wife!  
 The last time we came ower the muir,  
 'Twas thou bereft me of my life,  
 And wi' the Bishop thou play'd the whore.

(XV)

The suggestion of moral example drawn from history that is relevant to the early nineteenth century, when radicalism and revolutionary sentiments were associated with excessive passions and loose morals, emerges from the combination of the Romantic Ballad texts and Scott's editorial paratext. As I will show later in this chapter, with the final, Imitations of the Ancient Ballad section the frame narrative becomes less didactic, and more strictly informative and documentary.

Percy's main ideologically inflected literary achievement was a matter of class politics, and it showed a response to urbanization that anticipates the anti-radical stance that Scott would later take. The *Reliques* adopts the north-country Border Ballad as a paradigm from which one could redeem an oral ballad culture that had latterly become associated with vulgar street culture and popular protest. As Groom says at the outset of the introduction to his facsimile edition of the *Reliques*, Percy was both typical and outstanding within the mid-eighteenth-century world of literary medievalism. He worked to an already established antiquarian format, whilst authoring definitive, 'improved' versions of old ballads with themes of epic sentiment for a substantial and growing middling-class, literate and formally educated readership.<sup>36</sup>

All of the published ballad material and criticism to which I have been referring was accessible to a wide range of readers in the public sphere. Behind the publicly visible printed volumes that entered the literary marketplace, however, there existed an intricate network of collectors and antiquarian scholars, working with the mass of manuscript and early print sources that were being recovered, corresponding

with one another and arguing cases of authenticity. By the end of the eighteenth century the ballad anthology had become a genre in its own right. The rise in its popularity manifested an extensive scholarly and public interest in forms of folkloric poetry, and in medieval and primitive literature. The *Minstrelsy* was produced within this generic environment, and Scott's editorial strategies were shaped by the intricate and extensive protocols that had developed around it.

The growth industry in simple, folk and oral poetry during the late eighteenth century was partially a reaction to poetic artifice and the high sophistication of refined neoclassical form. As Marilyn Butler says, the evocation within the arts of 'a condition of society that was primitive and pre-social' was, indeed, the 'strongest single tendency' of the late eighteenth century.<sup>37</sup> By the last decades of the eighteenth century, when Scott was thinking about and beginning to collect ballads, 'cultural primitivism' had become one of the most fashionable features of the literary world. Ideologically speaking, the majority of antiquarian ballad collectors and publishers came from middling-class families and held Tory views in politics. Consequently, the ballad anthology produced by the antiquarian scholar was one that most frequently sought to retrieve and preserve cultural memories of codes of honour, particularly the binding communal loyalties that were latterly believed to have been lost when feudal structures decayed and disintegrated to be replaced by individualism. Joseph Ritson stands out as an example to the contrary, and he vehemently argued that the appellations bard and minstrel were applied to a range of poets and entertainers who may or may not have been creatively talented, socially elevated as poets or, indeed, virtuous in any sense.<sup>38</sup> I will discuss Ritson's radicalism and its manifestation in his ballad collections later in this chapter, in my comparison of his version of 'Johny Armstrong's Last Good-Night' and 'The Three Ravens' with Scott's versions of the same ballads. Some explanation of his dispute with Percy over editorial methods, and of Scott's response to the furore, is needed at this point, however.

The antiquarian practice of piecing together (often quite literally) fragments of ballad and romance poetry from the manuscripts, print sources and oral traditions of threatened communities involved the negotiation of certain protocols. Not the least of these was the requirement that sources be adequately acknowledged. The notorious dispute between Percy and Ritson over how far one might 'repair' such fragments, and over the extent to which one might claim authenticity either for individual ballads or for the superior status of minstrelsy in general, epitomized the way in which authorial control could be fiercely disputed.

Percy prioritized theme and costume, or manner, over scholarly accuracy in his construction of the *Reliques*. The story of the manuscript which he allegedly rescued as it was being used by a maid to light a drawing room fire allowed him to claim justification for his playing fast and loose with his texts, in the cause of rescuing them from obscurity. Nick Groom points out that relatively few of the ballads Percy used were taken directly from the fire-damaged manuscript, but rather were composites made up of a range of sources including his own invention in part.<sup>39</sup> In fact, Percy's editorial strategy was designed to 'improve' the historical manner of the ballads for a modern readership. His policy of 'improvement' – one of the keywords of the age – and Ritson's even more impassioned devotion to historical authenticity emphasize the differences between a writer who sought to construct a cultural history that enshrined ballad culture in traditions of elevated social status and one who sought to acknowledge, also, its less salubrious realities.

Scott discusses the Percy/Ritson controversy at length in his 1830 'Introductory Remarks on Popular Poetry and on the various collections of Ballads of Britain, particularly those of Scotland'.<sup>40</sup> His account is balanced in antiquarian and literary terms, but ideologically it is not so equanimous. Scott honours Percy for the 'felicity' and excellence of his 'antiquarian knowledge' in producing a ballad collection 'which must always be held among the first of its class in point of merit' and for his personal qualities, which are noted as his moderation and evenness of temper.<sup>41</sup> He praises Ritson's formidably rigorous scholarship, commenting on his 'laudable accuracy and fidelity as an editor', but he repeatedly refers to his irascible character and 'eager irritability of temper'.<sup>42</sup> Politics are not mentioned explicitly, but Percy was a Tory and thus of Scott's own party, whilst Ritson's proto-socialist beliefs and republican political affiliations were entirely antagonistic to all that Scott upheld. Scott's comparative descriptions of the two men demonstrate the discursive dimension of his political position: moderation and respectability as positive conservative traits, and eagerness, irritability or excessive passion as markers of radical temperament were so common as to be almost universally employed descriptive formulae during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Those politicized, contrasting character traits are translated into the positive and negative aspects of balladry on the Borders within the *Minstrelsy*.

The antiquarian practices of Percy and Ritson demonstrate how ballad anthologies generally used a range of conventions and editorial strategies to meet contemporary literary tastes. Produced within a modern literary framework, and marketed as volumes of ancient 'folk' poetry

(usually in dialect) in a burgeoning commercial environment, these collections involved a potentially paradoxical set of values. As Marilyn Butler states, the emergence of a fashion for 'pre-modern nativist cultural forms' during the late eighteenth century was partly a response to the 'modern cultural dominance of France and [other] Francophile governing élites', and 'laid the ground for a major shift... in social attitudes and group identities' as well as in literary tastes.<sup>43</sup> In the years following the French Revolution, and more particularly after the Terror, those attitudes and identities became polarized into factions of radical and anti-radical sympathizers. Materialism and capitalism resulted in the growth of a market and an intellectual trade in old documents, as the mania for old German and Norse, as well as English, ballad sources increased. Leith Davis has argued plausibly that Scott's 1830 'Essay on Imitations of the Ancient Ballad' presents the genre of modern Imitation Ballads as 'a recalcitrant response' to these materialist market conditions.<sup>44</sup> I would add that Scott's specific prescription of the Borders and its literary heritage as the definitive region where that response could best take place demonstrates the extent to which he regarded rural borders and margins as particularly valuable sites through which to counter the negative, individualistic aspects of commercial urbanization.

Scott was inspired in his early adult life by the German *Sturm und Drang* and Romantic Gothic movements (Schiller and Herder, in particular). As his letters, prose essays and the catalogue of the Library at Abbotsford all testify, he read extensively in Continental as well as British collections of ballads and *volkslieder*. Scott's interest in German gothic ballad literature is endorsed by his anonymous publication in 1797 of *The Chase and William and Helen: two ballads from the German*, which comprised translations of Bürger's 'Der wilder Jäger' (the wild huntsman) and 'Lenore'. Goethe was particularly inspirational, and Scott published a translation of his early (1773) historical verse drama *Götz von Berlichingen mit der Eisernen Hand*. Lukács, in *The Historical Novel*, points to *Götz von Berlichingen* as particularly influential on Scott's development of social and individual characterization within historical fiction.<sup>45</sup> Goethe, in his turn, had been strongly influenced by Herder's adaptations of folk and ballad literature and thus demonstrated developments that had been taking place within Germany. Scott's translation of *Götz von Berlichingen* was published 3 years before the first two volumes of the *Minstrelsy*, in 1799. He followed it with five ballads, all with Germanic or Scottish supernatural themes, contributed to Matthew Lewis's controversial *Tales of Wonder*. Scott's involvement with the gothic genre prevailed in spite of arguments, following the

publication of *The Monk* (1796), positing Lewis as typical of the debased modern Gothic prose writers who produced stories of terror and sensation for the readers of circulating libraries and purchasers of cheap fiction.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Scott became instrumental in seeking to redeem gothic and supernatural writing from accusations of excessive sensationalism and fringe libertarian association. Neither does Lewis seem such an unusual partner when we consider, in Fiona Robertson's words, how he, like Scott, expresses 'conventional misgivings about the corruptions of city life', preferring to create 'rural idylls which emphasize the responsibilities of individuals to each other in small communities'.<sup>47</sup> Scott's faith in the moral solidity of the ballads that he contributed to *Tales of Wonder* is borne out by his inclusion of two of them, 'Glenfinlas' and 'The Eve of St. John' in the Imitations section of the *Minstrelsy*. Furthermore, these ballads are respectively set in the Highland borders of Perthshire and the Borders at Smailholm, Roxburghshire, and provide a link between the *Minstrelsy*, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* and *The Lady of the Lake*.

The borders between historical and sensational gothic literature are once again brought into the foreground within Scott's literary biographies, published in the 1820s. His association of Horace Walpole with virtuous, simple forms of gothic romance, and his alignment of Mrs Radcliffe with a modern vogue for luxuriating in false sensation and phantasmagoria<sup>48</sup> can be compared to his own gendered form of medievalism. Scott contrasts the simplicity of the masculine, heroic Border Ballads with the feminized and more sentimentally themed Romantic Ballads, as I shall show in more detail later.

The *Minstrelsy* was compiled within the material, ideological and literary contexts just described. Upon publication, the first two volumes very quickly became known in England as well as in Scotland. The initial print run by James Ballantyne of 750 copies in January 1802 sold well and was followed by the first of the three-volume edition in May 1803, with a print run of 1000 (1500 of Volume 3). Critical reception was largely supportive of Scott's project and of his editorial methods. The *Edinburgh Review*, keen to uphold a scholarly Scottish counterpart to Percy's *Reliques*, and one that did not attract the controversy over authenticity that had accompanied Macpherson's *Ossian* publications and Pinkerton's ballad collections, gave a lengthy, positive reception to the initial two volumes. The tone of Francis Jeffrey's review for the *Edinburgh* can be deduced from the first paragraph:

The task which Mr. Scott has here undertaken, requires no common combination of abilities. He appears before the public in the distinct characters of author and editor, and unites, in his own person, the offices of antiquary, critic and poet. Such a task is not light; its execution, therefore, is entitled to indulgence in its censure, and to liberality in praise... The first merit of an author, with respect to history, is his *fidelity*. This spirit... Mr Scott possesses in an eminent degree. Very few of the pretended restorers of literary history, especially among our own countrymen, stand blameless in this respect. The long disputed charges against Macpherson, and the proved and acknowledged forgeries of Pinkerton, are instances too well known to need a comment.<sup>49</sup>

On the note of that early positive acclaim for the *Minstrelsy*, we can now move to a closer look at Scott's texts.

## Historical Ballads

The Historical Ballads of Scott's *Minstrelsy* have a number of common characteristics: all are masculine in their thematic bias, and all are based on austere, simple chivalric principles – women are passive and idealized, featuring only as stereotypical 'Ladies in Castelles' or, where they are more realistically depicted, as war-widows. Patriotism is a constant and prominent theme. All are set in geographically peripheral locations. In the first and second editions of the *Minstrelsy*, 'The Sang of the Outlaw Murray' was placed first in the collection. However, from the third edition onwards, it was moved to fourth place. The Aberdeenshire ballad of 'Sir Patrick Spens' was then placed first, 'Auld Maitland' was introduced and placed second and the 'Battle of Otterbourne' third. An examination of the more structured format of the third and subsequent editions, considered along with the content of the ballads, suggests Scott's reasons for making those changes. Notably, 'Sir Patrick Spens', 'Auld Maitland' and 'Battle of Otterbourne' are all intensely patriotic ballads that do not involve any theme of reiving or banditry. Each involves the death of a magnanimous hero. The following analyses should convincingly demonstrate how those three ballads strengthen the ideological strategy that provides the *Minstrelsy* with its impetus as an anti-radical production.

### 'Sir Patrick Spens'<sup>50</sup>

Scott begins his note prefacing 'Sir Patrick Spens' by acknowledging Thomas Percy's text (published 37 years earlier, in 1765) as his benchmark

version, and he also praises Johann Gottfried Herder's 'beautiful German translation' in *Volkslieder* (1778–1779), an anthology he describes as 'an elegant work'.<sup>51</sup> These tributes need to be seen as more than courteous acknowledgements: Scott had chosen a ballad that was equally well known amongst scholars and readers of antiquarian ballad collections, and in doing so he was consciously locating his own anthology within traditions epitomized by the leading collectors from England and Germany. Following these literary acknowledgements, Scott mentions other sources which directly link old manuscripts to contemporary oral recitation and at the same time establish his own rôle as a restorer (rather than simply a retriever) of history:

But it seems to have occurred to no editor, that a more complete copy of the song might be procured. That, with which the public is now presented, is taken from two MS. copies, collated with several verses, recited by the Editor's friend, Robert Hamilton, Esq., advocate, being the 16th, and the four which follow. But, even with the assistance of the common copy, the ballad still seems to be a fragment.<sup>52</sup>

Scott's claim that some of the verses had been orally related to him is crucial in establishing the individual, progressive nature of the *Minstrelsy*. First, whilst previous collections virtually made a fetish of oral traditions, they nevertheless prioritized blackletter, broadside and manuscript material as verification of their ballad versions. Indeed, here we see one of the most profoundly innovative differences between Scott, Percy and Ritson. Scott was the only one of the three to use – and state his use of – contemporary, orally related source material. Secondly, Scott establishes a clear lineage from *ancient* manuscript sources through to *modern* recitation by an approved person. Thirdly, the reciter is male, educated and middle class.

Yet, Scott states that the ballad still seems to be incomplete – thus rhetorically providing himself with the authority to repair it to a condition superior to that of the 'common copy'. The resulting addition of verses introducing a complementary story to the existing known incident of 'Sir Patrick Spens' is without question the most significant feature of the version that Scott published.<sup>53</sup> Scott's 'Sir Patrick Spens' has twenty-six verses, compared with the eleven that Percy used, and the extra material perfectly demonstrates his practical programme to compose a history that is both 'curious' in the antiquarian sense, and 'conjectural' as defined by Stewart's providential theory, as a close look at the narrative will now show.

'Sir Patrick Spens' begins in the same way as all other anthologized versions of the same ballad, with an image of the monarch seeking loyal service. Thus, a traditional beginning is used both for the individual ballad and for the *Minstrelsy*:

The King sits in Dunfermline town,  
 Drinking the blude-red wine;  
 'O whare will I get a skeely skipper,  
 To sail this new ship of mine!'

(I)

The dense alliteration is entirely consistent with oral tradition, as is the interjected dialogue. Scott's use of dialect (which differs in its orthography from that in the Percy version) along with archaic spellings further lends a sense of authenticity. An air of modish gothic simplicity with implications of savagery is invoked by the reference to the drinking of the 'blude-red' wine.<sup>54</sup> The second verse introduces the theme of loyal knighthood, respect for rank and service to the crown. Once this legitimate point of departure is established, Scott's editing processes start to tailor the ballad more specifically towards his own strategy.

The verses that Scott contended were related to him orally by Hamilton concern the storm scene that precedes the sinking of Spens' ship, and they come towards the end of the poem. Strictly speaking, they are important in a literary more than historical sense, for their main function is to heighten the dramatic effect of the ballad. They also add contemporary elements of the eighteenth-century sublime to what is presented as an ancient ballad text, and they constitute more than a gesture towards the wild, dramatic naturalism of the German *Sturm und Drang* and gothic schools. The vivid description of the 'Forties in winter, all 'faem', 'wind', 'weet', 'hail' and 'sleet', and of the 'gurly' sea against which the sailors pit themselves, employs dialect to emphasize the stark, historic masculine bravado of a nation that Scott configures as pounded and shaped by the unforgiving and savage forces of nature peculiar to northern latitudes. Scott ensures that his version of the Spens ballad supports a distinctly Scottish patriotism, increasing the sense of ruggedness by shifting the shipwreck further north than in prior versions, to offshore from Aberdeen. The power of cultural memory and the authority of the literary historian is thereby northernized and made more hardy, at the same time that it is attached to virtues of patriotism. This emphasis on hardiness is evident in Scott's note, where he remarks that 'the tune of Mr. Hamilton's

copy of *Sir Patrick Spens* is different from that to which the words are more commonly sung; being less plaintive, and having a bold nautical turn in the close'.<sup>55</sup> The storm verses establish a precedent for a living oral balladry, that can safely be listened to from the mouthpiece of an elite, modern 'minstrel' class – represented by men like Hamilton and deemed trustworthy – which exists in co-operation with a print culture presided over by literary authorities such as Scott.

However, it is Scott's attempt to repair the remaining fragment – as he designated it – through the addition of the 'Norway' verses near the beginning of the ballad, which loads it with a particularly nuanced historical significance. In all other printed or manuscript versions prior to Scott's the purpose of the voyage is either entirely omitted or remains obscure. As Nick Groom points out in his study of the *Reliques*, no catharsis whatsoever can be derived from Percy's version of this ballad because the narrative offers no reason for either the voyage or the drowning of the hero.<sup>56</sup> It is, in short, rhyme without reason. Scott remedies that anomaly. He has Spens travelling to Norway to bring back the heir to the Scottish throne and granddaughter of Alexander III, Margaret the Maid of Norway. The story is explained at length in the prose note prefacing the poem, where Scott offers his readers a tenuous and curious historical tale of a plan to marry Margaret to the English Edward, Prince of Wales. This would have had the profound effect of bringing the Union of the Crowns forward by some three centuries, had the plan succeeded, and would have entirely altered the character of the Borders as a frontier region. In his note Scott acknowledges Lord Hailes' (David Dalrymple's) *Annals of Scotland* and John de Fordun's *Chronicles* as historical texts from the eighteenth and fourteenth centuries that include the story, emphasizing the significance of the conjecture to the historical and literary interest of the Borders:

The death of the Maid of Norway effectually crushed a scheme, the consequences of which might have been, that the distinction betwixt England and Scotland would, in our day, have been as obscure and uninteresting as that of the realms of the heptarchy.<sup>57</sup>

Covering himself against the very real possibility of accusations of scholarly compromise, Scott freely admits that lack of hard archival sources prevented him from irrefutably linking the events of this story to 'Sir Patrick Spens'. His editorial activism is such, however, that it shades suggestion and possibility into probability.

The sea that claims the lives of 'gude Sir Patrick Spens' (XXVI) and the other 'Scots Lords' represents an obvious natural border (to which

I return in my fourth chapter, on Byron's Eastern Tales), and a political one insofar as it separates Scotland from Norway. But the manner in which Scott links the Aberdeenshire ballad with the ballads set in the Borders region requires more urgent explanation at this point. 'Sir Patrick Spens' stands out as the only one of the Historical Ballads of the *Minstrelsy* not to have Borders origins or a theme of Border incident. Scott makes the connection with the Borders, however, by developing a causal relationship between dramatized conjectural history, in the form of the 'Maid of Norway story', and the 'curious' folk history of the Border Ballad tradition. The centuries of discord that follow the mythical sinking of Spens' ship make possible the ballads that comprise the rest of the *Minstrelsy*, and ensure that the Borders develop into a frontier region with all the characteristics of martial hardiness, valour and resistance to invasion that Scott emphasizes as formative to modern, civil society.

Elements of corroboration of the 'Maid of Norway' story in the Rhymer's works are suggested by Scott. Furthermore, he argued that Thomas the Rhymer constituted proof both of the noble creativity and status of the Scots bards in general, and of the Scottish Borders more specifically as a site of seminal literary influence in the world of Metrical Romance that extended beyond the British Isles to the European continent.<sup>58</sup> My main discussion of the Rhymer comes later in this chapter, but it helps here to consider how, in proposing such an elevated 'History of literary Romance' rooted in the Borders alongside an ancient exemplar of the more general Scottish folk ballad tradition, Scott laid foundations for the *Minstrelsy* to distinguish between the behavioural examples portrayed in the virtuous, heroic medieval Border Ballads and those of the more disparate, sentimental and Romantic Ballads.

A closer look at Percy's version of 'Sir Patrick Spence' reveals the extent to which Scott's ballad offers an alternative treatment of the material form of the ballad.<sup>59</sup> Percy's ballad is written in a combination of Scots dialect and English archaisms. Though these differ somewhat from those used by Scott, the antiquarian effect is similar. The first verse presents the reader with the same gothic vignette of an anonymous monarch, who sits drinking 'blude-reid wine' (1:2) and is able to command the unquestioning loyalty of his Lords, without the need for specified reason. Alongside the primitivism, the medievalist picture of monarchy and baronial manners, Percy, like Scott, was inscribing ballad form as bearing out a theme of clearly defined social rank and responsibility, and unquestioning loyalty to Crown and country. But whilst Percy's version has all the formulaic verse and rhyme structure conventional to ballad form, its ideological and historical dynamism varies from that of

Scott because it lies entirely in the use of images. Percy's images are of aristocratic nobility and heroism, and his ballad offers a montage-like series of scenes: the King's castle; the reading of the letter; Sir Patrick's vision and dilemma; the drowning at sea; the eternally waiting ladies, with their fans and gold combs. Scott incorporates all of those features, but his connecting narrative and extensive additions have the dual effect of conferring authenticity *and* modernity. The short note with which Percy prefaces his poem also contrasts with that used more than a quarter of a century later by Scott. Percy's note serves as a pretext to his ballad's generalized historicization of knightly heroism, contending that vagaries of time, place and name are much less important than a sense of theme and historical manner. Whilst Scott fully assents to the primary rôles of theme and manner, which he prefers to call 'costume', he adds an array of justifications and historical explanations that suggest an enlightenment-based, socio-historical form of antiquarian awareness. The manner in which the more dramatically descriptive passages in the text of Scott's 'Sir Patrick Spens' work alongside the narrative supports a reading of the ballad as having a providential aspect alongside its semblance of antiquity. The effect is a moralizing form of nationalism, emphasizing duty to one's nation in the face of adversity. Scott's additions to 'Sir Patrick Spens', together with his interpolation of oral source material, accord with David Buchan's suggestion that the oral ballad was traditionally morally *descriptive* rather than *prescriptive*, and that it was 'only with the advent of general literacy' that 'the moral tags and interjections begin to spread through the ballad texts'.<sup>60</sup>

I will return to 'Sir Patrick Spens' throughout the present chapter, noting its structural and thematic relationships with other ballads in the *Minstrelsy*. At this point, I want to argue that Scott placed 'Sir Patrick Spens' first in his collection from 1806 in order to establish stronger and more simply readable foundations of patriotism and civic valour prior to the Border-raid, Reiving or Riding Ballads with their outlaw themes.

#### 'Auld Maitland'<sup>61</sup>

'Sir Patrick Spens' is followed by two ballads that develop the theme of nationalism, chivalric loyalty and Scots honour. Both are tales of defiance and heroism against attacks by England. Each involves rather tenuous events that purportedly occurred in the late thirteenth or fourteenth century, and each is strategically set in the Borders region.

'Auld Maitland', like 'Sir Patrick Spens', opens with reference to a king, but this time it is to a named 'Edward' – whom Scott's notes identify as Edward I of England.<sup>62</sup> However, the nature of monarchy and patriotism

is more important as the key to understanding this ballad. The use of the indefinite article in the first line establishes an immediate contrast with 'Sir Patrick Spens': the monarch here is *a* king rather than *the* king, suggesting an arbitrary quality to his reign. The first line tells us that he lived in a 'southern land', and he is described in the third line as 'unwordily' or unworthily wearing the crown. The heightened northernness of character that had been privileged in the previous poem thus meets its antithesis:

There lived a king in southern land,  
King Edward hight his name;  
Unwordily he wore the crown,  
Till fifty years were gane.

(I)

Throughout, Edward is represented as a monarch tainted by character traits of deception and injustice. Scott does not mention that Edward I became known popularly in England as the 'Hammer of the Scots' on account of his deposition of John de Baliol, his defeat and execution of William Wallace and his suppression of the Scots' continued insurrection under Robert the Bruce. However, his note comments on 'the stormy period of the Baliol wars', and the ballad takes up the matter of the 'lang wars, in fair Scotland' as early as verse four.<sup>63</sup> The ballad narrator, in Scots, wishes the English king 'dool and pyne' (VI), which translates as 'sorrow and grief'. The escalation of ill will between the English and the Scots forms the basis of the incident of 'Auld Maitland', and thus another contrast is established: 'Sir Patrick Spens' tells a tale of courtly behaviour and diplomacy. The notes with which Scott prefaces this second poem inform the reader of what quickly becomes obvious upon reading: that 'The inveterate hatred against the English, founded upon the usurpation of Edward I glows in every line of the ballad.'<sup>64</sup>

As with 'Sir Patrick Spens', the legendary hero of 'Auld Maitland' is a nobleman of obscure identity. Scott's introductory note identifies him as probably Sir Richard Maitland, Lord of Thirlstane castle in Lauderdale – one who 'seems to have been distinguished for devotion as well as valour'.<sup>65</sup> Repeated use is made of this kind of historical conjecture throughout the notes, and whilst Scott seems to have believed the ballad to be of genuine antiquity, he admits that its actual date 'cannot be ascertained with any degree of accuracy'.<sup>66</sup> It is, rather, the *concept* of the striking incident and the ballad narrator's stylistic 'conformity with the manners of the age' that is more directly relevant to the project of the *Minstrelsy*.<sup>67</sup>

The narrative of 'Auld Maitland' belongs to the category of curious history that I have been referring to throughout this chapter, and it demonstrates the importance within Scott's writing of regional literature as a reconstruction of popular cultural memory. The plot uses a conventional template for the old, gothic ballad tale: Maitland is besieged in his castle, he successfully resists and then, in disguise, with his sons wreaks revenge on his attackers. The whole is related in sufficiently dense Scots Borders dialect to invoke a distinctly regional and traditionally oral character, but again there is enough standard English to make it accessible to a wider readership. Scott ensures that the balance is such that a sense of ethnicity attaching to the narratorial voice is always maintained. The consistent use of dialect in lines of dialogue throughout 'Auld Maitland' warrants comment: the English characters, and even King Edward, speak for the most part in broad Scots. The effect is not so much a matter of suggesting that they would have spoken in such a manner. Rather, the traditions of oral poetry, in which the bard or minstrel would assume and dramatize the voices of a range of characters in the course of the narrative, are conformed to in a way that maintains a northern linguistic and poetic authority.

'Auld Maitland' is a set piece with which Scott attempts to capture the spirit of an age and of a people. Borders, as sites of confrontation where loyalties and virtues are constantly tested, are brought to the fore. The savagery with which Edward's men are killed by the Scots and made examples of – their bodies hung over the drawbridge 'that all the host might see' (LIII) – emphasizes ferocity suggestive of a barbarous, feudal age. Maitland's own fight to the death with Edward's nephew, at the end of the poem, in which he throws down his sword and flings himself at his opponent's throat, subscribes to the image of the Scotsman as a warrior of superior physical strength, if not size. The English youth was described in the second stanza as 'large of blood and bane' and here is portrayed as 'great in might'. The alliterative use of dialect in the stanza that describes the combat, along with the characteristically Scots dropping of the final consonants, linguistically reinforces a sense of cultural authenticity that is full of vitality:

When Maitland saw his ain blood fa',  
 An angry man was he!  
 He let his weapon frae him fa';  
 And at his throat did flee.

(LIX)

Scott encloses the ballad of 'Auld Maitland' within extensive notes that cite material from a variety of sources in order to authenticate its 'very high antiquity'. His references are literary and cultural, scholarly and popular: some are formal and printed, others either manuscript or oral. A highly heterogeneous literary and historical context for the ballad is thus created, and the overall diversity of the *Minstrelsy* maintained. The first source that he mentions is James Hogg's mother, Margaret Laidlaw, whose sung version of the ballad he acknowledges as his main point of reference. The mention of the 'blind man, who died at the advanced age of ninety' from whom she is alleged to have learned the poem, and Scott's footnote on her own aged status – 'This old woman is still alive'<sup>68</sup> – invoke two of the most prevalent stereotypes of oral poetic tradition: that of the blind bard (whether it be Homer, or Scotland's own 'Blind Harry'), and of the old woman, usually poor, who takes over and only partially preserves the remains of a dying tradition. This is the first instance that we find of the female gendering of the bardic voice that becomes a major feature within Scott's work and which, as I shall show, develops with the Romantic Ballads of the *Minstrelsy* before becoming more fully foregrounded with the publication of his narrative romance *The Lady of the Lake* in 1810.

Throughout the ballad and the notes of 'Auld Maitland' Scott emphasizes his main agenda of capturing the spirit of manners and custom, rather than proving minute historical detail and accuracy of text. The description of the siege of Maitland's castle along with the detail of clothing and weaponry enables him to affiliate his *Minstrelsy* to documented Scottish history, whilst the suggestion of oral sources and the use of formulaic techniques associated with oral tradition endow the ballad with a cultural identity. The notes that follow the ballad point to parallels with both alleged and recorded sieges. With his use of quotations from Blind Harry's *History of Wallace* and Barbour's *The Bruce*, two of the best-known national epics from Scottish medieval history (singing heroes who had been Edward I's primary Scottish antagonists) are drawn in to the *Minstrelsy* to deepen the context of Scottish bravery at the point of its frontier. Maitland is presented as an everyman version of these better-known heroes (as Fergus McIvor and Evan McCombich would prove to be in a Highland context later in *Waverley*). The notes that follow the ballad illustrate at length the romantic custom and chivalric codes that frame the action, all of which takes place within a theatre of conflict located on the feudal Borders.

**'The Battle of Otterbourne'**<sup>69</sup>

Scott's construction of the Scottish Borders as a site where national, as well as regional cultural identity could be established and maintained, is consolidated in the third ballad of the *Minstrelsy*, the 'Battle of Otterbourne'.<sup>70</sup> Again, he emphasizes the northern origins of the Historical Ballads, following his title with assertions of the Scottishness that distinguishes his version from that published by Percy:

## BATTLE OF OTTERBOURNE

## The Scottish Edition

The following edition of the Battle of Otterbourne, being essentially different from that which is published in the *Reliques of Ancient Poetry*, vol. i., and being obviously of Scottish composition, claims a place in the present collection. . . . The ballad, published in the *Reliques*, is avowedly an English production; and the author, with a natural partiality, leans to the side of his countrymen; yet that ballad, or some one similar, modified probably by national prejudice, must have been current in Scotland. . . .<sup>71</sup>

Furthermore, it is with 'The Battle of Otterbourne' and its accompanying notes that the overall narrative structure of the *Minstrelsy* as a *borders* text, and the manner in which the Borders region is established as a fulcrum of Scottish social and literary history, become more readily apparent. Rather than opening with reference to a king, there is a shift at this point to the culture of clans, the landscape of the debateable land and border-raids. The first stanza names the Earl of Douglas as the protagonist of this ballad, and the second establishes the unnamed 'muir-men' of the renowned border families of the Gordons, Graemes and Lindsays as his associates. They embark on a ride 'into England, to drive a prey' (I), meaning, to set out on a cattle-rustling expedition across the Border. The reader might at this point anticipate a reiving ballad, but cattle-rustling and outlaw activity is not yet to be the focus of the *Minstrelsy*. Rather, there is an abrupt turn: Douglas's excursion becomes a confrontation of honour and chivalric combat with Hotspur, Lord Percy. That confrontation leads to the battle of the title, with 'the Douglas' dying a hero's death and Percy being taken prisoner into Scotland. Scott further underwrites the Scottish bias of his version in his note on the naming of Hotspur as 'Percy' throughout the ballad, which he states was in itself an antagonistic gesture: 'Hotspur, for instance, is called *Earl Percy*, a title he never enjoyed.'<sup>72</sup> It might not be too fanciful

to read into the notes, with their several references to the two 'Percys' – Hotspur and the Bishop – a somewhat mischievous parallel on Scott's part. The audacious stealing of Hotspur, Lord Percy's 'pennant' that Scott mentions, and the abduction of both it and the Lord himself into Scotland, is perhaps echoed centuries later by Scott's own appropriation of Thomas Percy's pen and his gentlemanly plundering of the *Reliques* themselves.

Several fundamental principles relating to the historical rôle of Borders culture in the shaping of Scotland are mapped and negotiated by Scott in 'Otterbourne'. The landscape – prominent, though strictly speaking a seascape, in 'Sir Patrick Spens', but entirely absent in 'Auld Maitland' – returns to become a feature in this poem. Again, it is a wild environment – but there is a crucial difference between the rôle of the North Sea in 'Sir Patrick Spens' and the Borders in 'Otterbourne'. The Borders landscape of Scott's ballads is hostile, but not to the borderers. On the contrary, it provides them with a habitat to which they have become thoroughly adapted and with which they exist in rude harmony. The simplicity of the ballad form perfectly captures this harmony. A sense of freedom is evoked in lines such as 'The deer rins wild on hill and dale, / The birds fly wild from tree to tree' (XII). The emphasis on extant wildness is all important, for the fells, dales and muirs (moors) are established from the beginning of 'Otterbourne' as a geologically ancient and monolithic, but politically contested, that is 'debateable' terrain lit by the burning peel towers and soaked in the blood of feudal combat. Through descriptive passages such as these, Scott achieves the integrative vision of landscape, social history, oral performance and literary tradition that Katie Trumpener emphasizes in *Bardic Nationalism* as a preoccupation of Macpherson in his *Ossian* poems.<sup>73</sup>

Thus, despite the simplicity of the ballad form, there is a more intricate duality of passion and reason, nostalgia and enlightened sense that runs through Scott's life's work from its beginnings. The Borders country he describes is at once a picturesquely beautiful place and a violent badlands, a place that in times prior to the improvement of livestock farming can only support a population that exists by predation. When Douglas dies and is finally buried according to his request, 'by the braken bush, / That grows on yonder lilye lee', and 'beneath the blooming briar' (XXV–VI), the Border hero becomes part of the soil itself, to be commemorated for ever by the barbed briar and the lily that grow and flower as wildly and freely as he lived.<sup>74</sup> Those lines – with all their romance and beauty – are, of course, poetic fancy. Furthermore, they

reveal a great debt to the descriptive style of John Leyden in *Scenes of Infancy* (1803).<sup>75</sup> But a comparison of Scott's ballad text with the rationale of the notes exposes a romantic sensibility to the ending of the poem, as Scott informs the reader that Douglas was 'not buried on the field of battle, but in Melrose Abbey, where his tomb is still shown'.<sup>76</sup> That combination of balladesque poetic licence and contrasting factual annotation is a feature of Scott's style as an editor. It contributes pointedly to his individual, literary crafting of the Borders as a region where myth and reality combine to form a history that stimulates the imagination, albeit under guidance, as well as the antiquarian desire for authenticity.

The topography of 'The Battle of Otterbourne' is the landscape of the striking incident, and exemplifies what Scott referred to in 1808 in his autobiography as 'the distinction between a sense of the picturesque in action and in scenery'.<sup>77</sup> Scott explains his notion of a 'picturesque in action'. As an aesthetic concept, it requires the observer to communicate more closely with the object of interest than he or she would within the conventions of its more regular, scenic counterpart: 'to me the wandering over the field of Bannockburn was the source of more exquisite pleasure than gazing upon the celebrated landscape from the battlements of Stirling Castle'.<sup>78</sup> Such a close-up approach to landscape and its rôle as repository of social history – in contrast to a more conventional preservation of distance – amounts to an appreciation by Scott of the 'epic directness' that Lukács emphasizes as a primary factor in his success as a portrayer of the 'age of heroes'.<sup>79</sup>

Within the 'Battle of Otterbourne' various conventions associated with picturesque representation and its affect are evident. Austere stone structures built into a landscape of crags, burns and bracken-moors are invoked, and the gothic modality of the architecture appeals to the imagination. Scott's introduction of Melrose Abbey in his notes complements the gothic quality of the ballad itself, and also establishes a marker to which he would return in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*: in both works, Melrose Abbey is the place where devotion to duty and individual honour meet. It functions for Scott as the consecrated, ruined sepulchre of centuries of ennobled Borders history. In the *Lay*, it becomes the spiritual location of the 'magic' of literature itself – the repository of the book of gramarye.<sup>80</sup> Its presence within the notes of 'Otterbourne' perfectly integrates romantic gothic literature and medievalism with conventions of the picturesque.

Scott's introduction of the border clans in 'The Battle of Otterbourne' serves a purpose that similarly extends beyond the individual ballad, and ultimately beyond the *Minstrelsy*. The Gordons, Graemes and Lindsays

are the 'doughty Douglas's' choice of support as he embarks on his ride (I): 'He chose the Gordons and the Graemes / With them the Lindesays, light and Gay' (II). The powerful use of alliteration in those lines binds these families to Douglas, and is typical of the ballad's form and effect in three main ways. First, it is another example of the way in which the *Minstrelsy* ballads conform to oral literary formulae and traditions. Secondly, it contributes to the easy flow, rhythmic pattern and drive of what is, after all, a song, and enhances its readability. It also emphasizes the dominant cultural theme of rapport and solidarity. The Jardines, from the West-Border, provide a strident contrast that is both formal and thematic. They are shamed for their rejection of this code of honour: 'But the Jardines wald not with him ride / And they rue it to this day' (II). The alliteration in those lines, other than in the use of the consonant 'd', is almost entirely self-contained. Scott's note testifies to the way in which such poetic continuities and, conversely, fractures mirror the national calamity that could accompany the failure of clan-feudal codes of loyalty and support: 'Their refusal to ride with Douglas was, probably, the result of one of those perpetual feuds, which usually rent to pieces a Scottish army.'<sup>81</sup>

The Jardines' rejection of the Douglas's call to action, together with their formal alienation within the structure of poem, should not be read simply as an attempt by Scott to construct a parallel to nineteenth-century individualism. However, their example focuses attention on the catastrophic potential of disloyalty or apathy. Thus, popular poetry as a form of cultural memory serves to remind readers of the *Minstrelsy* that collective, unwritten moral principles of duty and loyalty existed deep in Borders history. Scott's inclusion of this version of 'The Battle of Otterbourne' in the *Minstrelsy*, when it is read in conjunction with his editorial note, emphasizes the importance of such traditions of social duty for his own time when many people feared they had become endangered or lost within an increasing pursuit of individual interest.

In terms of Scott's construction of a curious history, all of the families named in 'The Battle of Otterbourne' are important in socio-historical and in literary terms, both within the more regional context of the Borders and the wider, national history of Scotland. Furthermore, they reveal a good deal about Scott's own interpretation of the extent of Borders influence. Douglas became such a well-known name, associated with feudal conflict and monarchical dispute, that this early point of consecration of an ancestral hero contributes to the linear historical framework and continuity of the *Minstrelsy*. But it is the Gordons and

the Graemes – families that migrate – that are particularly interesting. Within the ballad they represent, as we have seen, the regional loyalties and camaraderie of the Borders. This is emphasized by the omnipresent threat of English attack. In Scott's notes, however, the Gordons and Graemes lead the reader out of the Borders through the account of their departure: to Aberdeenshire and Inverness on the one hand, and to Ireland – and more obliquely to Stirling and the Western Highlands – on the other. Scott thus establishes through 'Otterbourne' a diaspora of virtuous Borders culture. An appreciation of such a mapping of cultural influence will aid our understanding of his later work.

### The Riding Ballads

I now turn to the themes, structure and textual content of the Riding Ballads, along with Scott's editorial strategy in placing them within the *Minstrelsy*. These ballads form a coherent subgroup within the Historical Ballads section. From the 1806 edition onwards, the Riding Ballads follow the three nationalist Historical Ballads 'Sir Patrick Spens', 'Auld Maitland' and 'The Battle of Otterbourne'. Two-thirds of the twenty-seven ballads that comprise the Historical Ballads from 1806 onwards belong to this category, indicating their level of importance to Scott. The remaining six poems are Covenanting Ballads, which Scott himself described as the product of Scotland 'during a period highly unfavourable to poetical composition'.<sup>82</sup> The Covenanting Ballads appear to be somewhat tacked on to the end of the Historical Ballads section of the *Minstrelsy*, and though there is no doubting their historical place and value, Scott, who was not a religious man, clearly preferred the excitement and spirited romance of the mosstrooping or reiver tales. Taken as a group, and considering their narratives of striking incident and the vigorous heroism of outlaws, the Riding Ballads describe a tenuous and violable border region between England and Scotland during a period from the early fourteenth century to the beginning of the seventeenth century. Their placement before the Romantic Ballads adds dramatic impetus to the *Minstrelsy* as a programme of curious historical recovery. Scott's editorial strategies impart sanction and order to the fragmentary and essentially 'unruly' literary – as well as social – character of the ballads themselves.

The use of the wide range of oral literary formulae and stylistic motifs already discussed continues throughout these poems, but a major thematic variation occurs at this point in the *Minstrelsy*: law becomes a central feature alongside patriotism. Richard Lomas concludes that although

'for almost all of the three centuries between 1296 and 1603, Scotland and England were in a state of actual or threatened war', there remains even today a need to 'tone down the popular impression that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the Border, and indeed the whole of Northumberland, was a war-torn land subject to constant and sustained Scottish raiding which was primarily, if not solely responsible for creating conditions of depression and poverty'.<sup>83</sup> Scott is without doubt the writer most responsible for creating such an enduring 'popular' impression of Borders banditry, and though poverty is never treated as a negative issue (his tales are of a hardy peasantry and benevolent chieftains), the *Minstrelsy* is the single most influential text in the forging of that impression into cultural memory. Partisan though his account proves to be, Scott puts together a history of the Borders that portrays a social structure based around freebooting on the one hand, and freedom-fighting on the other. The overwhelmingly obvious feature of the *Minstrelsy* Riding Ballads, indeed, is that the degree of acute lawlessness that prevails at one level, and which is carefully documented in the notes, is always accompanied by a correspondingly obvious conformity to codes of kin loyalty and communal custom. Those loyalties are in turn always translatable into loyalty to the state. The old individual and communal virtues that motivate the heroes of these poems thus counterbalance the endemic disrespect of property laws – a disrespect that, with hindsight, would be remedied through the development of the centrally administered legislature and judiciary systems of fully civil, commercial society. Francis Jeffrey's review takes up the issues of lawlessness, specifically in the matter of property, and moral virtue on the Borders as they are represented in Scott's ballads:

The laxity of Border morals, in respect to property, is seen in the very animated ballad of *Jamie Telfer of the Fair Dodhead*, the *Lochmaben Harper*, *Dick o' the Cow*, &c. On the other hand, courage, fidelity, enterprize, are exemplified in *Kinmont Willie*, *Jock o' the Side*, and *Archie o' Cafield*.<sup>84</sup>

Scott cultivated his readers' nostalgia for an outlaw culture that once lived on the edge of the nation (yet in contemporary terms, in a region only fifty to eighty miles from one or other of the nation's major metropolitan centres). His collection of ballads from such a peripheral, frontier region – which he emphasizes as hostile geographically and socially, but which by his own time had been transformed into a 'safe' Tory stronghold – presents a Scottish alternative to the popular English legends

based around heroic outlaws such as Robin Hood. (Robin Hood is mentioned in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* and in *Marmion*.)

However, Scott explicitly states in his introduction, and again in his notes that the Borderers from whom these ballads are supposed to have originated tended to cast their national allegiances according to what suited their particular outlaw status at the time. The ballad notes tell of communities that claimed protection from one nation and then the other, showing little or no inclination to identify themselves with lowland or urban Scots, or to respect the institution of the Scottish Crown.<sup>85</sup> At times, the legislatures of Scotland and England are shown to be united and directed against them. In his introduction to the first edition of the *Minstrelsy*, Scott describes a truly marginal community, so peripheral that it risks being foreign to both nations:

The Borderers had, in fact, little reason to regard the inland Scots as their fellow-subjects or to respect the power of the Crown. . . . They were, in truth, during the time of peace a kind of outcasts against whom the united powers of England and Scotland were often employed. Hence, the men of the Borders had little attachment to the monarchs whom they termed, in derision, the kings of Fife and Lothian; provinces which they were not legally entitled to inhabit, and which, therefore, they pillaged with as little remorse as if they had belonged to a foreign country.<sup>86</sup>

Within this bandit culture, clan-feudalism emerges from the ballads as a distinctive northern variant of the more regular model of English and European feudalism, because of its more powerfully ingrained familial bonds. The Armstrong clan of cattle and horse rustlers appears in many of the Riding Ballads that Scott chose for the *Minstrelsy*, and its members function within the anthology as frontier outlaw archetypes:

The Armstrongs appear to have been, at an early period, in possession of a great part of Liddesdale and of the Debateable Land. Their immediate neighbourhood to England rendered them the most lawless of the Border depredators; and, as much of the country possessed by them was claimed by both kingdoms, the inhabitants, protected from justice by the one nation, in opposition to the other, securely preyed upon both.<sup>87</sup>

A contradiction plainly emerges which it would be unsatisfactory merely to accept without resolving. In each of the notes I have just quoted,

disrespect for the authority of the Crown is explicitly mentioned or implied. The Riding Ballads that Scott published, however, all involve themes of loyalty to the Scottish Crown, even to the point of submitting to execution in the case of 'Johnie Armstrang'. Indeed, at this point in the *Minstrelsy* something particularly important from the perspective of Scott's relationship with other ballad anthologists happens, and it illuminates the degree of politicization and policy influencing Scott's editorial practice. The editorial dialogue that emerges between Scott, Percy and Ritson through the ballads chosen in their anthologies demonstrates my point. Two of the three 'monarchist' patriotic ballads I have looked at so far ('Sir Patrick Spens' and 'The Battle of Otterbourne') were included in the *Reliques*. But none of the outlaw Riding Ballads that Scott chose to use were in Percy's collection. Joseph Ritson, Percy's most bitter critic and political antithesis, however, anthologized some of the Riding Ballads and, as we will see, others of the Romantic Ballads. Scott can therefore be seen to take the *Minstrelsy* from its initial, safely Tory patriotic stance underwritten by Percy's prior example towards ballad tales of lawlessness, heroic in content but also familiar to readers of radicals such as Ritson.

Scott uses romantic gothic and picturesque conventions to emphasize the physical inaccessibility of the extreme Borders region within which the Riding Ballads are set, and to contrast it with urban and lowland Scotland: in his note prefacing 'The Sang of the Outlaw Murray', for example, he writes of 'a wild and frontier country'.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, this stretch of country had before the Union of the Crowns in 1603 been termed the Debateable Land on account of its contentious and irresolute status. But Scott's use of imagery of the region in his own time creates a picturesque vista consistent with the aesthetics of gentlemanly travel narrative: in his note prefacing the next ballad 'Johnie Armstrang', he writes that 'All along the river Liddel may be discovered the ruins of towers.'<sup>89</sup> Landscape description within the ballads is lyrical, and consistent with the notes surrounding them insofar as it always relates to the documented history of social incident. Scott thus avoids the pitfalls of pathetic fallacy, and also the hyperbolic, elaborate manner that he later condemned as gratuitous in Mrs Radcliffe's prose ('The wild and improbable fictions of an overheated imagination' – fictions furthermore which 'display more liveliness and richness of fancy, than correctness of taste, or felicity of expression'<sup>90</sup>). Adopting the dramatic descriptive stylistics of gothic literature combined with the moralizing *chiaroscuro* of the romantic picturesque, Scott continues with his description of Tarras Moss (a remote wetlands area at the heart of Liddesdale), as 'a desolate

and horrible marsh, through which a small river takes its course' and where a combination of 'morasses', 'dry spots' and streams running 'furiously among huge rocks' is revealed to be the sanctuary of 'the most lawless of the Border depredators'.<sup>91</sup>

Given his outlaw heroes' contempt for authority outside of their own, immediately local and familial communities, one might wonder how Scott managed to talk of their rapacity on the one hand whilst constituting them as heroes of a Borders region that could evolve into a site resistant to contemporary radicalism and revolution on the other. The ideological nuances of his ballad versions, and of his textual insertions and extensive miscellanea, provide the answer and show how the Riding Ballads illustrate stadal history operating providentially. A comparison of 'Johnie Armstrang's Goodnight', as published by Scott, with Joseph Ritson's version of the ballad, published in 1783, demonstrates how Scott's editorial strategies render the Scottish Border country readable in such a way.<sup>92</sup>

### 'Johnie Armstrang's Goodnight'<sup>93</sup>

I mentioned earlier that politically, Scott and Ritson were poles apart. But though Ritson was a known radical, on account of his pacifism and vegetarianism he was regarded more as an outspoken but relatively harmless and pedantic eccentric than a danger to society. Scott came personally to know him through his antiquarian and literary interests, and entertained him as a houseguest at Lasswade in 1801.<sup>94</sup> He knew Ritson's ballads well, and owned copies of his various anthologies. The version of 'Johnie Armstrang' that Scott chose to publish in the *Minstrelsy* shows many similarities to Ritson's version and must be considered as providing at least some kind of response. Similarly, the 'Twa Corbies' constitutes a definitive response to 'The Three Ravens', as I will show in due course.

'Johnie Armstrang', like 'Sir Patrick Spens', was widely known amongst late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century antiquarian writers and readers, in a variety of versions. It had been included in collections published by a number of others, including Allan Ramsay and David Herd.<sup>95</sup> Scott's version is heavily based on that used by Herd, which is also in Borders dialect.<sup>96</sup> The plot is straightforward: Johnny Armstrong, a notorious bandit Baron who has established semi-autonomous rule within his Borders locality, is summoned to meet the Scots King. In both Ritson's and Scott's versions, Armstrong willingly goes with a group of his men to pay homage to his monarch. The summons is a trap, and the men are murdered along with Armstrong as a condition of a pact made

in advance between the Scots and the English kings. The ballad has its roots in historical fact.

Ritson's version of 'Johny Armstrong's Last Good-Night' differs from Scott's in that it tells of the outlaws' desperate fight to escape the Scottish king. The point about Ritson's Armstrong is that he fights for the liberty of himself and his men, albeit in vain. Scott's 'Johnie Armstrang' is more idealistically magnanimous in his loyalty, to the extent that he will not take up arms against his sovereign even in the cause of his and his men's lives. Like Ritson's hero he repeatedly tries to negotiate freedom but fails in the face of a deceptive and unworthy monarch. In both versions the king is shown as cruel and merciless against a loyal, if lawless, subject. Both versions include in their early stanzas brief, but quite detailed representations of the domestic sphere of the outlaws, drawing the sympathies of the reader to Armstrong as a family man before he goes to the king. Thus, the 'bad' king is also shown as contravening his duty to protect the families that are his subjects. Scott's note prefacing the ballad comments that the same monarch had also 'guilefully entrapped Bothwell, Maxwell, Home, and other Border lords, and kept them in durance, so that he might be free to deal as he wished with their dependants'.<sup>97</sup> It has to be said that as a known pacifist, as well as a republican, Ritson would not in practice have supported armed insurrection.<sup>98</sup> But even if his version of Johnny Armstrong is a matter of fidelity to scholarly principle, it nevertheless constitutes a powerful indictment of the tyranny and arbitrary application of justice that he regarded as consistent with absolute monarchical power. It is difficult not to read the ballad as offering some comment on the show trials of the 1790s, however oblique.

Ritson's Johnny Armstrong ultimately constitutes the Scottish Borders as a marginal, violent area where nature – human or otherwise – always holds the potential to spark into rebellion if pushed to the limits. Armstrong and his men are freebooters, but they steal to feed their families. Ritson's ballad ends with a return to the domestic sphere that bears out his republicanism. In the last two lines the voice becomes that of the next generation, with the dead man's infant son representing the fomenting irrepressibility and inevitability of revolution:

O then bespake his little son  
As he sat on his nurse's knee  
If ever I live to be man  
My father's death reveng'd shall be.<sup>99</sup>

Closure is denied and the prospect of future rebellion is left nestling at the very heart of the family.

The Johnie Armstrang of Scott's *Minstrelsy*, by contrast, does not take arms, because he has to be seen as a loyal subject to the end. Scott does not allow him to be readable as a revolutionary in a time of radical unrest, even at a historical distance. Nor are his descendants represented as potential traitors, or the domestic environment in any way construed as nurturing revolution. Scott's ballad is a straightforward glorification of the flawed but virtuous subject, as much as Ritson's is a republican anthem. Scott ends with verses that commemorate the rough nobility of the martyred hero and his patriotic men. The voice of Armstrang dies away, leaving only the commemorative voice of the poet. The son in this ballad version is left with memories of heroism rather than a mission of revenge:

And God be with thee, Kirsty, my son,  
Where thou sits on thy nurse's knee!  
But and thou live this hundred yeir,  
Thy father's better thou'lt nevir be.

'Farewell! My bonny Gilnock Hall,  
Where on Esk side thou standest stout!  
Gif I had lived but seven yeirs mair,  
I wad hae gilt thee round about.'

John was murdered at Carlinrigg,  
And all his gallant cumpanie;  
But Scotland's heart was ne'er sae wae,  
To see sae mony brave men die –

Because they saved their countrey deir,  
Frae Englishmen! Nane were sae bauld,  
While Jonnie lived on the Border syde,  
Nane of them durst cum neir his hauld.

(XXX–XXXIII)

Similarly, throughout the Historical Ballads simplistic patriotic devotion by border clan leaders, and the ultimate privileging of themes of bravery and loyalty on the part of men whose families maintain the home front, is borne out over and again. The romanticizing of a hardy, but essentially honourable banditry is thus kept within a masculine frame. The contrast between these characters' bravado in the face of death and

the manner in which Scott represented Watt as a coward on his way to execution in 1794 is marked. Scott had written to his aunt: 'the pusillanimity of the unfortunate victim [Watt] was astonishing considering the boldness of his nefarious plans'.<sup>100</sup>

## Romantic Ballads

The move to the Romantic Ballads in the second section of the *Minstrelsy* takes the reader into a quite different cultural context. Masculine, martial modes, patriotism and regionalism set on the extreme peripheries of the Borders cede to more widely cast tales of the supernatural, and to those with romantic and sentimental themes. In the context of Scott's dealing with revolutionary energies, I want to suggest that this central, Romantic and supernatural ballad section, contained as it is between the Historical and Modern Imitation Ballads, specifically treats the threat of unregulated passion, lax morality, superstition and other supposedly subversive stimuli through the genre of an effeminized balladry. John Leyden's haunting lament 'Scottish Music, an Ode', written shortly before Leyden left Britain for India in 1803, is the first of these ballads. Scott's close friend and active associate in the production of the *Minstrelsy*, Leyden posits oriental imagery of 'Hindu legends' and 'Syria's date-crowned shore' alongside Ossianic motifs. Furthermore, the poem also directly refers to three of the ballads included in the Romantic Ballad section – 'The Lass of Lochroyan', 'Brown Adam' and the 'Gay Goss Hawk'. The effect is that an air of heightened exoticism is swiftly brought into the collection at this point. Analogies such as those that Katie Trumpener emphasizes as evident in Scott's novels – inscribing 'the centrality of national identity as a component of imperial identity' – are entirely readable here within the *Minstrelsy*. Scott's editing and Leyden's writing ensures that the Borders are specifically promoted as the heart of national *and* imperial sentiment and virtue.<sup>101</sup>

John Leyden's friendship and collaboration with Scott (they met in the autumn of 1799, and from the winter of 1800–1801 worked on the ballads) resulted in him making a considerable contribution to the *Minstrelsy*. A large part of the essay 'On the Faeries of Popular Superstition' is attributable to his work with Scott. His laments, 'Scottish Music: an ode' and 'Ode on visiting Flodden', take on a particular resonance in the light of these changes and of his career move away from Scotland to India and south-east Asia. An antiquarian scholar, physician, poet and orientalist, Leyden's ability to learn languages and his desire for exploration was taken up by the East India Company and by the British military

forces. He died of illness at the age of thirty-six at Batavia, in Java, in 1811.<sup>102</sup> A considerable part of his semi-autobiographical poem *Scenes of Infancy* (published 1808), which romantically eulogizes the Teviotdale area in which he had lived, was written whilst he was staying with Scott at the latter's cottage in Lasswade during 1801 and 1802. Scott profoundly admired *Scenes of Infancy* and, as I will show in my next chapter, the descriptions of landscape in his own narrative poetry reflect its influence. It would be difficult to overstate the importance to Scott of Leyden's knowledge of Borders Ballad traditions and folklore. Born at Denholm in Roxburghshire into a shepherding family, and educated at home until he was almost 10 years old before gaining a place at Edinburgh University at the age of fifteen, Leyden (whose politics, like Scott's, were Tory) exemplified the traditional, humble Scottish virtue and fortitude of the kind that Scott regarded as emanating in its purest form in the rural Borders region. His departure from Scotland epitomized the diaspora of educated, younger Scots in the cause of imperial expansion.

Scott's lengthy essay on the supernatural, entitled 'On the Faeries of Popular Superstition', follows Leyden's ode and introduces the first actual ballad of this section, the 'Tale of Tamerlane' (this ballad is based on Burns' 'Tam Lin', which had been published in Lewis's *Tales of Wonder*). Once more, Scott's antiquarian approach uses scholarly erudition to assert authority, and his account of a wide range of beliefs and fairy superstitions is objective and rational. Some of the superstitions treated involve benign phenomena, whilst others are popularly held to be malevolent. Throughout the essay Scott assumes the standpoint of the proto-anthropological or ethnographic travel writer of the period, beginning with beliefs traditional in Iceland, Finland and other countries with Germanic Gothic associations, then extending ever further east to Persia and India. Leyden was, indeed, the source of much of the eastern material cited in the essay. Thus, Leyden's 'Ode' and Scott's essay work together to arouse in the reader a sense of the orient, of magic and of the unfamiliar. With the Romantic Ballads that follow constituting a feminized genre, and one in which sentiment and sensuality replaces the binding loyalties and rugged virtues of the Historical Ballads, these opening male (and in Scott's case overtly patrician) approaches to the fantastical are very significant. Evidence that the Romantic Ballads of the *Minstrelsy* may have formed part of an ideological agenda at an early stage in Scott's project, representative of the need to control potentially wayward or subversive tendencies, can be seen in a letter from Scott to Burns' editor and biographer Dr Currie in 1800:

I do not mean entirely to limit my collection to the Riding Ballads, as they are called in our country, those namely which relate to Border feuds and forays; but, on the contrary, to admit Scottish Ballads of merit upon romantic and popular subjects. . .<sup>103</sup>

The Riding Ballads with their masculine themes of Border incident clearly always provided the benchmark for the *Minstrelsy*, and Scott does not indicate any qualification of their merit. The romantic and popular ballads were to be 'admitted', to quote Scott – 'but' and 'on the contrary'. Definitively, the status of these ballads is one of contrast and of otherness in relation to the Riding Ballads. (The 'poisonous' effect of the intruding women – the niece and the maid – on the dusty order of the antiquary's study and his more haphazard collection of historical artefacts in Scott's novel of 1816, *The Antiquary*, is a humorous sketch that provides an interesting comparative case study.<sup>104</sup>) The express mention of the application of a criterion of merit suggests a need for control, with Scott positing himself as a moral guardian or censor in respect of a ballad form that had begun to attract radical associations. Scott also makes a clear distinction between 'our country', meaning the Borders, and a more general Scotland that is readable as potentially more vulnerable and in need of guardianship.

The category of Romantic Ballads and the possibility of including a significant female voice from elsewhere in Scotland within the *Minstrelsy* became of more interest to Scott in 1800, as a result of his acquaintance with Robert Jamieson. Prior to this time, he had collected mainly Riding Ballads during his Borders excursions. When Jamieson contacted him and stayed with him for a few days at Lasswade on his return to England from a visit to Aberdeen in the summer of 1800, he showed Scott a collection of ballads he had acquired from Mrs Anna Brown. Jamieson pays tribute to Mrs Brown in the introduction to his *Popular Ballads and Songs, from Tradition, Manuscripts, and Scarce Editions*, and comments on his discussion of her ballads with Scott.<sup>105</sup> Unlike the rural and elderly Margaret Laidlaw, Anna Brown was an educated woman whose father, Thomas Gordon, held the Chair of Humanities at King's College, Aberdeen (he was also appointed Professor of Greek). Intellectually active, she was known to many antiquarians interested in Scottish song and ballads as a valuable and reliable source of oral and written material.<sup>106</sup> Scott includes nine ballads that he attributes either partly or wholly to her in the *Minstrelsy*, all in the second volume of the 1802–1803 edition and retained thereafter.<sup>107</sup>

For the main part, the ballads obtained from Mrs Brown are grouped together. In the early edition, they are mostly located at the beginning of the Romantic Ballads, which is essentially in the middle of the overall collection, whilst with the 1806 edition they are placed in the middle of the Romantic Ballads section and surrounded by ballads from a variety of male contributors (these include Leyden, Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe, Hogg, Herd, Burns, Ritson and Lewis). Furthermore, even where Scott acknowledges Anna Brown as his main source he makes adjustments by incorporating material from versions attributed to various of the male collectors. For example, his note prefacing 'The Lass of Lochroyan' begins 'Now first published in a perfect state' and the ballad he published is an amalgam of her version and that of Herd, whilst 'King Henrie' 'is edited from her manuscript, corrected by a recited fragment' and finally influenced by a modern version in Lewis's *Tales of Wonder*.<sup>108</sup> There is no suggestion by Scott that Mrs Brown's versions represent any corruption of the ballads' form or integrity, but his habit of 'improvement' and the manner in which her ballads are clustered and enclosed within the *Minstrelsy* does show a paternalistic pattern in Scott's editing.

The point about the Romantic Ballads and their place is that Scott's choice of ballads and his grouping of them is such that they are seen to represent moral erosion on two closely related fronts: domestic virtue is corrupted on the one hand, and militaristic and chivalric feudal ideals on the other. Several of the ballads are tales about unmarried or abandoned mothers and their children. In the 'Twa Corbies' (another ballad with a version by Ritson), a dead knight who represents the passing of chivalry lies in a bleak and windswept wilderness, his horse, hound, hawk and ladye all having deserted and forgotten him. Jeffrey, for the *Edinburgh Review* commented on the extent to which feminine issues dominate the section: the 'circumstances of pregnancy and parturition are brought forward to heighten the interest of every love story'.<sup>109</sup> Even where morality remains uncorrupted, loss is the theme. The 'Flowers of the Forest', a Roxburghshire ballad towards the end of the section, comprises two parts, the first a particularly beautiful lament on the sorrow of the young women and children left when their men died at Flodden: 'Sighing and moaning, on ilka green loaning - / The flowers of the forest are a' wede awae' (VI).<sup>110</sup> By this point in his collection, Scott has moved a long way from the defiant 'O wha dare meddle wi' me?' of Kinmont Willie (footnoted by Scott as a 'Border tune'). The section ends with another contemporary poem by Leyden, also on the subject of Flodden and entitled 'Ode on Visiting Flodden', providing a sense of recovery and masculine enclosure yet again.

### 'The Twa Corbies'<sup>111</sup>

A comparison of Ritson's 'The Three Ravens' and Scott's 'The Twa Corbies' illustrates the degeneration of chivalric virtues that the Romantic Ballads represent for Scott, as well as further elucidating the differing ideological programmes of these two editors.<sup>112</sup> The ballads both involve folklore and the story of a dead chivalric knight whose body is surveyed by carrion birds. In Ritson's 'Three Ravens', which was published in his *Ancient Songs and Ballads from the Reign of King Henry the Second to the Revolution*, the knight lies protected by his shield and is watched over by his hawk and hound, until his heavily pregnant lady – in the romance guise of a 'fallow doe' – finds and buries him. She then dies also, before nightfall. In Scott's version, the knight lies unprotected and deserted. The 'Twa Corbies' of the title – two carrion crows, described using an aptly onomatopoeic piece of Scots dialect that mimics the coarse call of the birds themselves – plan to pick his bones clean. On the face of it, Ritson's version – which he subtitled 'a dirge' – is a rather beautiful and wistful romance that enshrines codes of chivalric honour, loyalty and love as triumphing over evil (which is represented by the Ravens and their sinister dialogue). Ritson's ballad ends with a wish that God might bless every man with 'Such haukes, such hounds, and such a leman' (lover/mistress). But when looked at in its context within the collection a rather different picture emerges. The ballad that follows, 'The too courteous knight', is a bawdy song that mocks chivalric manners and idealized love. The risible figure of the knight, who is introduced as coming 'Lustely raking over the lay', meets with a wandering young woman who never says nay, and the ballad ends in a thoroughly crude manner with an allusion to the knight's impotence. Thus idealized romance, with themes of purity, loyalty and honour is juxtaposed with a text that immediately subverts all of those principles.<sup>113</sup>

In fact, Ritson's collection (the songs are classified and grouped purely in terms of historical period) contains a number of popular songs of a bawdy nature. This demonstrates one of the main differences between Ritson's view of the history of minstrelsy as a literary form and that of Percy and Scott. Neither Percy nor Scott includes any bawdy or vulgar ballads in his collection. Ritson's texts all bear out the principles of the lengthy dissertations that he included in each publication regarding the nature of the Minstrels. These dissertations persistently contend that oral poetry and song had a history that had always involved common and itinerant characters as well as the more refined bards, and that it was not a form that had been only latterly corrupted. However, Dave Harker, in his sceptical study of the ballad and folk song as a truly

working-class medium, *Fakesong*, argues persuasively that for all Ritson's scholarly 'accuracy and integrity' his choice of sources embodied a scholarly and intellectual elitism on his own part that still denied ballad texts a popular and truly radical ideology devoid of middle-class influence.<sup>114</sup>

Scott printed Ritson's text as part of the note prefacing his own ballad. He states his source for the 'Corbies' (which remains controversial) as Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe, who acquired it from a nameless 'Lady'. Scott further comments that the lady had herself written the ballad down 'from tradition'. This is just the kind of feminized, popular dissemination that Scott wrote of in his introduction as having eventually degraded ballad form. The ballad text of the 'Corbies' embodies a theme of feudal corruption, decay and abandonment, and its placement in the carefully structured 'Romantic Ballads' section of the *Minstrelsy* summarizes the function of the Romantic Ballad in Scott's version of history. Such a loss of feudal codes of honour and older medieval loyalties becomes a justification for Scott and his collaborators to attempt a rescue of the ballad form, through the *Minstrelsy* as a collection and through the inclusion in it of their own imitations. In short, after the ballad scavengers have picked at the elements of chivalry that they find useful, one by one and bit by bit, Scott and his colleagues are able to retrieve the bare 'white banes' from the bleak wilderness of forgotten literature, and flesh them out again to their own design.

### Imitations of the Ancient Ballad

After the Romantic Ballads, Scott's *Minstrelsy* makes a final move towards its valorization of the Borders as a contemporary, patriotic Tory Borders stronghold. Old virtues from the period of the Historical Ballads are reclaimed and re-fashioned through the modern Imitations of the Ancient Ballad by Scott and his mainly male collaborators. The conventional reactionary emphases on localism, masculinity and militarism return, and though there are exceptions the ballads use Borders settings almost throughout. The inclusion of the short, imitation Riding Ballad 'Rich Auld Willie's Farewell' by Anna Seward, without any note (apart from Matthew Lewis's 'Sir Agilthorn', it is the only ballad in this section not to be accompanied by an explanatory note), does not alter the powerfully male emphasis of this section. Seward became a regular correspondent with Scott following the first publication of the *Minstrelsy*, and at her request he edited the three-volume collection of her poetry published by Ballantyne in 1810.<sup>115</sup> This edition might be taken as an indication of Seward's acknowledgement of or even deference to the masculine

authority of Scott. However, the final unity and narrative closure of the *Minstrelsy* is only completed in this section by the added reclamation of romance ballads and stories of the supernatural.

A selection of ballads with supernatural themes which includes two of those that Scott had contributed to Lewis's *Tales of Wonder*, one by Lewis, and three others by Leyden, emphasizes the *Minstrelsy's* re-masculinization of the Romantic Ballad form through its return to the domain of the elevated male bard. Amongst these supernatural poems is Leyden's 'The Mermaid', one of the few ballads in this section not to have a Borders setting. 'The Mermaid' offers a return to various themes dealt with in 'Sir Patrick Spens' at the beginning of the *Minstrelsy*. Most notably, it takes a more northern, seaborne trajectory than any of the other ballads in the section. Leyden supplied the prefatory note, which sets the ballad around the Hebridean Islands of Jura and Scarpa and the Gulf of Colonsay. He states that the ballad is his own composition, and that it is based on an identified traditional Gaelic song and on more general, old superstition drawn partially from Norse myth. Leyden incorporates a number of explicitly Ossianic references and, consequently, within the context of the *Minstrelsy* the poem can be read as an example of Ossianic reclamation on the part of himself and Scott. Structurally, the sea returns at this point in a modern ballad that is, unlike 'Sir Patrick Spens', written in a lyrical form of standard English without recourse to any use of dialect:

On Jura's heath how sweetly swell  
The murmers of the mountain bee!  
How softly mourns the writhèd shell,  
Of Jura's shore, its parent sea!

(I)

The story of a Chieftain who falls in love with the mermaid of the title, leaves behind his mortal love and subsequently drowns in lines of a dramatic, descriptive nature, clearly has other affinities with 'Sir Patrick Spens'. Leyden's ballad concludes with the same convention of the eternally mourning, exquisitely beautiful female. His image of the mermaid who grieves 'ever as the year returns' for her 'lovely Chief of Colonsay' (LXVIII) is entirely reminiscent of the maidens who wait on the shore at the end of the first ballad of the *Minstrelsy* 'for their ain dear loves! / For them they'll see nae mair' (XXV).

The description of the mermaid casts her as exotic and seductive, but alongside her more sinister supernatural features she nevertheless retains

a noble appearance: her 'form of pearly light, / Was whiter than the downy spray' and 'round her bosom, heaving bright, / Her glossy, yellow ringlets play' (XVII). The dialogue is courtly throughout the ballad and invokes the conventions of chivalric devotion and adventure. The mermaid tries to seduce the Chief, but he clings to his idealized, chaste model of love even to his death. Thus, the ballad bears out the male virtue of adhering to principle in the face of temptation by a feminine influence.

In his 'Essay on Chivalry', first published in *The Supplement to the Encyclopaedia Britannica* in 1818, Scott points towards sexual abandon as one of the causes of feudal decay: 'extremes of every kind border on each other; and as the devotion of the knights of Chivalry degenerated into superstition, the Platonic refinements and subtleties of amorous passion which they professed, were sometimes compatible with very coarse and gross debauchery'.<sup>116</sup> Scott's heroes in the Imitation Ballads, and those of his collaborators, reverse the coarseness and debauchery displayed in several of the Romantic Ballads. Moderation and moral austerity are once more seen as cause for celebration. Furthermore, Scott printed 'The Mermaid' together with Leyden's dedication to Lady Charlotte Campbell, daughter of the fifth Duke of Argyle. This acknowledgement of the aristocratic Lady in nineteenth-century Scotland equates with old customs of chivalric devotion when seen within the context of the *Minstrelsy* in its entirety. Scott's editorial organization of his ballad collection to include poems such as 'The Mermaid' works to bring about a redemptive unification of the romantic, supernatural ballad with its older, heroic counterpart.

Scott's three-part ballad 'Thomas the Rhymer' is the most substantial inclusion in the final, imitation section of the *Minstrelsy*. The three poems that comprise this piece can be treated as exemplary, and a more extended look at the way that it operates within the overall narrative strategy that I have been arguing for will conclude this chapter. If we look at the three separate parts of 'Thomas the Rhymer' on a comparative basis, paying particular attention to the interplay of notes and the ballad text, it becomes clear that we are looking at a quite remarkable instance of the way in which Scott's whole programme of refashioning the Border Ballads works within an ideological framework. Structurally and thematically 'Thomas the Rhymer' echoes the tripartite classifications of the entire *Minstrelsy*.

The first part of 'Thomas the Rhymer', with Scott's note providing details of his manuscript and archival sources, is a poem in Borders dialect and archaic diction based on ballad sources originating from near Erceldoune on the Borders (Erceldoune was Thomas's home). Scott establishes the importance of Thomas as poet and as the subject of

legend, describing him variously throughout the prefatory note as renowned, regarded with veneration, remarkable, celebrated, important and as a poet and man whose ‘memory is still held in profound respect’.<sup>117</sup> He makes explicit reference to the gothic nature of the ‘wild and fanciful tale’ that forms the basis for this part of the poem. His insistence that the ‘tale exists in MS...’, accompanied by details of that document, conforms with the formalities of standard antiquarian practice and also, and more importantly, reiterates the importance to Scott of a readily identifiable and recoverable lineage from the poetry of the thirteenth century through to that of his own.

Thomas of Erceldoune had become the subject of centuries-old Borders legends that held him to be an inspired bardic poet of elevated position and influence extending far beyond the Scottish Borders to Europe. At a more fantastic level, myths tell of his abduction by the fairies, his return to the mortal world and his final call back to the land of magic. Partly through the Rhymer’s literary legacy, and partly through the myths associated with him, Scott sought to draw attention back towards a Romance literary heritage that inscribed elements of Homeric significance for the Borders region and for Scotland. Thomas’s *Sir Tristrem*, extant as a fourteenth-century transcription of the poet’s original oral version, was translated by John Leyden and edited by Scott concurrently with the production of the *Minstrelsy* and finally published on 2 May 1804. Scott continued to maintain – falsely, as it turned out – that the Borders poet was the originator of continental literary forms of the Tristan romance tale. Whether or not Thomas had been the original ‘Tristrem’ poet is not really of prime importance to the issues I wish to deal with in this book. It matters more that Scott regarded him as a model of ancient bardic virtue emanating from the Borders. By constituting Thomas as the fundamental historical point of departure for his own work on Borders oral tradition, Scott was reinforcing the authority of his own recovery and re-inscription of oral Borders Ballad form. The retrieval of poetic fragments from a time when loyalty to king and crown was apparently honourable and unquestionable, coupled with the regionally specific siting of such loyalties in the villages of the Borders forms the subtext of Scott’s description of Erceldoune in *Sir Tristrem*. The intimate and intricate relationship between landscape, the poet and patriotism is emphasized and cast in picturesque terms:

THOMAS OF ERCELDOUNE derived his territorial appellation from the village of Erceldoune, in the Merse, or county of Berwick, situated on the river Leader, about two miles above its junction with the

Tweed. . . This small village was once a place of some importance, and, at least occasionally, honoured with the royal residence. . . In a tower at the western extremity . . . the ruins of which are still shewn after the lapse of seven centuries, dwelt Thomas of Erceldoune, the earliest Scottish poet.<sup>118</sup>

Scott undoubtedly saw himself as the retriever and rebuilders of the neglected 'ruins' of Thomas's poetry, and regularly referred to himself throughout his life as the 'Rhymer'.

The second part of 'Thomas the Rhymer' in the *Minstrelsy* deals with what Scott describes as 'printed prophecies vulgarly ascribed to the Rhymer'.<sup>119</sup> It contrasts with the first part of the poem in that Scott presents it as being compiled from a more disparate range of sources. Scott describes in his notes the difficulties of ascertaining the accuracy and sequence of these sources. The inference is that they are less reliable because they have been affected by degrees of popular dissemination. This is important, as it parallels the dilution and degradation of ballad form that Scott attributed to the lack of control brought about by excessive popular recitation. It also serves as the pretext for the authoritative reclamation I have been speaking about.

Scott acknowledges the third part of 'Thomas' as his own composition. Written entirely in Standard English, which distinguishes it from the first two parts, the third part effectively retrieves the poem for a single, elevated bardic voice, with Scott subtitled it 'Modern – By the editor'.<sup>120</sup> The repeated statement in his note prefacing this part of the ballad that it is 'entirely modern' further emphasizes the nature of Scott's historicist perspective: literary lineages from ancient times lead ever towards modernity. Scott's insistence on his fidelity to the manner of the original, and to the cultural importance of legend – an approach that he steadfastly maintained throughout his life – again observes the formalities of antiquarian protocol. At the same time he assents to a Burkean notion of continuity that denies modernity the revolutionary iconoclasm of severance:

The following attempt to commemorate the Rhymer's poetical fame, and the traditional account of his marvellous return to Fairy Land, being entirely modern, would have been placed with greater propriety among the class of Modern Ballads had it not been for its immediate connexion with the first and second parts of the same story.<sup>121</sup>

Far from being some kind of apology, the reference to 'immediate connexion with the first and second part of the same story' underwrites the importance of history in providing cultural and social continuity. Furthermore, Thomas's disappearance into the realm of the supernatural at the end of the third part of the ballad leaves Scott, the author, as his latter-day successor and the *Minstrelsy* ballad tradition as his legacy. That succession is naturalized by Scott in the last verse of the ballad, and in the note that he added after it. The ballad ends with a suggestion that the supernatural world is one with which the living is in everyday contact, and that cultural memory can be seen all around:

Some said to hill, and some to glen,  
Their wondrous course had been;  
But ne'er in haunts of living men  
Again was Thomas seen.

(XL)

Scott's concluding note specifies where various topographical features mentioned in the poem and connected with the Rhymer legend can be found. The list of place names evokes the whole area in which the Rhymer is imagined, and includes locations in Berwickshire, Roxburghshire and Selkirkshire landscapes. It incorporates the localized region of Scott's grandfather's farm, where he spent his own early childhood years, and of the Border *Minstrelsy* more widely as a text. The fantastical aspect of the ballad ending, furthermore, retains its simplicity, and needs no Radcliffean explanation. Colin Manlove pertinently draws attention to the connection between landscape, history, the supernatural and everyday life in his *Scottish Fantasy Literature*, where he locates Scott and Hogg as marking a watershed in the supernatural genre. He argues that 'in Scottish fantasy the fantastic experience and the world from which it emanates are very close to ours' and that localism is part of its character.<sup>122</sup>

In conclusion, Scott's editing of the *Minstrelsy* established several new precedents for ballad collection as a genre. Certainly, it inscribes a Borders culture rich in ballad storytelling traditions. Its recollections of a vernacular oral and literary past invoke a sense of cultural loss, which the Imitation Ballads partially allay. However, behind the nostalgia for the heroes of the past it is always possible to read a post-sentimental endorsement of modern commercial society supportive of a cohesive British union and empire, being built on class and rank hierarchies with the monarch firmly at the top. The gothic and old romance motifs, Scots and archaic

language of the ballads, and Scott's persistent appeals to traditionalist sentiment form a carefully constructed cultural history. Within that matrix any threatened slippage into anarchy and revolution in the modern world is contained and figuratively disempowered, through the moral examples posited in the ballad texts when read in association with Scott's notes. Tensions emerge between the historicized rural settings of the ballads and the increasingly urban or metropolitan societies of Scott's readers. Such tensions can only be accommodated when history is understood as a continuous process, in which each succeeding phase of society is able to recognize and salvage the more valuable constituents of its past.

The *Minstrelsy* is a collection of rural ballad poetry, and it both invokes and commemorates the cultural history of the Scottish Borders region. As an historical frontier between England and Scotland, the landscape either side of the border was layered with sites of battles and outlaw incident – the 'striking incidents' of ballads and vernacular poetry. At a more mundane, but no less important level the depopulation of the Borders throughout the latter half of the seventeenth century, largely as a result of improved farming methods, provided a landscape replete with myth-history and ripe for re-inscription. Scott's evident love of place, evolving from his own childhood experiences, together with his knowledge of local traditions ensured a lively account. He offered his readers a picturesquely romantic perspective onto a glamorous and wild culture. But beyond the imaginative world of curious history and cross-border encounter, his romanticism and the Borders he depicted as such a vibrant, socially organic environment were always aimed at resisting contemporary radical energies either in Britain or from Europe.

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