

## Scottish Balladry and National Identity

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# Scottish Balladry and National Identity

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## Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter I The Genealogy of British Literary Ballads and Gothicism of Scott	
1 The Genealogy of British Literary Ballads from the Early Eighteenth Century to the Nineteenth Century	10
Twentieth Century literary Ballad Studies	10
Wardlaw's Imitation and Deviation	14
Romantic Literary Balladists	23
Refrain Technicians in the Victorian Era	28
Trail's Parody Ballad	34
Scottish Literary Balladry and National Identity	39
2 Scott's "William and Helen" and Gothicism as the Spirit of Locality	44
Percy's <i>Reliques</i> and German Influence	44
Scott's Devices and Attachment to his Locality and Language	50
Gothicism as the Spirit of Locality	66

## Chapter II Davidson's Defiance and Return towards Scottish Identity

1	John Davidson and Unstable Scottish Identity	70
	'Dung' in London or Pioneer of Scottish Renaissance?	70
	Antipathy and Attachment to the Country	77
	Unstable Identity under the Shadow of Burns	89
2	Davidson's Defiance and Return towards Walter Scott	102
	Balladry for Davidson	102
	Davidson's Defiance towards Scott's Ballads	106
	The Last Stage of Davidson as a Balladist	122

## Chapter III "Thomas Rhymer" and Unstable Scottish Identity

1	National Identity for Scot and Davidson as Imitators of "Thomas Rhymer"	132
	Thomas of Erceldoune as an Image of Cumunion	132
	"Thomas the Rhymer" by Scott and Advocacy of National Identity	134
	Gothic Anxiety in "Thomas the Rhymer" by Davidson	145
	Equivocal Identity of Thomas of Erceldoune	154
2	"The Enchanted Knight" and Muir's Identity Consciousness of 'Half-a-Scot'	163

Muir as Ballad Critic	163
Genealogy of “Thomas Rhymer”	169
“La Belle Dame sans Merci” versus “The Enchanted Knight”	171
Scotland as a Second Country	178
Conclusion	182
A Select Bibliography	
I Primary Works	187
II Critical Studies and References	196
III Works, Critical Studies, and References in Japanese	207

## Introduction

The ultimate goal of my study is to view the genealogy of British literary balladry from the seventeenth century to the present. Thomas Percy's *Reliques of the Ancient English Poetry* (1765) was a milestone of the genealogy of the eighteenth century, and Walter Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802-03), which was an offspring of *Reliques*, stood at the beginning of the nineteenth century genealogy. As for the literary balladry of the eighteenth century, a pioneering and important study result was published in 2001: M. Yamanaka's *The Twilight of the British Literary Ballad*. The eighteenth century literary balladry paved the road to the high Romantics. Therefore, the nineteenth and twentieth century studies following *The Twilight* are eagerly expected. The present dissertation will make small contributions to the further studies.

This dissertation is aiming to fulfill three purposes. The first purpose is to study the nineteenth century literary balladry in the genealogy.

The oral heritage of anonymous traditional ballads in the ancient days encountered the emergence of printing culture in the late fifteenth century. The encounter generated another type of balladry called broadside ballads. There was an interaction between the two types of ballads. Oral narratives were lettered to be broadside ballads, and conversely, they were diffused orally. They joined together to be handed down both orally and as printed matters to the later generations. When traditional balladry as the hybrid

broader stream was collected by scholars and sophisticated writers from the eighteenth century, they assumed a key role of renovating English poetry. Since *Reliques*, over 800 or more of literary ballads have been created so far.

However, we are on our way to figuring out why and how a large number of poets have been influenced by traditional balladry, what the literary balladists have been attempting by imitation, and, fundamentally, what they have been imitating from traditional pieces. We have had around the world not a few leading scholars dealing with these issues, and the ballad study is gaining more attention as not only a literary study but also a cultural one, but there is too much room left for us to cover. When the general relationship between traditional ballads and literary ones is fully discussed, and at the same time, each literary ballad is sufficiently analyzed, the complete genealogy of British literary balladry for over four centuries will be established.

The second purpose is to discuss Scottish literary ballads of the nineteenth century in the context of Scottish national identity. Scotland had been an independent nation until the Union of Parliaments in 1707, and re-establishing national identity has been a key issue for Scottish literature since then. Political, social, and literary matters in Scotland have been involved in the issue of re-establishing identity. In the 1970s, Scottish universities launched a course in Scottish literature. In 1999, the Scottish Parliament was established. In 2014, we witnessed the devolution referendum for complete independence in Scotland.

With the social background mentioned above, a lecture titled “the

Contemporary Scottish Novel and the National Imagination” given by Professor Cairns Craig in 2002 was extraordinarily stimulating to me.<sup>1</sup> He discussed the contemporary issues Scottish literature faces and the ways for us to overcome them. According to him, the Scottish novelist in the past meant only Walter Scott, but ironically he was often recognized as an English novelist. The Union of Parliaments was not included in the historically important items of the United Kingdom. These phenomena metaphorically imply that Scotland itself had not existed from the beginning of history. To Scottish literature without parliament and history, some adjectives of ‘dead’, ‘neurotic’, and ‘schizophrenic’ were given. The loss of identity, or ‘a split personality’<sup>2</sup> had been a main topic of Scottish novels from R. S. Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) to Alasdair Gray’s *Lanark* (1981). However, out of the struggle of identity, Scotland in the early twentieth century produced such postmodern writers as Hugh MacDiarmid and Muriel Spark.

MacDiarmid was a driving force of the literary modernism movement called ‘Scottish Renaissance’. He insisted that its purposes were ‘escaping from the provincializing of Scottish literature’, ‘carrying on the independent Scottish literary tradition’, and ‘reintegration of the Scots language.’ (*The Uncanny Scott* 169). MacDiarmid practiced the movement by writing lyrics

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<sup>1</sup> The lecture, based on Craig’s *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and National Imagination* (1999), was given at Scottish Universities International Summer School, Univ. of Edinburgh, 1 Aug. 2002.

<sup>2</sup> The term comes from Kurt Wittig, *The Scottish Tradition in Literature* 240.

with synthetic Scots called ‘Lalans’. ‘Scottish Renaissance’ of the early twentieth century tremendously developed the discussion of Scottish identity, and also contributed to the modernist movement of the experimental use of language.<sup>3</sup>

As for balladry, Scotland has a curious legacy called Border ballads. The Border areas located in between Scotland and England had been historically a debatable land: countless numbers of battles and skirmishes between the two nations were fought there. The peculiarity of the locality produced and preserved Border ballads: they are fictional and non-fictional narratives produced in the peculiar life and manners of the Border society, legends and memoirs of the well-known figures in the area, and historical narratives of battles and conflicts between the two nations or among clans. Out of 305 kinds of narratives F. J. Child edited in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1882-98), about 60 belong to the Border ballads. They basically function as a symbol of Scottish cultural identity.

Thomas of Erceldoune is a well-known legend of the Border areas, and why and how he was granted his prophetic instinct has been told in the traditional ballad of “Thomas Rhymer” (37A-C)<sup>4</sup>, as well as in medieval romances. He is also a key figure of relating three Scottish balladists of the

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<sup>3</sup> Oxenhorn points out the distrust of language after the First World War: ‘Class relations in Britain were deeply shaken by the Great World War. The failure of those in command to comprehend the true nature of that conflict called into question both the code by which they justified it, and the language that embodied the code.’ (8)

<sup>4</sup> Traditional ballads’ titles and quotations in this dissertation are from *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* edited by F. J. Child. The number in the parenthesis after the title means his categorizing number and version.

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: Scott, John Davidson and Edwin Muir. I will pay attention to their expressions of the legendary figure and discuss how their ballads vary and what they convey in the context of Scottish identity.

The third purpose is to ‘re-re-evaluate’ John Davidson’s literary ballads. He was never a successful poet in his life time, but has achieved much posthumous fame since the 1960s. When Maurice Lindsay re-evaluated Davidson by issuing *John Davidson : A Selection of his Poems* (1961), he says with much affection in its “Introduction” that ‘the man whom perhaps [a little giant as a nickname of ’nineties] especially fits was John Davidson, whose personality was rocky and stubborn and full of Scottish fight, with no little of Scotch pig-headedness’ (12). MacDiarmid contributed an essay “John Davidson: Influences and Influence” to Lindsay’s anthology, but he had already written “Of John Davidson” (1932) in a condoling tone twenty three years after Davidson’s suicide:

I remember one death in my boyhood  
 That next to my father’s, and darker, endures;  
 Not Queen Victoria’s, but Davidson, yours,  
 And something in me has always stood  
 Since then looking down the sandslope  
 On your small black shape by the edge of the sea,  
 — a bullet-hole through a great scene’s beauty,  
 Got through the wrong end of a telescope. (1-8)

He conveyed his immense blow with the expression of ‘a bullet-hole’. However, their compliments and affections as the same Scottish writers are mainly rendered to Davidson’s later modernistic works and influences, and less to his literary ballads. The same thing can be said about other Davidson critics. But his ballads show his honest struggle concerning Scottish identity. It is necessary for us to appreciate his skillful techniques of borrowing some aspects of traditional ballads, and to know Davidson’s attitude as a poet to national identity through his ballads, in order to discuss the genealogy of Scottish literary ballads in relation to the issue of national identity.

In Chapter I “The Genealogy of British Literary Ballads and Gothicism of Scott”, the first section provides, as the basis for discussion on Scottish literary balladry, a rough sketch of the genealogy of British literary balladry from the early eighteenth century to the nineteenth century. The explanation of the present situation of ballad study is followed by such topics as Elizabeth Wardlaw as the predecessor of literary balladists, the sentimentalized tendency of Wordsworth and Keats, the Victorian refrain technicians of Tennyson and Rossetti, and Trail’s parody ballad. In the end, Scott’s *Minstrelsy* as a representation of Scottish identity is discussed in comparison to Percy’s *Reliques*.

The second section begins with the influence of *Reliques* and German taste on the initiation of Scott’s ballad-writing. Scott’s Gothic devices in “William and Helen” (1796), however, are understood as his strong advocacy

of his locality and language. Through the comparison of Scott with Bürger and Taylor, the details of Scott's characteristic devices are pointed out, and his purpose of showing the spirit of locality is clarified from his essays.

In Chapter II "Davidson's Defiance and Return towards Scottish Identity", the first section focuses on Davidson as a typical diaspora writer from Scotland to England in the nineteenth century. The poet's ambivalence of defiance and attachment to his native place is projected on the main character of "A Ballad in a Blank Verse" (1905). In "Ayrshire Jock" (1891), a scribbler, Old John, as Davidson's persona, criticizes Burns for producing Old John's own struggle under his shadow. But it is pointed out that, in reality, the cultural diminishment after Burns and a question about Scottishness caused by the diminishment were due to the drastic social and economic changes in Scotland of the era.

The aim of the second section is to evaluate Davidson as a Scottish balladist. It begins with the discussion of the circumstances which led Davidson to ballad-writing. Davidson uses the ballad form as an experimental method to show irony and parody-spirit against his predecessor, Scott. But in the last ballad of "A Runnable Stag" (1905) he employs the same sound effect of words as Scott used in "William and Helen". Davidson struggled with the unstable identity, but Scott was always on the mind of Davidson.

Chapter III "'Thomas Rhymer' and Unstable Scottish Identity" treats three Scottish literary ballads employing the same motif of Thomas of Erceldoune, written by Scott, Davidson, and Edwin Muir. The first section defines Thomas as an image of communion, and looks at the clear contrast

between Scott's ballad and Davidson's imitation of Scott. Scott shows enthusiastic advocacy of national identity by the communal image of Thomas, but Davidson expressed Gothic anxiety through the same image. The transformation of the image of Thomas must have been produced by the social change and the identity crisis caused by that change in Davidson's days as mentioned in the previous chapter. On the other hand, we come across the curious fact that Thomas has been equivocal from the Middle Ages. Does Thomas of Erceldoune make us accept his innate equivocality as a changing image of communion?

Not only the medieval prophetic writers, anonymous ballad singers, Scott, and Davidson, but also more poets and novelists in later years employ the image of Thomas in their works, which is forming another genealogy of "Thomas Rhymer". Muir's "The Enchanted Knight" (1937) is in the genealogy on which the final section of this dissertation focuses. Muir's criticism of modern poetry from the viewpoint of traditional balladry is clear-cut and persuasive, but his own ballad, "The Enchanted Knight", an offspring of Keats's "La Belle Dame sans Merci" (1819), is enigmatic. With the discussion of his other two poems on Scotland, Muir's ambivalence towards his nation is articulated through his identity consciousness of 'half-a-Scot'.

Overall, this dissertation will discuss some of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries Scottish literary ballads, and pursue the roles they played in the context of Scottish national identity.

## Chapter I

The Genealogy of British Literary Ballads and Gothicism of Scott

# 1 The Genealogy of British Literary Ballads from the Early Eighteenth Century to the Nineteenth Century

## Twentieth Century Literary Ballad Studies

Ballad poetry is roughly classified into two types: traditional balladry and literary balladry. Traditional balladry is basically narrative poetry that anonymous people have created, sung, and passed down to the following generations since about the twelfth or the thirteenth century. Literary balladry is also basically narrative poetry that has been produced by sophisticated poets with their imitations of the stories, techniques, and styles of traditional balladry. However, it is quite difficult to define a piece of work as a literary ballad, because the types of imitation are so varied and quite often subtle. This is the reason why literary balladry has not been acknowledged as a literary genre as traditional balladry has in the history of English and Scottish literature. Literary balladry has not provided researchers with an adequate amount of texts as the base of their ballad study; consequently, the study of the literary ballad has not fully matured.

It was *The Ballad Revival: Studies in the Influence of Popular on Sophisticated Poetry* by A. B. Friedman in 1961 that positively suggested the existence of the genealogy of literary balladry in British literary history. Friedman begins the discussion with his own understanding of balladry as the 'otherness' from poetry (5). 'The ballad is not a species of our staple sort of poetry. It belongs to an altogether different class. . . . Beneath

sophisticated poetry lies another poetic system, which, under earlier conditions, preserved a primitive mode of composition radically different from that of sophisticated poetry' (5-6). Once the otherness is noticed, it cannot be foregone to find a common ground between popular and learned poetry. His pioneering literary ballad study aims to reveal that 'balladry has affected literary criticism and theory at crucial moments and has vitally influenced the style of several major poets — and through them the whole development of English poetry.'(10) Thus Friedman roughly but clearly describes how the elements and ethos of traditional and broadside balladry have been transmitted from the early eighteenth to the early twentieth century.

The succeeding critic of literary balladry, Malcolm Laws Jr., accomplished two achievements in *The British Literary Ballad: A Study in Poetic Imitation*. He tried to define what literary balladry is by saying that literary balladry is 'the product and possession not of the common people of village or city but of sophisticated poets writing for literate audiences. They are printed poems rather than songs, and they have no traditional life. Despite great variations among individual examples, the literary ballads as a class are conscious and deliberate imitations of folk and broadside ballads' (xi). On the basis of his own classification, Laws develops a further definition of literary ballad, but in the first chapter he begins the discussion ambiguously. 'In the field of balladry, definition by example has often been found more enlightening than abstract verbalizing. Thus one may begin by identifying as literary ballads such frequently anthologized poems as the following: Wordsworth's "Lucy Gray," Scott's "The Eve of St. John,"

Southey's "The Battle of Blenheim," Tennyson's "The Charge of the Light Brigade," Rossetti's "Sister Helen," Housman's "Is My Team Ploughing?" Hardy's "Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave?" and Yeats's "The Ballad of Father Gilligan" (1). Consequently Laws sets the only two main imitation markers of styles and subjects. The imitation of styles and subjects is a part of 'great variations among individual examples'. Although after the main discussion on these aspects of imitation he expanded his research topics to the contemporary literary balladry and parody ballads, and his topics were quite original in the undeveloped literary ballad study in the 1970's, his study was not enough for a complete understanding of the 'great variations' of imitation.

On the other hand, Laws completed another great achievement for the study of the literary ballad by appending the list of literary ballads to his book, where 537 titles of literary ballads written by 111 poets including those mentioned in his book, from the eighteenth century to the modern period, are listed (149-61). As defining literary balladry is not easy, the publication of the list was a landmark achievement for the study of the ballad. Friedman already mentioned as many works and poets as Laws, the area and boundary of literary balladry had not been obvious at a glance until the Laws' list appeared. Owing to Laws, we had the initial list of the genealogy of literary balladry, but it was a pity that all of the texts mentioned in the list were still hard to obtain. Anne Henry Ehrenpreis introduced only 41 full texts with proper headnotes in *The Literary Ballad* in 1966. This was the first authentic literary ballad anthology edited with the clear notion of what literary balladry is, but compared with the Laws'

list, the number included in Ehrenpreis was too small. About 40 years later *Sixty English Literary Ballads*, edited by M. Yamanaka and 4 coeditors, followed Ehrenpreis to introduce 60 texts with full-length notes. Laws, Ehrenpreis, and *Sixty* have been enlarged on the Web to *The English Literary Ballads Archive*, where 748 full texts of literary ballads by 141 poets for 300 years have been accumulated. This might not be the definitive anthology of literary balladry. As Mary Ellen Brown at the end of her paper “Placed, Replaced, or Misplaced?: the Ballads’ Progress” anticipates, an anthology with a wider range is still longed for.<sup>1</sup>

On the phase of ballad criticism, Yamanaka, going further than Malcolm Laws, in *The Twilight of the British Literary Ballad in the Eighteenth Century* advocates the five aspects of literary ballad imitation: direct imitation, technical (or formal) imitation, the imitation of subject matter, stylistic imitation, and the imitation of traditional ethos (11-12).

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Ellen Brown, “Placed, Replaced, or Misplaced?: the Ballads’ Progress”, *Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, 47.2-3 (2006): ‘Imagine with me then a new anthology of ballads, with no claims for generic exclusivity, but implying some generative relationship among all the materials, a mega-concept of continuity and change. This anthology would be full of the textual (and sometimes musical) evidence — the poems and songs, their corporality and historicity demanding notice. These texts we have in profusion. The headnotes and introductory materials would strive to provide as much of the contextual information as possible, as well as touch on the rich body of “ideas” and “theories” this material — popular, broadside, literary — has stimulated over time: I think here of Pound and Gummere, of Child and Kittredge, of Macmath and Walker, of Peter and David — the Buchans; but I also think of Coffin and Laws, of Shepherd and Wurzbach, of the Roxburghe and Pepys collections, of Ehrenpreis and Yamanaka, of Coleridge and Wordsworth, Housman and Kipling. The list goes on and must include Scott and Percy. By pulling together materials generatively linked, in multiple media, across time and space, we might display a verse form or tendency — an art — with enormous persistence, sometimes great beauty.’ (127)

These cover almost all the literary ballads which have been brought to the public eye since the early eighteenth century and generated the genealogy of about seven hundred and fifty imitated pieces. The achievement of *The Twilight* is that it succeeds in stating the characteristics of the imitation of the eighteenth century literary balladry, and pointing out the meaning of the imitation: the eighteenth century literary balladry led to high Romanticism.

#### Wardlaw's Imitation and Deviation

The literary balladists in the eighteenth century such as John Gay (1685-1732), Thomas Tickell (1686-1740), David Mallet (1705-65), and William Shenstone (1714-63), who are almost obscure today, left simple imitations of traditional balladry or reminiscently romantic or sentimental pieces. Beyond such simply imitated poetry, "Hardyknute" (1719) by Lady Elizabeth Wardlaw (1677-1727) makes an important mark in the genealogy of British literary balladry. It shows the first significant deviation from the impersonal tradition by describing mental anguish of the hero.<sup>2</sup>

The key figure, Hardyknute, is derived from the quasi-mythological

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<sup>2</sup> Friedman mentions the work as one of the neoclassic imitations of traditional ballads in some pages of *The Ballad Revival*. Yamanaka, in *Twilight*, categorizes the work as the imitation of a subject matter which 'is the use of the varied subject matter to be found in the ballad tradition, such as historical wars, tragic love, curses, the supernatural world of ghosts and fairies, and metamorphosis' (12). Besides, the deviation of "Hardyknute" was fully analyzed in "'Hardyknute' and Personal Reflection" (17-26). He points out that Mrs. Wardlaw 'focuses in the end upon the mental turbulence of the victor in the last stages of his glorious life as a hero who has rescued his country' (25).

combatant, Alexander Stewart (1214-83), the fourth Steward of Scotland, forty-nine years old, at the time of the Battle of Largs in 1263 (Percy 2: 108). Mrs. Wardlaw intentionally remodeled the historical figure and his legend by keeping the traditional ethos of suspense and irony. Hardyknute, the old warrior of seventy, having achieved distinction and fame in the past battles, is spending a quiet life. His full-blown dignity is introduced at the opening stanza:

Stately stept he east the wa',  
 And stately stept he west,  
 Full seventy years he now had seen,  
 Wi' scarce seven years of rest.  
 He liv'd when Britons breach of faith  
 Wrought Scotland mickle wae:  
 And ay his sword tauld to their cost,  
 He was their deadlye fae. (1-8)

His peerless and fair old dame, his four stout sons surviving through fierce battles, and his only fair daughter are those whom he is proud of and content with. But some queer and inexplicable episodes are inserted in the story, which casts a cloud on the dignified description of Hardyknute at the opening stanza and his brilliant career as a renowned warrior. Describing his daughter's beauty with such expressions as 'Her girdle shaw'd her middle gimp, / And gowden glist her fair' (27-28), the narrator suddenly adds 'what waefu' wae her beauty bred!' (29). At this moment we cannot

anticipate what this small cry means, but at the end of the story we can presume what caused the inconceivable closing. One day Hardyknute was called back to the battlefield against the king of North. On his way to the battlefield, we come across the mysterious episode again. When he met a wounded knight, he ardently invited him to his castle to make his wife and daughter take care of him, but the knight consistently rejected Hardyknute's chivalric hospitality with saying 'Kind chieftain, your intent pursue, / For here I maun abyde' (135-36). Here again we don't know what the episode leads to. In the scene of the battlefield, Hardyknute's fighting spirit is described quite as fierce as when he was younger. When the king of North challenged him, saying 'Where is Harkyknute sae fam'd, / And fear'd at Britain's throne' (227-28), he proudly accepted the challenge and said 'I'm Hardyknute; this day, / To Scotland's king I heght / To lay thee low, as horses hoof' (235-37). He got victory through the fierce battle and a monumental cross was set up in order to praise him. His fully satisfied life as a warrior might have been completed here.

But Mrs. Wardlaw's intention was not to recreate the historical legend of Alexander Stewart, nor to celebrate ancient Scotland's victory. When Hardyknute returned home, what he found there was his deserted tower. His graceful wife and his beautiful daughter, who should have kept his fort, were gone. His sons and his men, who had followed Hardyknute back from the battle, having a feeling of foreboding at the sight, left him quickly:

His tow'r that us'd wi' torches blaze  
To shine sae far at night,

Seem'd now as black as mourning weed,

Nae marvel sair he sigh'd.

'There's nae light in my lady's bower,

There's nae light in my ha';

Nae blink shines round my Fairly fair,

Nor ward stands on my wa'.

'What bodes it? Robert, Thomas, say;' —

Nae answer fitts their dread.

'Stand back, my sons, I'll be your guide;

But by they past with speed.

'As fast I've sped owre Scotland's faes,' —

There ceas'd his brag of weir,

Sair sham'd to mind ought but his dame,

And maiden Fairly fair.

Black fear he felt, but what to fear

He wist nae yet; wi' dread

Sair shook his body, sair his limbs,

And a' the warrior fled. (317-36)

While Mrs. Wardlaw skillfully keeps the traditional form by observing the ballad stanza of iambic tetrametre on odd lines and trimetre on even lines, rhyming 'abcb', and sometimes sounding rough alliteration, she makes the narrative open-ended. She does not explain the reasons why the tower was

deserted and why the lady and the daughter were gone, but simply describes in the ironical and suspenseful ending *Hardyknute* as an old man who was confused about and frightened at what he saw at the last stage of his life. The small mysterious episodes mentioned above might foreshadow this unexpected ending. Does she insist on the meaninglessness of the fame in the battlefield or the stupidity that men are not aware of it? The poet's artistic intention might be to reveal her skepticism to the conventional heroism. In this way she succeeds in leaving the audience in such suspense and irony as they experience in the representatively anthologized traditional ballads of "Lord Randal" (12A) and "Sir Patrick Spens" (58A), and at the same time, creating not a simple imitation of a narrative poem but a sophisticated literary ballad.

One of the key factors of literary balladry is that the poet's intention is implied in the work. Traditional balladry does not have specified authors. The ballads had been produced and handed down anonymously for centuries. Basically they tell actions and events but never the characters' personal sentiment nor feeling. When the characters in a story are given their names, it never means the story is concerned about their own private lives. Their individuality has been dissolved through the process of being handed to for the generations. Namely the world of traditional balladry is impersonal.<sup>3</sup> On the contrary, literary balladry is never impersonal. Poets

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<sup>3</sup> Child points out the absence of subjectivity and self-consciousness of traditional balladry due to the fact that it had been produced not by a personal hand but in a community: "The condition of society in which a truly national or popular poetry appears explains the character of such poetry [popular ballads]. It is a condition in which the people are not divided by political organization and book-culture into markedly distinct classes, in

imitate traditional ballads to create them with their own intentions or purposes. “Hardyknute,” reflecting the old man’s deep embarrassment or repentance, is the first significant deviation from the impersonal tradition in the early stage of the genealogy of British literary balladry.

To experience the suspense and irony of traditional balladry, it is worthwhile for us to read the two traditional pieces here. “Lord Randal” produces a feeling of suspense through the technique of constructing the story by dialogues between main characters. The suspicion that Lord Randal might have been poisoned by his lover in the woods is gradually disclosed through their dialogues.

‘O where ha you been, Lord Randal, my son?  
 And where ha you been, my handsome young man?’  
 ‘I ha been at the greenwood; mother, mak my bed soon,  
 For I ’m wearied wi hunting, and fain wad lie down.’

‘An wha met ye there, Lord Randal, my son?  
 An wha met you there, my handsome young man?’  
 ‘O I met wi my true-love; mother, mak my bed soon,  
 For I ’m wearied wi huntin, an fain wad lie down.’ (1-8)

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which consequently there is such community of ideas and feelings that the whole people form an individual . . . . The fundamental characteristic of popular ballads is therefore the absence of subjectivity and self-consciousness.’ (*ESPB* 5: 756)

Lord Randal's mother repeats the same question twice in a stanza, and he answers it in the third line, adding a repetitive line at the end of each stanza. The narrative style of repeating the same phrases makes the story develop very slowly, but paradoxically increases a feeling of tension and suspense. Their dialogues gradually raise tension and suspense to the sixth stanza, where the mother and the son share the suspicion of the murder: she cries that 'O I fear you are poisoned, Lord Randal, my son! (21), then he admits that 'O yes, I am poisoned; mak my bed soon' (23). But from the seventh stanza the next plot of Lord Randal's nuncupative will starts slowly again:

'What d' ye leave to your mother, Lord Randal, my son?  
 What d' ye leave to your mother, my handsome young man?'  
 'For and twenty milk kye; mother, mak my bed soon,  
 For I'm sick at the heart, and I fain wad lie down.' (25-28)

It is bizarre that the mother urges her dying son to distribute his property to his family, but the characteristic narrative style of a nuncupative will traces back to testament poems in the Middle Ages. A Dutch historian, Johan Huizinga, introduces testament poems and bequest as a formalism widespread among common people in those days in *The Autumn of the Middle Ages* (1919)<sup>4</sup>. In the end, using the will, Lord Randal leaves his curse

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<sup>4</sup> Huizinga mentions a poor woman's distributing her small property as an example of formalism in the Middle Ages: 'A poor woman bequeaths her Sunday dress and her bonnet to her parish; her bed to her godchild, a fur to her nurse, her everyday dress to a pauper, and four pounds *turnoise*, which

to his lover, who poisoned him in the wood:

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

His condensed woe is expressed in the form of a will. The ballad technique of framing a whole story with slowly developing dialogues provides the audience with fully intensified tension and suspense.

“Sir Patrick Spens” is a ballad of a shipwreck of Scottish nobles. Sir Patrick Spence, a skilled captain, was ordered by a Scottish king to embark for the sea in winter. The story abruptly begins with the description of the king’s majestic but haughty air:

The king sits in Dumferling toune,  
Drinking the blude-reid wine:  
‘O whar will I get guid sailor,  
To sail this schip of mine?’ (1-4)

The king who ‘has written a braid letter, / And signd it wi his hand, / And sent it to Sir Patrick Spence” (9-11) is said to be Alexander III (1241-86)

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constitutes her only wealth, together wit yet another dress and bonnet to the Minorites. Is this not a very trivial example of the frame of mind that postulated every case of virtue to be an eternal example and that saw in every fashion a divine ordinance?’ (*The Autumn of the Middle Ages* 278)

(*ESPB* 2:19). But one of the sailors objected to the embarking because he witnessed “the new moone, / Wi the auld moone in her arme” (25-26) foretelling the coming storm. Predictably enough Sir Patrick Spence was shipwrecked together with the Scottish nobles:

O our Scots nobles wer richt laith  
To weet their cork-heeled schoone;  
Bot lang owre a’ the play wer playd,  
Thair hats they swam aboone.

O lang, lang may their ladies sit,  
Wi thair fans into their hand,  
Or eir they se Sir Patrick Spence  
Cum sailing to the land. (29-36)

Haf owre, haf owre to Aberdour,  
It’s fiftie fadom deip,  
And thair lies guid Sir Patrick Spence,  
Wi the Scots lords at his feit. (41-44)

Noble ladies dressed up with ‘thair fans’ and ‘thair gold kems’ (38) and waiting for their lords are ironically described. The ending scene is full of irony. Sir Patrick Spence, who followed the king’s unreasonable order, is lying at the bottom of the sea, just like a king having ‘Scots lords at his feit’. Mrs. Wardlaw is deft at recreating such lines as ‘he [the good Scots king] sat

at dine, / With noble chiefs in brave array, / Drinking the blood-red wine' (38-40)', or 'Late, late yestreen' (73) in "Hardyknute". These are found in "Sir Patrick Spens".

### Romantic Literary Balladists

The literary ballad genealogy fully launched under the influence of *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) by Thomas Percy (1729-1811). *Reliques* prepared the ground for the Romantic poets, produced the ballad revival movement in which many professional poets created imitations of traditional ballads, and urged the vogue for editing ballad collections. Prominent literary figures such as William Blake (1757-1827), William Wordsworth (1770-1850), S. T. Coleridge (1772-1834), M. G. Lewis (1775-1818), Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), John Keats (1795-1821), and Thomas Hood (1799-1845) created many literary ballads.

Wordsworth, one of the Romantics, was highly influenced by Percy's *Reliques*. It was in the early nineteenth century when he proudly announced the direct influence from *Reliques* on the Romantic poets by saying he did not think that there was an able writer in verse of the day who would not be proud to acknowledge his obligation to *the Reliques*. ("Essay, Supplementary to the Preface" (1815), *Prose Work of Wordsworth* 3: 78). *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), cooperatively published with Coleridge, is one of Wordsworth's products of the influence by the *Reliques* and the ballad revival movement. What attracted Wordsworth to balladry, who had been feeling bored with sophisticated subject matters and poetic diction, was

simple matters and language. In the second ‘Preface’ of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1802 he insisted on describing common life and using common people’s language as the purpose of the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* (Brett and Jones, eds. 244-45). However, his final destination was not to create genuine narratives of simple matters and language like traditional balladry. In another part of the ‘Preface’ of 1802, he declares ‘it will be the wish of the Poet to bring his feelings near to those of the persons whose feelings he describes’ (256). What really matters for him as a poet might be to be thoroughly integrated with the characters in his narrative poems. For Wordsworth, describing common people might be equal to describing his desire to be close to them: namely, describing his own feeling in the same situation as common people’s simple life.<sup>5</sup>

“The Thorn” conveys Wordsworth’s contradiction between his announcement in the “Preface” and his work. Under the declaration of preferring simplicity, Wordsworth wrote one of his representative literary ballads, “The Thorn”. Martha Ray was betrayed by her lover, Stephen Hill, on the appointed wedding-day, and he went to a church with another maid. After six months, Martha, being pregnant and mad, started going to the mountaintop. No one knows if a baby was born, nor if it was born alive or dead. A narrator went up to the mountain, and there he witnessed Martha

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<sup>5</sup> Friedman points out that ‘Wordsworth’s ballad poetry is eloquent in showing how sharply the ballad (whether traditional or broadside) has to be wrenched from its true nature in order to accommodate a poet whose concern is with “inner significance” not “ourward spectacle”’ (295). And also T. Yabushita pointed out clearly Wordsworth’s contradiction between his announcement and his work in “The Ballad for the Romantic Poets — With Special Reference to Keats’ ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’” (1974).

mourning repeatedly. Below is the climax scene of the poem.

I did not speak — I saw her face,  
Her face it was enough for me;  
I turned about and heard her cry,  
“O misery! O misery!”  
And there she sits, until the moon  
Through half the clear blue sky will go,  
And when the little breezes make  
The waters of the pond to shake,  
As all the country know,  
She shudders and you hear her cry,  
“Oh misery! oh misery! (199-209)

It does not use ballad stanza nor ballad metre, but imitates the subject matter of “The Cruel Mother” (20B), a tragedy of a woman who bore a child under the thorn, and murdered it by herself. It is true that Wordsworth is describing a common tragedy by using common language. But what the poem strongly impresses on the readers is not that Wordsworth imitates a common tragedy of the ballad world by using simple language, but that he simply uses the ballad-like repetitions of ‘O misery! O misery’ (202) and ‘Oh misery! oh misery!’ (209) which seem only to intensify sentimentalism of the narrator and Wordsworth himself. We suspect that for Wordsworth balladry does not mean an objective narrative story. His ballads are poems which reflect his own sentiment and sympathy for common life and language. As

one of the Romantic ballad poets, he participated in the sentimentalized tendency of the literary balladry in the Romantic period.

Keats is another literally balladist in the Romantic period, whose “La Belle Dame sans Merci” (1819) borrows the subject matter from “Thomas Rhymer” (37A). A legendary figure of the thirteenth century in Scotland, Thomas of Erceldoune (1210?-97?) was taken by the queen of the fairyland into her world, spent seven years, and came back endowed with the prophetic instinct. “Thomas Rhymer”, whose folklore is mixed with Christian episodes, tells the legendary encounter of Thomas and the queen. Thomas hailed her as the ‘mighty Queen of Heaven’ (11). They went through knee-deep red blood ‘for forty days and forty nights’ (25), and they had a rest in ‘a garden green’ (30), where the queen prohibited him from plucking the fruit because ‘a’ the plagues that are in hell / Light on the fruit of this countrie’ (35-36). She fed him ‘a loaf’ of bread and ‘a bottle of claret wine’ (37-38) there, and tells him the Matthean creed that the narrow road is ‘the path of righteousness’ (47) and that the broad road is ‘the path of wickedness’ (51). But “Thomas Rhymer” is a genuine narrative consisting of characters’ acts and events, and there is no explanation of his sentiment nor reflection.

On the other hand, Keats’ knight says that he was enchanted by ‘a faery’s child’ (14), was taken to her elfin grot where they fell asleep, and dreamt a horrible dream that death-pale kings, princes, and warriors ‘cry’d – “La belle Dame sans merci / Hath thee in thrall”’ (39-40). What Keats is describing in the poem is the knight’s romantic situation of being enthralled

by a lady of another world, and his suspended emotion of being half-ecstatic and half-agonized caused by the enthrallment. When he wakes up on the cold hillside, he starts anguishing and loitering for the lady. The poem begins with a question of the third party.

Ah, what can ail thee, wretched wight,  
Alone and palely loitering;  
The sedge is wither'd from the lake,  
And no birds sing. (1-4)

I see a lilly on thy brow,  
With anguish moist and fever dew;  
And on thy cheek a fading rose  
Fast withereth too. (9-12)

Keats skillfully imitates the ballad-like dialogue and observes the ballad stanza. When an interlocutor asks the knight the reason why he is alone and palely loitering, the knight begins to confess he is being enthralled (13). The attractiveness of the lady he met is described not so in detail as that of Cynthia in "Endymion" (1818), but quite simply as 'full beautiful' (14) or having long hair, light foot, and wild eyes (15-16) just like the lady in "Thomas Rhymer". On the one hand, Keats tries to maintain the frame of a genuine narrative to describe the episode; on the other he focuses attention on the enchanted knight's sentiment and agony. Narrative objectivity betrays thematic subjectivity. Moreover, Keats implies that the knight's

loitering for the lady may last endlessly, because the last stanza repeats the first stanza to make the circulation of his loitering.

And this is why I sojourn here  
Alone and palely loitering,  
Though the sedge is wither'd from the lake,  
And no birds sing. (45-48)

His anguish for her never ends. His suspended emotion of being half-ecstatic and half-agonized caused by her enthrallment never ends. Keats brings Romantic agony and stasis into the literary balladry of the Romantic period.<sup>6</sup>

#### Refrain Technicians in the Victorian Era

In Scotland under the same influence of *Reliques*, Robert Burns (1759-96), Joanna Baillie (1762-1851), James Hogg (1770-1835), Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), and John Leyden (1775-1811), who were socialized as members of Scott's literary circle, were enthusiastic about creating literary ballads. After *Reliques*, not only creating imitation pieces but also editing collections contributed to the development of the literary ballad genealogy. Scott published *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802-03), which gave the same tremendous influence as *Reliques* upon the nineteenth century British and

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<sup>6</sup> A. Kamata gives an analysis in detail on the poem in *Mythological Impersonation in John Keats* (Otowa-Shobo Tsurumi-Shoten, 2010) 81-126.

Scottish poets such as William Motherwell (1797-1835), Alfred Tennyson (1809-92), Charles Kingsley (1819-75), D. G. Rossetti (1828-82), Lewis Carroll (1832-98), A. C. Swinburne (1837-1909), as well as John Davidson (1857-1909). Actually the genealogy of the nineteenth century literary balladry opened with *Minstrelsy* and produced the golden period of the literary ballad. Not only did more than 60 poets, both renowned and unrenowned, create over 400 literary ballads, but they also stepped out of their eighteenth century predecessors' rather simple ways of imitation: they developed their own themes and techniques.

Tennyson, who is said to have memorized the whole three volumes of *Minstrelsy* by Scott (Ricks, *Poems of Tennyson* 398), created "The Sisters" (1832). This is not only a direct imitation of the traditional ballad, "The Twa Sisters" (10C), but also a typical example of the nineteenth century literary ballad which describes complicated sentiments or agonies by imitating ballad refrain.

We were two daughters of one race:

She was the fairest in the face:

*The wind is blowing in turret and tree.*

They were together, and she fell;

Therefore revenge became me well.

*O the Earl was fair to see!* (1-6: emphasis added)

The younger sister in an honorable family had a sexual relationship with an earl before her marriage, and was executed by fire after their love affair was

exposed. The elder sister was ashamed of her sister's having disgraced her family, and decided to get revenge. One night she had a chance to invite the earl to her chamber. After she won his love, she stabbed him on the bed three times with her sharp dagger. Her vengeance was completed:

I rose up in the silent night:

I made my dagger sharp and bright.

*The wind is raving in turret and tree.*

As half-asleep his breath he drew,

Three times I stabb'd him thro' and thro'.

*O the Earl was fair to see!*

I curl'd and comb'd his comely head,

He look'd so grand when he was dead.

*The wind is blowing in turret and tree.*

I wrapt his body in the sheet,

And laid him at his mother's feet.

*O the Earl was fair to see!* (25-36: emphasis added)

The two refrains in each stanza produce highly dramatic effects on the murder story. The one is the changing refrain in the third line. Along with development of the story, the verbs of the changing refrains also develop intensively from 'blowing' in the first stanza, to 'howling' in the second, 'roaring' in the third, 'raging' in the fourth, 'raving' in the fifth, and back to 'blowing' in the final. When the elder sister as a narrator is recollecting the

murder case in the past, the changing refrains represent that her own sensation is being unfolded. Her storm-like sensation is getting worse as things move closer to the climax of the murder and then dying down at the end of the story. Moreover, they suggest that she still keeps that sensation at this moment, because these refrains are told not in the past tense but in the present tense.

However, we should not overlook the fact that the unchanging refrain in each stanza gives dramatic effects on the sequence of the narrator's sensation. Regardless of the fierce emotional shift, she repeats 'O the Earl was fair to see!', which intensifies the fact that she was still madly in love with the earl, who was indeed her sister's lover. Passionately loving him, the elder sister fulfilled her role as an avenger of blood. By imitating the traditional ballad refrain technique but employing the highly skillful deviation of refrain, Tennyson succeeds in representing the elder sister's complicated agony.<sup>7</sup>

Another refrain technician of the nineteenth century is D. G. Rossetti. The story of "Sister Helen" (?1853-80) is that Helen takes her revenge on her lost love by casting a curse: she makes and melts a waxen image of Keith of Ewern, her former lover. Just like in the traditional ballads "Lord Randal" and "Edward" (13B), the narrative begins in the form of balladic dialogue between Helen and her little brother with an abrupt opening. Each stanza has the unchanged refrains of the second, the fourth, and the fifth

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<sup>7</sup> Yamanaka gives an analysis in detail on the refrain technique of Tennyson in *Traditional Ballads* 231-40.



When Helen's younger brother asks some questions or describes what happens around them, Helen sometimes neglects his questions and description, but sometimes directly responds to him. She seems to be half absorbed in her inner emotion and to monologize in the form of dialogue. In the opening scene the reason why Helen began to melt the waxen man is not explained, nor whom the waxen man is like. But as the pseudo-dialogue between the two advances, readers learn the whole story behind her curse. Helen and Keith of Ewern made a vow of eternal love with 'a ring and a broken coin' (148), but the vow was broken by his marriage to another woman with fair hair. Her revenge began on the day of his marriage. She cursed him by melting his waxen image, and on the morning of his marriage he became ill and lay in bed forlorn. Keith of Ewern and his relatives understand that the cause of his disease is Helen's curse on him. Although they come one after another to beg her to take her curse away from him, to see him before he dies, or to save his soul alive, she completes her revenge. At the end, the wax has dropped from its place. Rossetti, to modify the refrains of the horrible revenge story, effectively uses the ballad-like incremental repetition of the last line in each stanza.<sup>8</sup> The words between

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<sup>8</sup> Incremental repetition means repeated phrases or sentences including small changes in them. Along with refrain and repetition, it slows the development of the story and raise suspense gradually in a narrative. "The Cruel Brother" (11G) has a highly formalized structure of refrains and incremental repetitions. The first and the third lines in each stanza are incremental repetitions, and the second and the fourth lines are refrains. In the artistic stanzas, three lords come to woo one of three ladies, and the mystic number three anticipates a tragedy. However, the second and fourth lines are unchanging to the end of the story, which alleviates tension the

*'O Mother, Mary Mother'* and *'between Hell and Heaven'* sometimes reflect the voice of a third-person narrator or Helen's inner emotion, and sometimes describe her monologues. Rossetti, as well as Tennyson, by imitating the traditional ballad refrain technique, succeeds in representing Helen's intensified agony.

### Trail's Parody Ballad

As witnessed in the two literary ballads mentioned above, variations of ballad refrain are outstanding in the nineteenth century. Excessive devotion to the ballad technique, however, has produced another cultural phenomenon of parody. Refrain in the era of oral culture originally took the form of audience response to ballad singers or their chorus as one of the co-creators of balladry. In this sense, refrain of traditional balladry shows tragedy produces.

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The first of them was clad in red:  
 Fine flowers i' the valley  
 'O lady fair, will you be my bride?'  
 Wi' the red, green and the yellow

The second of them was clad in green:  
 Fine flowers i' the valley  
 'O lady fair, will you be my queen?'  
 Wi' the red, green and the yellow

The third of them was clad in yellow:  
 Fine flowers i' the valley  
 'O lady fair, will you be my marrow?'  
 Wi' the red, green and the yellow (5-16)

Tennysonian sentence of 'the wind is blowing in turret and tree' in "The Sisters" mentioned above is also an incremental repetition.

the fact that singers and audience shared the same feeling from their singing. It symbolizes the sense of unity in a ballad-singing community. However, along with the development of literate culture, poets have written their work and their co-creators faded away in time. Poets and audience were separated definitely. After the ballad revival, refrain has been one of the techniques poets exhibit in their writings. The nineteenth century literary poets were quite interested in using refrain as mentioned above. But heavy use of refrain was satirized, and sometimes caricatured. Henry Duff Traill (1842-1900), a journalist and satiric poet of *Recaptured Rhymes* (1882) and *Saturday Songs* (1890), parodied the contemporary heavy use of refrain in “After Dilettante Concetti” (1882). He engrafts D. G. Rossetti’s “Sister Helen” to “A Superscription” (1869) in order to parody the popularity of refrain of the century:

“Why do you wear your hair like a man,

Sister Helen?

This week is the third since you began.”

“I’m writing a ballad; be still if you can,

Little brother.

*(O Mother Carey, mother!*

*What chickens are these between sea and heaven?)” (1-7)*

“The refrain you’ve studied a meaning had,

Sister Helen!

It gave strange force to a weird ballad.

But refrains have become a ridiculous 'fad'

Little brother.

*And Mother Carey, mother,*

*Has a bearing on nothing in earth or heaven.* (36-42)

Some traditional ballads like "Lord Randal" and "Edward" show the truth of a murder case by the dialogue between mother and son. Rossetti, by imitating that ballad technique, creates the dialogue between Helen and her younger brother in "Sister Helen". It represents the struggle, agony and madness of Helen, who takes her revenge on her former lover through a curse of making and melting his waxen image. And at the same time, it describes the complicated role and psychology of her brother as an interlocutor, who always asks some questions or describes what happens around them. However, Traill completely substitutes the burlesque dialogue between Helen and her brother for the serious dialogue of Rossetti. Helen struggles to make a ballad and her brother makes fun of her. While Rossetti effectively uses the ballad-like incremental repetition of the last line in each stanza in order to imply the place where Helen and her brother are set in and to intensify their struggling emotion, Traill again completely substitutes the totally meaningless and burlesque refrain of the last two lines in each stanza for the serious incremental repetition of Rossetti. '*O Mother Cary, mother!*' is a simple and meaningless adaptation of '*O Mother, Mary Mother*' by Rossetti, and the words between '*O Mother Cary, mother!*' and 'between sea and heaven' are simple plays on words. These intentional adaptations self-ironize the excessive devotion to the ballad technique of

refrain.

The latter part of the parody ballad is an imitation of “A Superscription”. Here is the original sonnet composed in 1869:

Look in my face; my name is Might-have-been;  
I am also call'd No-more, Too-late, Farewell;  
Unto thine ear I hold the dead-sea shell  
Cast up thy Life's foam-fretted feet between;  
Unto thine eyes the glass where that is seen  
Which had Life's form and', but by my spell  
Is now a shaken shadow intolerable,  
Of ultimate things unutter'd the frail screen.

Mark me, how still I am! But should there dart  
One moment through thy soul the soft surprise  
Of that wing'd Peace which lulls the breath of sighs, —  
Then shalt thou see me smile, and turn apart  
Thy visage to mine ambush at thy heart  
Sleepless with cold commemorative eyes. (1-14)

Rossetti expresses a sense of failure and remorse which may be inspired by the death of his wife, Elizabeth Siddal, in 1862, or by a new love for Jane Morris. In the parodied lines below, Trail describes a sense of remorse for using a ballad refrain technique too much, and repeatedly emphasizes that ballad refrains were out of date:

“Look in my face. My name is Used-to-was;  
I am also called Played-out and Done-to-death,  
And It-will-wash-no-more. Awakeneth  
Slowly, but sure awakening it has,  
The common-sense of man; and I, alas!  
The ballad-burden trick, now known too well,  
Am turned to scorn, and grown contemptible —  
A too transparent artifice to pass.

“What a cheap dodge I am! The cats who dart  
Tin-kettled through the streets in wild surprise  
Assail judicious ears not otherwise;  
And yet no critics praise the urchin’s ‘art,’  
Who to the wretched creature’s caudal part  
Its foolish empty-jingling ‘burden’ ties.” (50-63)

The narrator calls ballad refrains ‘Used-to-was’, ‘Played-out’, ‘Done-to-death’, or ‘It-will-wash-no-more’. The ‘ballad-burden trick’ of refrains are scorned as ‘foolish empty-jingling “burden”’. The conventional refrain is completely criticized as being tedious.

“After Dilettante Concetti” is full of tough and critical spirit against blind following of the contemporary popularity of imitating ballad refrain, but at the same time the playful imagination in the poem shows the imitation of ballad technique had fully matured in those days. In this sense,

parody ballads also suggest the nineteenth century was the golden period of the literary balladry.

### Scottish Literary Balladry and National Identity

Percy's *Reliques* is the first cornerstone of the genealogy of British literary ballads. Under the immeasurable impact of *Reliques*, British literary ballads paved the way for the Romantic poetry, stimulated Victorian poets to mature their styles and techniques, and eventually showed the critical spirit of the era by making caricatures of themselves. The achievement of the ballad collection, however, is not confined to the literary evolution through the ballad revival of the eighteenth century. Nick Groom infers that *Reliques* was 'a Great British imperial endeavor' (181), citing Percy's letter to his contemporary balladist, William Shenstone on July 19, 1761: when he started editing *Reliques*, Percy intended to find correspondents in Scotland, Wales, Ireland, and the West Indies in order to involve all areas of Great Britain into his project of preserving literary relics.<sup>9</sup> Percy tried to

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<sup>9</sup> 'Since my last I have had another Letter from Mr Warton, who has promised to ransack all their hoards at Oxon for me, . . . Perhaps I shall derive greater assistance from an Acquaintance I have made of a much lower stamp, and that is with Dicey of / the Pringing-Office in Bow Church Yard, the greatest printer of Ballads in the kingdom, . . . I thankfully accept your offer of applying to your *virtuoso* friend in Scotland in my favour; . . . I have settled a correspondence in the very heart of Wales, and another in the Wilds of Staffordshire and Derbyshire; . . . I intend also to write a friend in Ireland . . . nor will I fail to mention our scheme to Grainger in the West Indies; thus shall we ransack the whole British Empire' (*Percy Letters* 7: 108-10)

contribute to forge a new identity needed for the people in the British Isles in those days by editing the ballad collection, because, according to Linda Colley's *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707 -1837*, Britain is an idea and an invented nation that emerged in the eighteenth century after the Acts of Union in 1707. Employing the theory of 'an imagined community', Groom says that *Reliques* 'was in embryo what Benedict Anderson has described as an imagined national community — *imagined* rather than *fabricated*, more creative than a simple falsification' (181). Moreover, Percy's much emphasis was on shaping Englishness rather than forging British identity. Groom's point of discussion is that Percy ignored various noises and sounds as the remnants of oral tradition throughout *Reliques*, and instead, 'adopted a deliberately melancholy drone as an index of polite, reading-class Englishness' (194). Thus, Percy succeeded in advocating the identity of Englishness through making 'a Great British imperial endeavor'.

On the other hand, Scott's *Minstrelsy* is the next cornerstone of the genealogy of British literary ballads. It gave the same tremendous influence as *Reliques* upon the nineteenth century English and Scottish poets, and actually it brought forth the genealogy of the nineteenth century literary balladry. Scottish literary ballads, however, have played a completely different role from English ones. Scottish literature has historically made considerable effort in demonstrating national identity to compete against English politics and culture. Especially traditional and literary ballads have played a key role in recovering the identity of Scottish literature. Scotland apparently lost its identity around 1707, when English and Scottish Parliaments were united, but at that time, James Watson's *A Choice*

*Collection of Comic and Serious Scots Poems both Ancient and Modern, By Several Hands*, 3 parts (1706-11), the first anthology of Scots poetry and ballads in Scotland, was published for the purpose of recovering the lost national identity. Watson declares the purpose of publishing the anthology at the very beginning of “The Publisher to the Reader”:

As the frequency of Publishing Collections of Miscellaneous Poems in our Neighbouring Kingdoms and States, may, in a great measure, justify an Undertaking of this kind with us; so 'tis hoped, that this being the first of its Nature which has been publish'd in our own Native Scots Dialect, the Candid Reader may be the more easily induced, through the Consideration thereof, to give some Charitable Grains of Allowance, if the Performance come not up to such a Point of Exactness as may please an over nice Palate. (n. pag.)

Following Watson, Allan Ramsay's *The Ever Green: Being a Collection of Scots Poems, Wrote by the Ingenious Before 1600*, 2 vols. (1724)<sup>10</sup> and *The Tea-Table Miscellany*, 4 vols. (1724-37)<sup>11</sup>, David Herd's *Ancient and Modern*

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<sup>10</sup> In “Preface” of the first volume, Ramsay demonstrates the national pride evoked by his anthologies: ‘Their [these old Bards] Poetry is the Product of their own Country, not pilfered and spoiled in the Transportation from abroad: Their Images are native, and their Landskips domestick; copied from those Fields and Meadows we every Day behold.’ (vii-viii)

<sup>11</sup> Ramsay begins “Preface” with the following words: ‘Altho’ it be acknowledged, that our Scots tunes have not lengthened variety of music, yet they have an agreeable gaiety and natural sweetness, that make them

*Scottish Songs, Heroic Ballads, Etc.*, 2 vols. (1776)<sup>12</sup>, James Johnson's *The Scots Musical Museum*, 6 vols. (1787-1803), and Sir Walter Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, 3 vols. (1802-03), were published in sequence. They contain both anonymous and professional Scottish ballads and poems, also in order to recover the lost national identity.

Scottish literature has been still in the heat of discussing what Scottish national identity is and how it can be demonstrated. The modern society witnessed Scottish devolution in 1999 and Scottish independent referendum in 2014. We fully recognize that identity matters have been deeply concerned with literature and culture of the people. It was in 1919 that T. S. Eliot notoriously said that 'Was there a Scottish literature?' (*The Athenaeum* 4657 (1919): 680)<sup>13</sup>, but no one in these days is haunted by the nonsense. The discussion of the relation between Scottish balladry and national identity can contribute to the whole concerns about Scottish acceptable wherever they are known, not only among ourselves, but in other countries.' (v)

<sup>12</sup> In the second volume of the anthologies, the editor explains the general rules of the difference between Scots and English, and provides 'a glossary or explanation of the Scotch Words'. This demonstrates that the editor was fully conscious of the native language.

<sup>13</sup> T. S. Eliot, "Was There a Scottish literature", *The Athenaeum* 4657 (1919): 680, cited in Robert Crawford, ed., *The Scottish Invention of English Literature*. Crawford logically explains the background of Eliot's opinion and his intention. A Scottish literary critic, G. G. Smith, propounded the idea of 'Caledonian antisyzygy' as an outstanding characteristic of Scottish literature in *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* (1919). This is incompatible with Eliot's notion of literary tradition. Therefore, "Was There a Scottish Literature" reactivates the older attitude of seeing Scottish Literature not as a subject in its own right but as a flickering gathering of individual works and moments in comparison with the continuous tradition of English literature.' (236)

national identity, and at the same time, it can clarify the roles and the meanings of Scottish literary ballads.

## 2 Scott's "William and Helen" and Gothicism as the Spirit of Locality

### Percy's *Reliques* and German Influence

It is generally established that Percy's *Reliques* contributed immeasurably to Romantic poetry, but it is still surprising that balladry, narrative poems sung by anonymous people in the old days, played an epoch-making role in the regeneration of the British poetry of the literati in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries. Beers devotes one chapter in *A History of English Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century* to the explanation of the characteristic styles and techniques of traditional ballads, and the crucial differences between traditional ballads and literary ones. He begins 'Chapter VIII: Percy and the Ballads' in a tone of astonishment:

The regeneration of English poetic style at the close of the last century came from an unexpected quarter. What scholars and professional men of letters had sought to do by their imitations of Spenser and Milton, and their domestication of the Gothic and Celtic muse, was much more effectually done by Percy and the ballad collectors. (265)

Percy's *Reliques* marked the twilight of the enthusiasm for balladry among literary people. Although, as mentioned in the previous section, *Reliques* took the role of forging English identity, it is undeniable that Walter Scott

was profoundly affected by *Reliques*. As he himself recorded, besides being familiar with the legendary lore of the Borders from his childhood days, Scott was absorbed in Percy as a boy.<sup>1</sup> The life amid living ballads and the exclusive devotion to Percy led Scott to collect Border ballads and to issue *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. The intellectual excitement for traditional ballads, which Percy's *Reliques* had caused, was succeeded by Scott's *Minstrelsy*. Beers also demonstrates the succession of the ballad revival movement from Percy to Scott at the latter part of the chapter by introducing Macaulay's 'Preface' to *Lays of Ancient Rome*:

There is, indeed, little doubt that oblivion covers many English songs equal to any that were published by Bishop Percy; . . . . Eighty years ago England possessed only one tattered copy of 'Child Waters' and 'Sir Cauline,' . . . . The snuff of a candle, or a mischievous dog, might in a moment have deprived the world forever of any of those fine compositions. Sir Walter Scott, who united to the fire of a great poet the minute curiosity and patient diligence of a great antiquary, was but just in time to save the precious reliques of the Minstrelsy of the Border. (298-99)

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<sup>1</sup> 'But above all, I then first became acquainted with Bishop Percy's *Reliques of Ancient Poetry*. . . . The summer-day sped onward so fast, that notwithstanding the sharp appetite of thirteen, I forgot the hour of dinner, was sought for with anxiety, and was still found entranced in my intellectual banquet. . . . To read and to remember was in this instance the same thing, and henceforth I overwhelmed my schoolfellows, and all who would hearken to me, with tragical recitations from the ballads of Bishop Percy. . . . ; nor do I believe I ever read a book half so frequently, or with half the enthusiasm.' (*Life of Sir Walter Scott* 11)

The tattered manuscripts of which unexpected misfortunes might have deprived the world forever were regenerated as *Minstrelsy*.

However, before issuing *Minstrelsy*, Scott received another significant influence as well as Percy. That was German Gothic poetry. Scott confesses the reason why he was interested in the foreign artistic inclination in the 1790s in his "Essay on Imitations of the Ancient Ballad":

During the last ten years of the eighteenth century the art of poetry was at a remarkably low ebb in Britain. Hayley . . . had lost his reputation for talent . . . . Cowper . . . was still alive, indeed; but the hypochondria which was his mental malady impeded his popularity. Burns, whose genius our southern neighbours could hardly yet comprehend, had long confined himself to song-writing. (*Minstrelsy* 547).

Scott seemed to be hungry for literary stimulation and ambitious associates to face the coming century. According to Scott's statements in the "Essay" (547-49), under such circumstances, 'as far back as 1788 a new species of literature began to be introduced' to him: the first occasion was the presentation of an "Essay on German Literature" by a Scottish lawyer and writer, Henry Mackenzie, to the Royal Society on April 21, 1788.<sup>2</sup> The

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<sup>2</sup> Ian Duncan suggests that 'the wars with revolutionary and Napoleonic France' had an influence on the Scottish Gothic tendency in the late eighteenth century: 'Opening up a potent aesthetic alternative to politically suspect French taste, Mackenzie initiated the first wave of Germanising

German taste had British poets including Scott enslaved at that time. Ehrenpreis describes the impact a Gothic horror-ballad, "Lenore", by Gottfried August Bürger, had on them in the headnote to "Ellenore", William Taylor's translated version of "Lenore":

["Lenore"] created a sensation in England on its appearance — which coincided with *The Monk* — in 1796. For many the poem was the first heady whiff of German romanticism. Seven versions by five translators appeared within the year . . . . Of William Taylor's translation Lamb wrote to Coleridge: "Have you read a ballad called 'Lenore' in the second number of the 'Monthly Magazine'? If you have !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!". (67)

Scott heard that "Ellenore" had been recited in a literary circle. Inspired by the commotion caused by the translation ballad, Scott found a copy of Bürger's ballads, and immediately came up with his own translation of "Lenore".<sup>3</sup> In 1796, Scott anonymously issued a thin quarto including just

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Gothic influence on Scottish literary culture. . . . The young Walter Scott began his literary career under the aegis of this counter-revolutionary, if aesthetically radical, German Gothic.' (*A Companion to the Gothic* 73).

<sup>3</sup> Scott gives an abbreviated account of his hearing the translated ballad: 'A lady of high rank in the literary world read this romantic tale, as translated by Mr. Taylor, in the house of the celebrated Professor Dugald Stewart of Edinburgh. The Author was not present, nor indeed in Edinburgh at the time; but a gentleman who had the pleasure of hearing the ballad, afterwards told him the story, and repeated the remarkable chorus — "Tramp! tramp! across the land they speede, / Splash! splash across the sea.' (*Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott* 606) In "Essay on Imitations of the Ancient Ballad", Scott recorded the detail of his trying to translate Bürger's "Lenore", and of the decisive influence the translation gave him. (*Minstrelsy*

two translation ballads of "William and Helen" and "The Chase". This is Scott's initiation into the world of literary publishing. Even the German language seemed familiar to Scott: he states that 'the remarkable coincidence between the German language and that of the Lowland Scottish encouraged young men to approach his newly discovered spring of literature' (*Minstrelsy* 549).

Therefore, it is natural that, when Scott highly evaluates M. G. Lewis as the most important writer who introduced the German Gothic taste into Britain, Scott's attention is mainly paid to Lewis's ballads: he highlights 'the attachment to the ancient ballad' and 'the tone of superstition' some ballads in *The Monk* (1796) show:

[T]he public were chiefly captivated by the poetry with which Mr Lewis had interspersed his prose narrative. . . . [M]any may remember as well as I do the effect produced by the beautiful ballad of *Durandarte* . . . ; by the ghost tale of *Alonzo and Imogine*; and by several other pieces of legendary poetry which addressed themselves in all the charms of novelty and of simplicity to a public who had for a long time been unused to any regale of the kind. In his poetry as well as his prose Mr Lewis had been a successful imitator of the Germans, both in his attachment to the ancient ballad and in the tone of superstition which they willingly mingle with it. (552)

Scott's evaluation of these features was produced by his own experience of being steeped in the traditional ballads of his childhood, and by his involvement in the German Gothic taste. However, it is a fact that the German Gothic taste originated from Percy's *Reliques*. Wordsworth, one of great admirers of Percy's *Reliques*, pointed out in "Preface, 1800-1845" that the German poets of the 'Sturm und Drang' period were deeply influenced by Percy: 'Bürger, and other able writers of Germany, were translating, or imitating these *Reliques*, and composing, with the aid of inspiration thence derived, poems which are the delight of the German nation' (George 80). Agrawal discusses the ardent German students of English ballad-literature of Bürger, Goethe, Schiller, and Uhland, and succinctly summarizes the contribution of Percy to the German Pre-Romantic poets: 'The *Reliques* thus gave an incentive to the revival of medieval ballads in Germany and made its own contribution to the rise and growth of the Romantic Movement in Germany as in England' (177). Thus we come across the interesting interaction between British ballads and German ones from the eighteenth century to the nineteenth century. The taste of Percy's *Reliques* had been brought from Britain to Germany by the poets of the 'Sturm und Drang' school, and the attachment to old ballads and their Gothic taste *Reliques* had had were brought back to Britain from Germany by the introducers of the new German taste. Therefore, Scott's inclination to the German taste was also the result of the influence of Percy, and Percy's *Reliques*, both directly and by way of the German influence, contributed to the ballad revival movement evolved by Scott.

Scott started writing ballads by translating Bürger's German ballads.

In this section, the characteristics of Scott's translation and their meaning for Scott will be discussed by comparing Scott's "William and Helen" (1796) with Bürger's "Lenore" (1773) and Taylor's "Ellenore" (1788).

#### Scott's Devices and Attachment to his Locality and Language

Bürger's "Lenore", Taylor's "Ellenore", Scott's "William and Helen" all consist of three scenes. In the first scene, Lenore is lamenting hearing nothing from her lover Wilhelm who is away at battle. Lenore's mother is consoling her and reproving her loud wailing. In the second scene, Wilhelm's ghost comes back and takes a horrible trip to his grave with Lenore and his accompanying ghosts. In the third scene, they reach Wilhelm's grave, where Wilhelm transforms himself to a ghastly skeleton. This is the highlight of the poem. Wilhelm looked like a living creature to Lenore, but in reality he was a corporeal revenant. He discloses his unearthly figure at the grave.

#### [The First Scene: Maiden's Lament]

Lenore, awaking from a nightmare, is wailing over whether Wilhelm betrayed her or was dead. Bürger begins the story with the ballad technique of 'abrupt opening', with which readers are instantaneously involved in the story. But there is no ballad-like 'narrative lacuna'; after her abrupt wailing, the reason why he went to the war and the present truce they made with the opponent country are properly explained.

Er war mit König Friedrichs Macht  
Gezogen in die Prager Schlacht  
Und hatte nicht geschrieben,  
Ob er gesund geblieben.

Der König und die Kaiserin,  
Des langen Haders müde,  
Erweichten ihren harten Sinn  
Und machten endlich Friede; (5-12) <sup>4</sup>

The army Wilhelm belongs to came back, and people young and old around her are delighted with welcoming their sons and lovers. But Lenore alone cannot find her Wilhelm. Being disappointed and mad, she goes asking about him:

Sie frug den Zug wohl auf und ab  
Und frug nach allen Namen;  
Doch keiner war, der Kundschaft gab,  
Von allen, so da kamen. (25-28)<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> All quotations of "Lenore" are from *The Penguin Book of German Verse* (1959). English translations given in the footnotes are cited here in italics.

*He had gone with King Frederick's army into the Battle of Prague and had not written to say that he was safe.*

*The King and the Empress, weary of long strife, had softened their hard hearts and made peace at last.*

<sup>5</sup> *She went up and down the ranks asking, and asked the name of each man; but there was no one, of all those who returned, who gave her any*

Her wailing is intensified by the pain of not hearing from him.

Taylor and Scott reform the original eight-line stanza to a quatrain ballad stanza. In Taylor's "Ellenore", the 'abrupt opening' technique is more effective, because he doesn't mention the truce between the opponent countries, and simplifies the original story:

At break of day from frightful dreams

Upstarted Ellenore:

My William, art thou slayn, she sayde,

Or dost thou love no more?

He went abroad with Richards's host

The paynim foes to quell;

But he no ward to her had writt,

An he were sick or well. (1-8)

And Taylor's translated version has no scene in which Ellenore goes asking about William among returned soldiers. Instead, Taylor tends to use some adjectives and verbs that effusively describe action and emotion. When the mother runs into her wailing daughter to console her, Taylor modifies Bürger's original line of 'Und schloß sie in die Arme' (*and took her in her arms*, 36) into 'And clasped her in her arm', in which their strong embrace is intensified. Ellenore is 'a suffring child' (42) with a 'troubled spright' (34).

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*information.*

Lenore says 'Der Tod, der Tod ist mein Gewinn!' (*Death, death is what I shall gain*, 67), but Taylor gives a euphemistically elaborate expression, 'The grave my only safe guard is' (59).

In the world of literary balladry, characters have a tendency to show emotional overreaction. When Ellenore's mother says that '[h]er anguish makes her wild' (68), her emotional words and deeds cannot be suppressed. Ellenore shows a wild reaction to her anguish:

Against the Providence of God

She hurld her impious strains.

She bet her breast, and wrung her hands,

And rolled her tearless eye (83-86)

On the contrary, in the world of traditional balladry, a narrative mainly consists of the actions of the characters, and their emotion is not told in detail. This was the fundamental style of shared oral ballads for many years. The narrative style of suppressing emotional expression, paradoxically, conveys strongly-condensed emotion eloquently. 'Wringing one's hands' is a commonplace action to express utmost sadness in the traditional ballad world. In "Lord Saltoun and Auchanachie" (239A), the heroine, Jeanie, was forced by her father to be married to decrepit old Salton. On her nuptial night, Jeanie died for grief, and after her death, her true lover, Auchanachie came back from the sea. Jeanie's maidens, 'all wringing their hands' (49) say 'alas for your staying sae lang frae the land!' (50). 'Wringing their hands'

conveys all the emotion the maidens had at one time: grief of losing the person to whom they dedicate loyalty and affection, sympathy for their mistress's fate, and fury over her father's mercilessness. Ellenore, on the contrary, 'wrung her hands' as well as 'bet her breast' and 'rollde her tearless eye'. This is the same as Lenore.<sup>6</sup> The woman created in the literary ballad cannot help showing her extreme grief, and devotes herself to her own anguish.<sup>7</sup>

The beginning of Scott's translation is faithful to Bürger. Helen has not heard from William since he joined Prince Frederick's Crusade. When Frederick's gallant knights returned after making a truce with paynim and Saracen, Scott uses more elaborate and sentimental expressions than Bürger. He adds the elaborate lines that 'And every knight return'd to dry / The tears his love had shed' (11-12). In the scene where the people welcomed the knights' return, Scott adds an explanation of their shouts and mirth: 'The debt of love to pay' (20). When the retuning army went past, Helen's wailing is described more pathetically than Lenore. As for Lenore, with the ballad cliché of 'rending one's hair' being used, 'Zerrauft sie [Lenore] ihr Rabenhaar / Und warf sich hin zur Erde / Mit wütiger Gebärde (*she tore her raven hair and threw herself with crazed movements on the*

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<sup>6</sup> 'Sie fuhr mit Gottes Vorsehung / Vermessen fort zu hadern, / Zerschlug den Busen und zerrang / Die Hand bis Sonnenuntergang' (91-94, she went on presumptuously repining against God's providence, beat her breast and wrung her hands until sundown).

<sup>7</sup> Charles Kingsley's literary ballad, "The Three Fishers" (1851), is a rare case in which the commonplace of 'wring one's hands' is used simply and effectively like in a traditional ballad: 'And the women are weeping and wringing their hands / For those who will never come home to the town.' (17-18)

*ground*, 30-32). But Helen 'rend her raven hair, / And in distraction's bitter mood / She weeps with wild despair' (30-32). The word 'despair' is repeated in her exaggerated cry of 'Drink my life-blood, Despair!' (42).

Scott's outstanding device in the first scene is the lonely tower to which Helen confines herself. Bürger and Taylor do not describe a tower as the setting of their works.

Wild she arraigns the eternal doom,  
 Upbraids each sacred power,  
 Till, spent, she sought her silent room,  
 All in the lonely tower.

She beat her breast, she wrung her hands,  
 Till sun and day were o'er,  
 And through the glimmering lattice shone  
 The twinkling of the star. (85-92)

Scott often sets his stories in an old tower. Another Gothic ballad of Scott, "The Eve of St John" (1800), is set in Smaylho'me tower, to which Scott in his youth was quite familiar.<sup>8</sup> The opening scene conveys the cragginess of

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<sup>8</sup> In the headnote to "The Eve of St. John", Scott shows his attachment to Sandyknowe, Roxburghshire, where he spent his childhood days: "This ancient fortress [Smaylho'me tower] and its vicinity formed the scene of the Editor's infancy, and seemed to claim from him this attempt to celebrate them in a Border tales.' (*Minstrelsy* 606)

Scott affectionately describes the landscape of the area in "Introduction to Canto Third" of "Marmion" (1808):

the area:

The Baron of Smaylho'me rose with day,  
He spurr'd his courser on,  
Without stop or stay, down the rocky way,  
That leads to Brotherstone. (1-4)

Sir Richards of Coldinghame had been slain by the Baron of Smaylho'me, but his ghost visited his lover, the baroness, at the Smaylho'me tower to punish their 'lawless love' (179):

He laid his left palm on an oaken beam;  
His right upon her hand;  
The lady shrunk, and faintng sunk,  
For it scorch'd like a fiery brand. (181-84)

The fiery brand of his four fingers marked the beam of the tower and her wrist forever, and the baroness became 'a nun who ne'er beholds the day'

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Then rise those crags, that mountain tower,  
Which charm'd my fancy's wakening hour. (158-59)  
.....  
It was a barren scene, and wild,  
Where naked cliffs were rudely piled; (168-69)  
.....  
And well the lonely infant knew  
Recesses where the wall-flower grew,  
And honey-suckle loved to draw  
Up the low crag and ruin'd wall. (172-75)

(193). According to Scott's headnote to the poem, 'The tower is a high square building, surrounded by an outer wall, now ruinous. The circuit of the outer court, being defended on three sides, by a precipice and morass, is accessible only from the west, by a steep and rocky path' (*Minstrelsy* 606). The rough landscape of the tower as a natural fortification intensifies the Gothicism of the story. Besides, Scott had another purpose for setting the work in Smaylho'me tower. According to Scott's own account, as a part of the symbol of his blissful childhood days had been destroyed at that time, Scott was willing to stop its dilapidation by writing a ballad set in the tower.<sup>9</sup> The setting of Smaylho'me tower was inspired by Scott's attachment and patriotic fever to his locality.

Also, Helen's seclusion in the tower reminds readers of the opening lines of "Canto First" of "The Lay of the Last Minstrel" (1805):

The feast was over in Branksome tower.  
 And the Ladye had gone to her secret bower;  
 Her bower that was guarded by word and by spell,  
 Deadly to hear, and deadly to tell — (1-4)

In 'Note A' of the "Appendix" to the work, Scott explains the possession and

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<sup>9</sup> 'Some idle persons had of late years during the proprietor's absence torn the iron-gated door of Smailholm Tower from its hinges and thrown it down the rock. I was an earnest suitor to my friend and kinsman . . . that the dilapidation might be put a stop to and the mischief repaired. This was readily promised on condition that I should make a ballad, of which the scene should lie at Smailholm Tower, and among the crags where it is situated.' (*Minstrelsy* 558)

expansion of the Branksome tower by the Buccleuch family, and its destruction by Elizabeth I. Scott never fails to refer to its rough landscape: 'the extent of the ancient edifice can still be traced by some vestiges of its foundation, and it's strength is obvious from the situation, on a deep bank surrounded by the Teviot, and flanked by a deep ravine, formed by a precipitous brook' (*Poetical Works of Scott* 44). Scott's emotional attachment to the rough landscape of his locality and its history is reflected in the note, and the craginess of the place contributes to the Gothic mode of the story.

Scott's device of the lonely tower and the Gothic taste the tower intensifies in "William and Helen" is understood to originate from the same attachment to his native place as in "The Eve of St John" and "Canto First" of "The Lay of the Last Minstrel". In this sense, "William and Helen" marks the dawn of Scott's appealing setting of a tower in his later poems. Scott is strongly conscious of his locality even in a translation of a German ballad.

[The Second Scene: Spectral Journey]

The lovers take a horrible ride to the grave. In each ballad, onomatopoeia, mimetic words, and rhythmic words are used so effectively that they make the scene dynamic and bouncing. When the corporeal revenant of Wilhelm is riding to Lenore, Bürger composes 'ging's trapp trapp trapp, / Als wie von Rosseshufen' (*the sound of clop, clop, clop like horse's hooves*, 97-98). The one-syllable word of 'trapp' is repeated three times, and the bouncing rhythm produced by the repetition resonates with the three syllable 'klinglingling' in the following lines of 'den Pfortenring / Ganz lose, leise,

kinglingling!' (*the loose ring on the gate went tinglinging*, 101-02). When Wilhelm invites Lenore to their marriage bed which is '[w]eit, weit von hier! . . . Still, kühl und klein! . . . / Sechs Bretter und zwei Brettchen!' (*far, far from here, quiet, cool, and small, six planks and two boards!*, 139-40), the alliteration of [w], [k], and [b] sounds heightens the urgency of his invitation. In response to Wilhelm's urgency, Lenore briskly follows him: 'Schön Liebchen schürzte, sprang und schwang / Sich auf das Roß behende' (*tucked in her skirt, jumped and vaulted up nimbly onto the horse*, 145-46). The alliteration of [s] sounds also heightens her nimbleness. In fact, 'tucking her skirt' is a commonplace action in the traditional ballad world to show a maiden's briskness and bravery. In "Tam Lin" (39 I, adopted from *Minstrelsy*), the tomboyish heroine, Janet, goes to a plain called Carterhaugh, asking no leave of an elf, Tam Lin:

Jane has kilted her green kirtle  
 A little abune her knee,  
 And she has braided her yellow hair  
 A little abune her bree. (17-20)

At the end of the ballad, Janet's briskness and bravery lifted the spell on Tam Lin to return him to a human being. Lenore in this scene is a mirror image of brisk and brave Janet.<sup>10</sup> And also, when Lenore and Wilhelm are

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<sup>10</sup> Another example of a brave maiden is the fair maid in "The False Love Won Back" (218A): 'But she's kilt up her clathing fine, / And after him [John of Berwick] gaed she.' (25-26)

riding swiftly with the scenery at their right and left flying past, Bürger repeatedly uses some impressive onomatopoeia and mimetic words: 'Und hurre hurre, hop hop hop! / Ging's fort in sausendem Galopp' (*and hey, hey, hop, hop, hop away they went at a rousing gallop*, 149-50). The onomatopoeia of 'hop hop hop' conveys the rhythmical sound of their horse galloping on his hooves. It is repeated again as the sound of the accompanying ghosts jostling at the horse's behind: 'Und immer weiter, hop hop hop! / Ging's fort in sausendem Galopp' (*And still onward, hop hop hop they went at a rousing gallop*, 181-82). These lines are repeated once more when the airy spirits are following the lovers:

Und das Gesindel, husch husch husch!  
 Kam hinten nachgeprasselt,  
 Wie Wirbelwind am Haselbusch  
 Durch dürre Blätter rasselt.  
 Und weiter, weiter, hop hop hop!  
 Ging's fort in sausendem Galopp (201-06)<sup>11</sup>

The alliteration of [h] sounds of 'husch husch husch' is strongly echoed by the same [h] sounds of 'hop hop hop'. The effectively repeated [h] sounds succeed in evoking the surreal image of their horrible riding accompanied by ghosts.

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<sup>11</sup> *And the company, quick, quick, quick, came bustling after them as eddying winds rustle through dry leaves on the hazel bush. And on they go hop, hop, hop, away at arousing gallop . . . .*

In Taylor's "Ellenore", the lovers are also accompanied by 'the ghostly crew' (201) reeling 'in roundel dance' (194). They are coming and wheeling with the strong sound of 'brush, brush, brush' (201). But more impressive words and sounds in this scene are the two kinds of onomatopoeia of 'tramp, tramp' and 'splash, splash' when they are riding with unearthly speed through the flood, the mead, the wood, and the sea for 'a thousand miles' (119). Taylor repeats the following stanza three times in this scene:

Tramp, tramp, across the land they speede;  
 Splash, splash, across the sea:  
 "Hurrah! The dead can ride apace:  
 Dost fear to ride with me? (153-56)

Scott was very fond of the stanza cited above, and obtained Taylor's permission to use the same stanza in his own ballad. Scott states the reason why he was attached to the stanza in "Essays on Imitations of the Ancient Ballad":

It was the more successful that Mr Taylor had boldly copied the imitative harmony of the German, and described the spectral journey in language resembling that of the original. . . . The words were rendered by the kindred sounds in English.  
 (*Minstrelsy* 554-55)

Scott gives more importance to the sound effect of the words in this scene

than Bürger and Taylor. Scott writes 'hark! and hark! a knock — Tap! Tap!' (101) when William knocks at the door of the tower where Helen confines herself; 'Awake, awake, arise, my love!' (105) when he invites her to the journey; 'Busk, busk, and boune!' when she mounts his horse; and 'To-night — to-night a hundred miles! —' (129) when Helen is surprised at their long journey. These repeated short-syllable words accentuate the heaviness and rhythm of the ballad. Scott succeeds in introducing Bürger's 'galloping rhythm' in the English ballad.<sup>12</sup>

In the second scene, the three ballads are full of the sound effects: they are surreal and heavy, but dynamic, bouncing and rhythmical. On the whole, they intensify the horrible and irrational Gothic taste of these ballads.

As well as the sound effects, Bürger and Taylor highlight the Gothic taste by describing ghosts' dancing. Bürger describes 'Tantz' um des Rades Spindel, / Halb sichtbarlich bei Mondenlicht, / Ein luftiges Gesindel' (*half visible in the moonlight an airy gang is dancing round the axle of the wheel*, 194-96). Taylor's William cries 'Look up, look up, an airy crew / In roundel dances reele' (193-94). Readers of these lines must associate the spooky and ridiculous ghosts' dancing with the 'Danse Macabre', the popular notion of the universality of death which haunted people in the late Middle Ages. In *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, Huizinga discusses the most popular

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<sup>12</sup> The term 'galloping rhythm' is introduced in Baker, *History of English Novel*, vol. 5: 'In play, ballad, or prose story, he [M. G. Lewis] revelled in sheer horror. The fluent doggerel (attempt to emulate the galloping rhythm of Bürger's *Lenore*) of his well-known ballad "Alonzo the Brave, and Fair Imogine" . . . sounds like a breakdown by a rollicking resurrectionist.' (207)

image left at the Cemetery of the Innocents in France in the seventeenth century:

Grimly, with the gait of an old, stiff dancing master, he [the ape-like death] led the pope, the emperor, the nobleman, the day laborer, the monk, the small child, the fool, and all the other professions and estates away. (163-64)

He says that people in those days were overwhelmingly attracted by 'the gruesomely conscious realm of ghostly fear and cold terror' (164) the notion arouses. The ghosts' dancing doubtlessly plays the role of increasing terror in the works of Bürger and Taylor.

On the other hand, Scott does not employ 'Danse Macabre'-like description, and instead, he describes the lonely tower in more detail:

Then, crash! the heavy drawbridge fell  
That o'er the moat was hung;  
And, clatter! clatter! on its boards  
The hoof of courser rung. (93-96)

In Scott's imagination, the tower has a drawbridge, and is surrounded by a moat. He still sticks to his own setting as the device for producing the Gothic taste.

[The Third Scene: Transformation to Skeleton ]

The third scene highlights terror when the corporeal revenant of Wilhelm transforms itself into a skeleton:

Ha sieh! Ha sieh! Im Augenblick,  
 Huhu! ein gräßlich Wunder!  
 Des Reiters Koller, Stück für Stück,  
 Fiel ab wie mürber Zunder.  
 Zum Schädel ohne Zopf und Schopf,  
 Zum nackten Schädel ward sein Kopf,  
 Sein Körper zum Gerippe  
 Mit Stundenglas und Hippe.<sup>13</sup> (233-40)

Wilhelm's garments rotted down one by one, and in the end his real identity of Death was exposed. Taylor's translation is almost the same as Bürger's original. He describes 'His armure, black as cinder, / Did moulder, moulder all away' (234-35), and 'His head became a naked skull; / Nor hair nor eyne had he: / His body grew a skeleton' (237-39). But Scott describes William's transformation in more detail:

The falling gauntlet quits the rein,  
 Down drops the casque of steel,  
 The cuirass leaves his shrinking side,

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<sup>13</sup> *Ah, look, ah, look! in that moment ugh! a gruesome miracle! The horsemen's uniform, piece by piece, dropped off like rotten tinder. His head turned into a skull, a naked skull without scalp or queue; his body became a skeleton with hour-glass and scythe.*

The spur his gory heel.

The eyes desert the naked skull,  
The mould'ring flesh the bone,  
Till Helen's lily arms entwine  
A ghastly skeleton. (245-52)

Scott expands Bürger's understated 'Des Reiters Koller' (*the horseman's uniform*) into 'gauntlet', 'casque', 'cuirass', and 'spur', and produces suspense by describing the falling down of the armor piece by piece. In the end, the strong contrast between 'lily arms' and 'ghastly skeleton' is emphasized. Scott sticks to the details which produce a Gothic taste of his own.

Thus, the characteristics of Scott's translation ballad are clearly revealed. In the first scene, Scott creates elaborate and sentimental expressions, but first of all, he sets the story in his own outstanding device of the lonely tower. It shows his strong attachment to his childhood experience in his locality. In the second scene, Scott succeeds in introducing Bürger's 'galloping rhythm' and creating a heavy but rhythmic tone with repeated short-syllable words in his English ballad. And also the detail of the lonely tower increases Scott's own Gothic atmosphere. In the third scene, he describes William's armor more concretely than Bürger, which leads to the horrible contrast of lily and skeleton.

As a whole, Scott tried to express his own style of Gothicism in his

translated ballad. His Gothic devices were created by his attachment to his locality and the sound of his language. They convinced Scott that his locality and language could express as effectively as the Gothic taste he was involved in at that time. "William and Helen" was a key piece in Scott's career as a literary balladist, and prepared him for publishing *Minstrelsy* as his patriotic collection of ballads from the Border areas.<sup>14</sup>

### Gothicism and the Spirit of Locality

Percy's *Reliques* and German Gothicism produced Scott's literary landmark, *Minstrelsy*. It consists of historical and romantic ballads of the Border areas, and his imitations of them. Two essays of "Introductory Remarks on Popular Poetry" and "Essay on Imitations of the Ancient Ballads" were added to the 1830 edition. Therefore, it is Scott's official expression of his respect for the cultural legacy of his locality, and that of his concept of literary balladry. In his "Introduction" to *Minstrelsy*, Scott explains his imitations of the ancient ballads as follows:

[Modern imitations of the ancient style of composition have]  
been supposed capable of uniting the vigorous numbers and wild

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<sup>14</sup> Friedman mentions the unexpectedness of the fact that, not Scottish ballads, but German Gothicism triggered Scott's ballad writing: 'Scott himself fell under the same influences that were moving Lewis; for, strange as it may seem, Scott, who was a master of ballad lore from boyhood, did not take to writing ballads as a result of collecting and studying the Border ballads, but rather as a consequence of his enormous admiration for the German artistic imitations of the ancient style with their love of supernatural terrors.' (287)

fiction which occasionally charm us in the ancient ballad, with a greater equality of versification and elegance of sentiment than we can expect to find in the words of a rude age. (69)

Scott defines imitation balladry as versification with elegant sentiment. But at the same time, with vigorousness and rudeness of ancient balladry. That is to say, literary balladry is refined verses of ancient rude narratives. He puts the importance on refining ancient ballads. On the other hand, Scott is cautious about excessive or irrelevant refinement. In "Essays on Imitations of the Ancient Ballad", citing the famous advocacy of the rudeness of ancient ballads from Sidney's *Defense of Poesy*,<sup>15</sup> Scott says as follows:

The facility of versification and of poetical diction is decidedly in favour of the moderns . . . . The poetry addressed to the populace, and enjoyed by them alone, was animated by the spirit that was breathed around. (536)

Scott insists that poetry is animated not by poetic diction, but by the populace and the spirit of their locality. In order to define what literary ballads are, Scott is keeping a balance between literary refinement and poetry for the people.

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<sup>15</sup> 'Certainly I must confess mine own barbarousness; I never heard the old Song of Percy and Douglas that I found not my heart moved more than with a trumpet; and yet it is sung but by some blind crowder, with no rougher voice than rude style; which being so evil appavelled in the dust and cobwebs of that uncivil age, what would it work, trimmed in the gorgeous eloquence of Pindar?' (*Defense of Poesy* 29)

When this finely-balanced definition of Scott is applied to "William and Helen", his elaborate and sentimental expressions and introduction of Bürger's 'galloping rhythm' can be understood as his attempt to refine the original rudeness, and the detailed lonely tower as his attempt to retain the ballad for the people of his locality. Therefore, the Gothic atmosphere Scott created in "William and Helen" is an attempt to retain the spirit of the locality, and at the same time, to create a literary ballad Scott can be satisfied with.

## Chapter II

### Davidson's Defiance and Return towards Scottish Identity

## 1 John Davidson and Unstable Scottish Identity

‘Dung’ in London or Pioneer of Scottish Renaissance?

The Industrial Revolution began in the eighteenth century, and the British Empire enjoyed her prosperity to the full in the nineteenth century. In 1851 the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations, or the Crystal Palace Exhibition, was held in London, and the Crystal Palace was acknowledged as a symbol of the fortune and fame of the Empire. In 1854 after the Exhibition, the Palace was relocated at Sydenham in Greater London (Sloan 222). The Scottish poet, John Davidson, visited it twice and penetrated the irony created by the incongruity between the symbol of the nation’s prosperity and purpose-less, mob-like people around it. In “The Crystal Palace” (1908-09) he mockingly calls the palace, ‘Victorian temple of commercialism, / Our very own eighth wonder of the world’ (14-15), and describes the people who are not interested in the meaning of the construction:

Beyond a doubt a most unhappy crowd!  
Some scores of thousands searching up and down  
The north nave and the south nave hungrily  
For space to sit and rest to eat and drink:  
.....  
Crowd; Mob; a blur of faces featureless,

Of forms inane; a stranded shoal of folk” (134-37, 144-45).

As well as shrewd observation, fierce but honest description of people and society using modernistic techniques is one of characteristics of Davidson’s poetry. Like T. S. Eliot’s description of a waste city in *The Waste Land* (1922), Davidson, telling with irritation the bare facts of society by simply lining up the short syllables of ‘crowd’, ‘sit’, ‘rest’, ‘eat’, ‘mob’, ‘blur’, ‘shoal’, and ‘folk’, paradoxically heightens his irony to the incongruity between the Palace and the people.

Davidson was shrewd at not only observing the early twentieth-century people around the Crystal Palace, but in *The Testament of a Man Forbid* (1901) Davidson was also shrewd at describing the lower classes in London in the late nineteenth century. The rapid and noticeable expanding of power caused by the Industrial Revolution turned London into a notorious slum city called ‘the wen’.<sup>1</sup> In the shade of the prosperity of the British Empire, such people as the extremely poor, underpaid workers, prostitutes, and infant chimney sweeps were exploited and forced to spend harsh lives. Davidson is never afraid of talking about the contradiction between the prosperity of the Empire and the people suffering there. In *The Testament of a Man Forbid*, the narrator, ‘a man forbid’<sup>2</sup>, fiercely

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<sup>1</sup> ‘The Great Wen’ is the contemptuous expression for London. William Cobbett, a journalist, used the term in his *Rural Rides* (1830): ‘what is to be the fate of the great wen of all? The monster, called by the silly coxcombs of the press, “the metropolis of the empire”?’ (42).

<sup>2</sup> ‘The term “Man forbid” comes from *Macbeth* I. iii. 21’ (Turnbull 2: 513). The first witch in the heath says ‘He shall live in a man forbid.’ ‘Forbid’ here means ‘accursed’.

proclaiming that 'Mankind has cast me out' (1), scoops out what is lying under the seemingly beautiful world with his solitary monologue:

This Beauty, this Divinity, this Thought,  
This hallowed bower and harvest of delight  
Whose roots ethereal seemed to clutch the stars,  
Whose amaranths perfumed eternity,  
Is fixed in earthly soil enriched with bones  
Of used-up workers; fattened with the blood  
Of prostitutes, the prime manure; and dressed  
With brains of madmen and the broken hearts  
Of children. Understand it, you at least  
Who toil all day and writhe and groan all night  
With roots of luxury, a cancer struck  
In every muscle: out of you it is  
Cathedrals rise and Heaven blossoms fair;  
You are the hidden putrefying source  
Of beauty and delight, of leisured hours,  
Of passionate loves and high imaginings:  
You are the dung that keeps the roses sweet. (106-22)

London in those days enjoyed its 'beauty' or 'divinity', an illusion provided by its economic development, just like the 'eternally-perfumed amaranth'. Davidson, however, focused on the soil in which the imaginary flower was planted and the dung by which it was nurtured. It is 'used-up workers',

‘prostitutes’, ‘madmen’, and ‘children’ who ‘keep the roses sweet’ as ‘the dung’.

Davidson’s ironic voice against the illusion of London gives readers a strong impression of an English poet representing the lower classes, but in fact he was born in Scotland and, in the history of Scottish literature, acknowledged as a typical bicultural writer who moved from Scotland to England in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Davidson arrived in London in 1889 with the ambition of making a living by his own pen. His medium of expression was not Scots, but rather colloquial English. The choice of language brought him posthumous success as a modernist writer. In 1961, T. S. Eliot confessed ‘a particular debt’ to Davidson in his “Preface” to *John Davidson: A Selection of his Poems* edited by Maurice Lindsay:

I feel a peculiar reverence, and acknowledge a particular debt, towards poets . . . : the author of *The City of Dreadful Night*, and the author of *Thirty Bob a Week*. . . . Some may think . . . that the obligation of Davidson was merely for technical hints. Certainly, *Thirty Bob a Week* seems to me the only poem in which Davidson freed himself completely from the poetic diction of English verse of his time . . . . But I am sure that I found inspiration in the content of the poem, and in the complete fitness of content and idiom: for I also had a good many dingy urban images to reveal. (xi-xii)

The ancestor of ‘dingy urban images’ of Eliot’s *The Waste Land* was

Davidson's "Thirty Bob a Week".

In 1891 Davidson's apprentice collection, *In a Music-Hall, and Other Poems*, was published. *Fleet Street Eclogue*, the title of which produces a sharp irony with an unexpected combination of a metonym for the publishing business and pastoral poetry, was published in 1893 and its second series in 1895. They brought success to Davidson. His best and most famous collection, *Ballads and Songs*, which includes "Thirty Bob a Week", was issued in 1894. So far his ambition was realized. But gradually readers began to leave him. London in the late nineteenth century was at once a utopia and an abyss for literary aspirants. John Sloan gives us a brief sketch of the expanding journalism in the era:

From the middle to the end of the nineteenth century, literacy had increased in England by over 30 percent. The newspaper and magazine industry had expanded accordingly. By 1890 there were almost eighteen hundred periodicals in circulation, . . . Some benefited from the growth. . . . Kipling was paid a huge sum — reportedly £100 — for each of his ballads . . . . But there were also thousands of free-lance scribblers and hacks at the lower end of Grub Street, labouring for an average rate of 10 shillings per thousand words, . . . (*John Davidson, First of the Moderns* 47)

Davidson was also one of the labourers for 10 shillings per thousand words. Davidson wrote to Sir William Symington McCormick in order to dissuade

him from coming to London.

There are thousands of men in London, well-recommended, hundreds of them with English university degrees, scores of them authors of repute, battering at the doors of every newspaper, review and magazine, and shoving each other away from the keyhole to shout through it, 'Needless to say, I don't care what I do, If I make money honestly or dishonestly.' There is no use in the world joining in the crowd, especially if you insist on being honest. I was in the crowd, I am tough, and my wounds and bruises are not whole yet. (11 Apr. 1895, U of Glasgow MS [Gen 548/3/19], Sloan 46-47).

Davidson assured that he was 'tough', but frustration at not being appreciated by readers as well as by literary journalists in London, and subsequent hardship in living caused Davidson to have a serious mental breakdown about in 1897. Struggling with the hardships of creation, mental breakdown, and mundane needs, Davidson began in 1900 to write "the Testament" series of blank-verse philosophical poems, whose subjects were torture, murder, the evolution of man, and the nature of ether. In 1907, for a change of air and in need of cheap living costs, he and his family left London for Cornwall. Davidson disappeared in the evening of the 23rd March 1909, and his body was found off the seashore of Penzance on the 18th September. The exploitation of human beings in the name of the economic development described in *The Testament of a Man Forbid* was

literally a testament of the ‘mad’ poet, who had abandoned the land of his innate identity to acquire a new one and literary success in the southern country, but in the end was accursed and abandoned by the prosperous Metropolis. He himself was also ‘dung’ in the literary world in London.

About fifty years later, when Davidson received increasing reevaluation as a modernist poet after the publication of *John Davidson: A Selection of his Poems*, Hugh MacDiarmid, a distinguished driving force of the Scottish Renaissance in the early twentieth century, evaluated Davidson as a forerunner of the Scottish Renaissance in his contribution to Lindsay’s anthology, “John Davidson: Influences and Influence”:

What Davidson, alone of Scottish poets, did was to enlarge the subject matter of poetry, assimilate and utilize a great deal of new scientific and other contemporary material, pioneer in poetic drama and other forms, and recognize thus early the exhaustion of English, . . . and, above all, to write urban poetry . . . . Yet most of our versifiers continued to write nostalgic, pseudo-pastoral rubbish about an Arcadian life which had no relation to the facts at all. (50-51)

Although his harsh criticism against other Scottish poets of the nineteenth century is itself criticized in the twenty-first century as ‘prejudicial criticism’,<sup>3</sup> MacDiarmid, just like Eliot, celebrates not ‘nostalgic’, but ‘new’,

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<sup>3</sup> Douglas Gifford, citing MacDiarmid, devotes a page to the vicissitudes of evaluation of Victorian and Edwardian Scottish literature in “Prejudice: MacDiarmid and Young”, *Scottish Literature: In English and Scots:*

‘contemporary’, and ‘urban’ expressions that Davidson’s poetry achieved. However, at the forefront of the Scottish Renaissance, Davidson’s modernity is directly connected to Scottishness. Following the celebration above, MacDiarmid declares: ‘Social protest, espousal of the cause of the underdog, anti-religion, materialism, Rabelaisian wit, invective — all these find a place much more easily and prominently in the Scottish than in the English tradition’ (51). The high commendation by MacDiarmid focuses on Davidson’s contemporary Scottishness.

Was Davidson dung in London or a pioneer of the Scottish Renaissance? The enormous gap between the two evaluations implies not only that Davidson’s works have unfathomable depth of interest, but also that the poet’s identity, affected by his career as a bicultural writer, was unstable. In his birthplace Scotland or in tumultuous and insane London, what relationship did Davidson have with the literary predecessors of his native land? Hereafter Davidson’s defiance and return towards Scottish identity will be discussed by analyzing his literary ballads.

#### Antipathy and Attachment to the Country

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‘Prejudicial criticism has been arisen not only from the external perspectives of Anglo-British cultural priorities, but also from the politics of literary criticism within Scotland. Even Hugh MacDiarmid, eager to establish himself as the forefront of a new and dynamic literary movement, presented the previous century as a creative vacuum, a negative situation against which the Scottish Renaissance reacted, rather than as a productive context from which it evolved. In an essay in *John Davidson: A Selection of his Poems* (1961) MacDiarmid suggested that, with the exception of a few poets like Alexander Smith and John Davidson, Scotland’s writers had largely failed, and were still failing, to engage with realistic urban poetry, . . .’ (332)

Davidson's biography and some of his works convey that he rebelled fiercely against his father's Evangelicalism. "A Ballad in Blank Verse" (1905) is a kind of mental autobiography, where we can follow the religious conflict of a youth with his parents and break with their Christianity. The ballad was originally written in 1894 under the title of "A Ballad in Blank Verse of the Making of a Poet", whose content and title Davidson refined when he issued *Selected Poems* towards the end of his life. The main character, a young man, is ardently required to take Communion by his parents, but he is fundamentally opposed to his father's narrow-minded personality which is, according to the young man's understanding, given by the father's religious devotion:

His father, woman-hearted, great of soul,  
 Wilful and proud, save for one little shrine  
 That held a pinch-beck cross, had closed and barred  
 The many mansions of his intellect. (49-52)

The father patiently asks him to accept Christianity by saying 'My son, have you decided to the Lord? / Your mother's heart and mine are exercised / For your salvation. Will you turn to Christ?' (57-59), and his mother moans about her impious son by saying 'Almighty God! — / Almighty God! — Oh, save my foolish boy' (94-95). However, the young man is totally indifferent to what they are crying for. He cannot hear their persuasion, but he is seeing visions of Greek myths, where 'Apollo on the Dardan beach' (82) is

reluctantly building the Trojan walls, or 'the Cyprian Aphrodite' (104) is holding dead Adonis in her warm embrace. The parents' hope and the young man's future vision never meet; the parents' religion is never replaced by artistic desire. But persuasion by the father is repeated again and again after the mother died of 'anguish for his sins' (132), and the young man accepted Communion once. He could experience nothing spiritual when the ceremony was done. Instead, he again saw a mesmerizing vision of mermaids beckoning him when he was walking by the purple firth:

. . . ; beneath his feet the earth  
Quaked like a flame-sapped bridge that spans the wave  
Of fiery Phlegethon; and in the wind  
An icy voice was borne from some waste place,  
Piercing him to the marrow. (204-208)

At this moment, the vision of mermaids gives him a revelation. He understands what he is searching for:

'I'll have no creed'  
He said. 'Though I be weakest of my kind,  
I'll have no creed. Lo! There is but one creed,  
The vulture-phoenix that for ever tears  
The soul of man in chains of flesh and blood  
Riveted to the earth; . . . (215-20)

He cries a declaration of emancipation from any kind of creed, which the vulture-phoenix shedding tears for 'human beings bound' symbolizes. His creed is now to have no creed. The emancipation of himself accelerates more audacious affirmation of his own existence. He is conscious of his own self: that is, he is completely independent:

Henceforth I shall be God; for consciousness  
Is God: I suffer; I am God; this Self,  
That all the universe combines to quell,  
Is greater than the universe; and *I*  
Am that I am. (226-30)

Hearing his son's blasphemy, the father died in despair. But when the young man was again walking on the shore of the firth where he knows 'every rock and sandy reach' (381), he noticed that a God may be a creed, and cried 'How unintelligent, how blind am I, / How vain! . . . A god? a mole, a worm!' (391-92). Towards the end of the story, he reaches the two essences of his creed as no creed: the one is completely apart from any commitment. He says 'No creed for me! I am a man apart: / A mouthpiece for the creeds of all the world' (426-27), and 'A trembling lyre for every wind to sound' (435). The other is, although it seems contradictory, the acceptance of the whole universe:

I am a man set by to overhear  
The inner harmony, the very tune

Of Nature's heart; (435-37)

Within my heart

I'll gather all the universe, and sing

As sweetly as the spheres; and I shall be

The first of men to understand himself . . . (443-46)

Thus, a poet was born. The newborn persona created by Davidson is totally indifferent to any kind of creed, but still remains his own self as the center of the universe. He has acquired a kind of existential philosophy. Peterson labels it as 'a sort of center of indifference', which is a basis of Nietzschean 'eternal questioning' (42).<sup>4</sup>

As well as antipathy towards Evangelicalism, Davidson despised his hometown of Greenock in Renfrewshire, Scotland. Davidson gained acquaintance with an English poet, A. C. Swinburne through John Nichol, Professor of English literature at Glasgow University, under whom Davidson studied in around 1877. Davidson was infatuated with the poet,

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<sup>4</sup> 'Thus, the tendency present in Davidson from the very first, that tendency to reject all authority and conventions, his "everlasting no," has now become the basis for a whole philosophy of life, a sort of "center of indifference." Here, indeed, is a real basis for sympathy between Nietzsche and Davidson — the eternal questioning.' (42) However, Peterson is careful to point out the limits of Nietzsche's influence on the poem: 'Because Davidson did not read German, we must conclude that his earliest thorough acquaintance with Nietzsche came with his reading of the English translations, or perhaps from the analysis of Nietzsche's thought by Havelock Ellis in three articles published in the *Savoy* in April, June, and August, 1896. Therefore, the apparent influence of Nietzsche on the poem in question 'Ballad in Blank Verse', or indeed on any writings up to April, 1896, must be discounted.' (40)

and ardently sent his poems and letters to the poet. In a letter of 28, March 1878, Davidson mentioned his antipathy to his native place as the ‘Philistinism’ and ‘murky atmosphere of Greenock’ (Lang 47-48)<sup>5</sup>. In fact, Greenock was a slummy local town in Davidson’s days, and had two contradicting faces of a nostalgic spot for romantic Scotland recalled by Burns’ Highland Mary’s monument, and of a pioneering area of the steam age as the birthplace of James Watt. Sloan’s brief explanation of the town is enough to understand the reality Davidson faced and the reason why he created “Thirty Bob a Week” in which a poor clerk working like a mole in a big city monologizes of his pride in the plight.

Greenock was at that time a thriving Victorian seaport, and as was often the case, an important centre for the foreign missions. Its main industries were shipbuilding and sugar-refining, but it also had engineering works, iron forges, cooperages, tanneries and cotton mills. Its population had almost doubled during the first thirty years of Queen Victoria’s reign to nearly 40,000. As in other Victorian towns, prosperity and squalor [sic] were to be found together. There was a high incidence of alcoholism and

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<sup>5</sup> Davidson asks Swinburne to find a publisher for his poems. Towards the end of the letter, he wrote: ‘You will probably wonder that there is next to no echo — at least I think so — of your style in any verses of mine that may deserve the name of poetry. The reason is that on account of the Philistinism in which I have been brought up, and which is both the nitrogen and oxygen of the murky atmosphere of Greenock — within the veil of which I thank God I did not live, but by the shore — such a volume of ozone as your poetry is regarded as the subtlest poison, and I possessed no golden lightning-rod to attract it to me, so that it is just a year since I began to revel in that divine ether.’

violent crime. John's father — a well-known temperance reformer — may have been drawn there for this reason. Large numbers of men were to be found in Greenock at any one time — sailors from around the world, as well as immigrants from Ireland and the Western Isles who arrived looking for work. (6)

Part of the harsh reality cited above comes from what Davidson seemed to have experienced and witnessed in his teens. At the age of fifteen, Davidson worked for Walker's Sugarhouse, and the next year he moved to the Public Analyst's Laboratory, 'which had been established to check the levels of adulteration by sugar manufacturers such as Walker's' (Sloan 9). After leaving the laboratory, he was hired as a pupil teacher at the Highland Academy. Education in those days was esteemed as highly as it is today in Scotland, but the reality was that 'pupil teachers earned between 4 and 10 shillings a week' and he might have managed 'the classes at the school averaging between fifty and seventy pupils' (Sloan 10). 'Prosperity and squalor [sic]' lay right by Davidson.

Contrary to the antipathy to the environment of his hometown, however, Davidson begins "A Ballad in Blank Verse" with deep satisfaction which the beautiful nature and vibrant atmosphere of his hometown gave him:

His father's house looked out across a firth  
 Broad-bosomed like a mere, beside a town  
 Far in the North, where Time could take his ease,

And Change hold holiday; where Old and New  
Weltered upon the border of the world. (1-5)

The old house in the North stands overlooking a vast firth, along which the young man walks each time he has religious conflicts with his father. Davidson seems to express the same nostalgia for the lost Arcadian life that MacDiarmid criticized: time passes slowly, and there is no change. He is fully satisfied with the region, and regards the firth as the birthplace of his future. He naively cries on the shore:

‘Now may my life beat out upon this shore  
A prouder music than the winds and waves  
Can compass in their haughtiest moods. I need  
No world more spacious than the region here: (10-13)

He believes that his satisfaction can create a greater music than nature does. However, at the same time, the young man surely notices that some development might be brought there, because he says ‘Old and New / Weltered upon the border of the world’ (4-5). He witnesses and appreciates the old and the new jostling each other even in a familiar place:

The sloping shores that fringe the velvet tides  
With heavy bullion and with golden lace  
Of restless pebble woven and fine spun sand;  
The villages that sleep the winter through,

And, wakening with the spring, keep festival  
 All summer and all autumn: this grey town  
 That pipes the morning up before the lark  
 With shrieking steam, and from a hundred stalks  
 Lacquers the sooty sky: where hammers clang  
 On iron hulls, and cranes in harbors creak  
 Rattle and swing, whole cargoes on their necks;  
 Where men sweat gold that other hoard or spend,  
 And lurk like vermin in their narrow streets: (18-30)

The young man describes in detail the shores full of light and colors, like an impressionist painting. He appreciates the life force of the villages along the shores: surviving in the hard winter, they enjoy warm seasons. But at the same time, he clearly records how the hometown is industrialized. Hundreds of stalks are belching shrieking steam and making the sky sooty; hammers and cranes are working with a loud noise; and workers in the densely-populated town are sweating to earn money. The young man repeats again ‘This old grey town’ (31) . . . ‘Is world enough for me’ (36). Both the natural beauty and the unpleasant views of industrialization nurture the aspiring young man. The old and the new create his existence.

“A Ballad in Blank Verse” adopts ballad in the title, but it has neither a ballad stanza, a characteristic ballad style of refrain or repetition, nor a ballad motif, excepting the opening lines repeated three times, and the picturesque dawn in the town repeated twice, in the monologue. After his mother ‘died in anguish for his sins’ (132), his father reproached him saying

'You killed your mother, you are killing me' (137). But the young man only repeats the opening lines with a detached tone:

For this was in the North, where Time stands still  
And Change holds holiday, where Old and New  
Welter upon the border of the world,  
And savage faith works woe. (139-42)

'Savage faith' conveys the poet's strong aversion to the faith of his parents. And one more time, after his father followed his wife crying 'If his sin / Be not to death . . . Heaven opens!' (352-53), the young man again puts the same lines with the same detached tone.

Thus he died;

For this was in the North where Time stands still,  
And Change holds holiday; where Old and New  
Welter upon the border of the world,  
And savage creeds can kill. (353-57)

'Savage faith' (142) is altered slightly into 'savage creeds' (357) like the incremental repetition of a ballad technique, which intensifies his aversion and his irony.

In lines 36 to 48 where the young man is confessing that the region is world enough for him, the picturesque dawn, the glorious seasonal changes of the region, and the young man's ideal deeds of men and women living

there are described richly: 'Here daily dawn / Burns through the smoky east' (36-37); 'here winter plies his craft, / Soldering the years with ice' (40-41); 'And here are men to know, women to love' (48).<sup>6</sup> The aspiring young man is conscious of being closely united with nature. However, at the end of his monologue when a Nietzschean 'eternal questioning' poet was newly born shouting 'No creed for me!' (426), the same beauty, glory, and ideal encourage him:

And lo! to give me courage comes the dawn,  
 Crimsoning the smoky east; and still the sun  
 With fire-shod feet shall step from hill to hill  
 Downward before the night; winter shall ply  
 His ancient craft, soldering the years with ice;  
 And spring appear, caught in a leafless brake,  
 Breathless with wonder and the tears half-dried  
 Upon her rosy cheek; summer shall come

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<sup>6</sup> The lines from 36 to 48 are cited below:

Here daily dawn  
 Burns through the smoky east; with fire-shod feet  
 The sun treads heaven, and steps from hill to hill  
 Downward before the night that still pursues  
 His crimson wake; here winter plies his craft,  
 Soldering the year with ice; here spring appears,  
 Caught in a leaflets brake, her garland torn,  
 Breathless with wonder, and the tears half-dried  
 Upon her rosy cheek; here summer comes  
 And wastes his passion like a prodigal  
 Right royally; and here her golden gains  
 Free-handed as a harlot autumn spends;  
 And here are men to know, women to love.'

And waste his passion like a prodigal  
Right royally; and autumn spend her gold  
Free-handed as a harlot; men to know,  
Women to love are waiting everywhere.’ (447-58)

His hometown not only nurtures the aspiring man by giving him satisfaction, but also celebrates the birth of the self-independent and ‘eternal questioning’ poet. The blissful nature of Scotland undoubtedly forged Davidson’s identity as a Scottish man and poet.

The two repeated parts in the monologue intensify the young man’s consistent detachment from any creeds, and his unchanged integration with nature. Let us remember again Sloan’s explanation of the historical reality of Greenock. Davidson, knowing well the harsh reality of his hometown, describes its gorgeous surroundings and industrialized vibrant atmosphere. Greenock must have provided Davidson with mundane conflict and lyrical impulse: facing the radical change and the squalid reality of his native town, and at the same time being irritated at his father’s religion and convention, Davidson was excited by the beauty of the town. Davidson’s identity was nurtured in the total contradiction: as Hubbard says, ‘Davidson despised equally the dour philistinism of Scotland and the fashionable languor of London’ (75). Greenock, in the early stage of his life, provided the Scottish poet with an unstable identity.

Although Davidson’s identity was unstable, he undoubtedly kept his Scottish blood. In 1886 before leaving for London Davidson wrote a historical drama, *Bruce: A Drama in Five Acts*, glorifying the national hero

Robert the Bruce and conveying enthusiastic patriotism. In the opening scene Edward I is alarmed at Bruce's rebellious spirit: 'He goes to Scotland, and his guiding star / Is that same beacon of rebellious light / Built up by every burning Scottish heart.' (1. 1. 11-13) The drama ends with the victory of Scotland at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314, when Scotland defeated England led by Edward II, and was reestablished as an independent nation. Davidson's 'burning Scottish heart' was also witnessed and scorned by W. B. Yeats who met Davidson at a society of poets called 'the Rhymer's Club' in London. Against Davidson's criticizing the club as lacking in 'blood and guts', Yeats ironically mentioned Davidson's violent energy as 'a fire of straw' and 'useless in the arts' (*Autobiography* 392).<sup>7</sup>

#### Unstable Identity under the Shadow of Burns

Davidson had Scottish 'blood and guts'. However, compared with Davidson's Scottish predecessor, Walter Scott, who conveyed solid national identity through *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* and an essay titled "Essay on Imitations of the Ancient Ballad", Davidson was still defiant of Scottish

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<sup>7</sup> Yeats' severe antagonism against and frosty look at Davidson are clearly stated in "The Tragic Generation" in *Autobiographies*: 'I think he might [h]ave grown to be a successful man had he been enthusiastic instead about Dowson or Johnson, or Horne or Symons, for they had what I still lacked, conscious deliberate craft, and what I must lack always, scholarship. They had taught me that violent energy, which is like a fire of straw, consumes in a few minutes the nervous vitality, and is useless in the arts. . . . With enough passion to make a great poet, through meeting no man of culture in early life, he lacked intellectual receptivity, and, anarchic and indefinite, lacked pose and gesture, and now no verse of his clings to my memory.' (391-92)

identity. One of his early poems, “Ayrshire Jock”, conveys the instability and the defiance. The poem was written in the late 1870s when Davidson was in a literary circle led by John Nichol in Glasgow, and was issued in *In a Music-Hall and Other Poems* in 1891 in London. The narrator Old John is a struggling writer living in a garret in Glasgow: his writing-gear, ink, and tallow-candle are miserable, and his ‘heart and brain are nearly dead’ (15). As Davidson in an essay “On the Downs” in *The Man Forbid and Other Essays* wrote ‘When the Scotsman finds himself at cross-purposes with life, what course does he follow? . . . He either sits down and drinks deeply, thoughtfully, systematically, of the amber spirit of his country, or he reads philosophy’ (248), Old John, struggling with loneliness and poverty in the life of a poet, is drinking whisky, analyzing the standpoint of a Scottish poet, and justifying himself. Deprecating his own situation in monologue, and being accompanied by whistling wind in every muffled chimney, Old John suddenly experiences a vivid hallucination about his old home. Sitting in the harsh reality, he sees in his vision the simple cottage-like home with drooping eaves, bronze thatch, and sea-green shutters. But the poet turns his back on the vision. The reason why he would not see the old place might lie in his awareness of the big gap between the present and the past. By seeing the vision, John’s monologue accelerates into the climax where he confesses the cause of the predicament of Scottish poets.

That’s good! To get this golden juice  
 I starve myself and go threadbare.  
 What matter though my life be loose?

Few know me now, and fewer care.  
Like many another lad from Ayr —  
This is a fact, and all may know it —  
And many a Scotchman everywhere,  
Whisky and Burns made me a poet. (57-64)

Old John is clearly aware of himself as a beggarly alcoholic, and of being abandoned in a society, but he defends his being a social outcast by saying that this is the result of the great influence of the Bard of Ayrshire, Robert Burns.

Just as the penny dreadfuls make  
The 'prentice rob his master's till,  
Ploughboys their honest work forsake,  
Inspired by Robert Burns. They swill  
Whisky like him, and rhyme; but still  
Success attends on imitation  
Of faults alone: to drink a gill  
Is easier than to stir a nation. (65-72)

Old John is one of the unsuccessful Burnsian followers. As well as Old John, many other Scots dreamt of becoming 'a ploughman poet' like Burns, but they were merely epigones, and therefore, unlike Burns' poems, their works had no power to encourage their readers to reevaluate the lost nation and the lost national pride since the Union of Parliaments in 1707. They just took

refuge in drinking because it is 'easier than to stir a nation.'

They drink, and write their senseless rhymes,  
Tagged echoes of the lad of Kyle,  
In mongrel Scotch: didactic times  
In Englishing our Scottish style  
Have yet but scotched it: in a while  
Our bonny dialects may fade hence:  
And who will dare to coin a smile  
At those who grieve for their decadence? (73-80)

Moreover, the epigones of Burns have not noticed that their weapon of Scots was invaded far more extensively by English, while they imitated the nostalgic atmosphere of Burns' famous song, "There was a lad" (1787) which begins with 'There was a lad was born in Kyle'.

These rhymesters end in scavenging,  
Or carrying coals, or breaking stones:  
But I am of a stronger wing,  
And never racked my brains or bones.  
I rhymed in English, catching tones  
From Shelley and his great successors;  
Then in reply to written groans,  
There came kind letters from professors. (81-88)

The end of the poor epigones might have been ‘dung’ in a slum city, who made their living as scavengers or coal miners. Old John was never so stupid as to follow in their footsteps. He refused writing in non-dominant Scots and chose writing in English to create a new identity in the tradition of English poetry.<sup>8</sup> Old John neither stuck to Scots nor national pride. He pursued a realistic way of life, and made maximum efforts.

However, in the end, his plight of being a struggling alcoholic poet is the same as that of Burns’ followers. Old John is a parody of John Davidson himself: Old John abandoned the old identity symbolized by ‘mongrel Scotch’ and tried to create a new one through English, and Davidson left for London only to fall into mental disorder in the tumult and loneliness of the metropolis. Old John got ‘kind letters from professors’ in return for his groaning in English, but Davidson in reality, being excited by meeting Swinburne in Glasgow, wrote a dozen letters with his poems to ask Swinburne to help him start a poetic career in London, but unfortunately had no reply from Swinburne.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Millard in *Edwardian Poetry* compares the sense of threat to his native language with Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916): “This is a surprisingly Modernist anxiety, one given fuller expression in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young man*: ‘His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language’ (137).

<sup>9</sup> Edmund Gosse described Davidson’s encounter with Swinburne in *The Life of Algernon Swinburne*: “The most gifted of Nichols’s pupils, the unfortunate John Davidson, who was now an usher at Alexander’s Charity, Glasgow, sent Swinburne some of his unpublished verses. Swinburne received him in Nichol’s house with great affability, laying his hand upon Davidson’s head in a sort of benediction, and addressing him as “Poet.” (243-44) Sloan introduces some incomplete letters of Davidson around 1878

Old John's plight is shared not only by Davidson, but also by some other Scottish writers in the late nineteenth century. Scottish literature after Burns has been 'neglected' (Gifford, *Scottish Literature* ii). The cultural diminishment was not caused by the fact that Scotland had lost the great national poet. Kurt Wittig begins his literary history in the nineteenth century with mentioning the social change of that time: the tremendous pace of industrialization and the rapid increase of Anglicized Scottish writers as its result (239). And Edwin Morgan coherently explains the results of this social change in "Scottish Poetry in the Nineteenth Century": 'the absence of commanding creative figures'; 'the lack of good critics who might have stopped a slide into sentimentality'; 'the decline of the famously sharp literary journals like the *Edinburgh Review* and *Blackwood's Magazine*'; 'a rapid downturn in the intellectual and cultural sprightliness of Edinburgh'; 'a diaspora' of Scottish writers; and 'questions about a poet's "Scottishness"' (*History of Scottish Literature* 337). After the 1840s, discussions of national identity disappeared in Scottish literature, and instead, the rise of romanticism and sentimentality attracted attention from outside Scotland. Although it is said that 'the promotion of these images had political connotations' of establishing Britain and of disguising social change and urbanization 'by the success of Kailyard representations

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from Berg Collection, New York Public Lib., in which Davidson hysterically begged: 'Please read my poems to please me: but do nothing with them or about them save to please yourself. "May you stead me? *will* you please me?" Pity my impatience and answer as suddenly as can be.' (21) Not Swinburne's intentional neglect but his ill health might have disturbed their correspondence: 'From February 1877 to June 1879 he was in a state of constant febrility and ill-health in London, . . .' (*The Life of Algernon Swinburne* 244)

of timeless Scottish villages with gruff, eccentric, but ultimately worthy and devout peasant[s]' (Gifford, *Scottish Literature* 324), it is true that social change cast a considerable impact on the literature of Scottish writers at that time and under its influence the Kailyard school was born, which exploited sentimental and romantic images of small town life in Scotland, with much use of the vernacular language.

Under the shadow of Burns, however, the nineteenth century writers had an achievement: that is, like John Davidson, or Old John, they faced and criticized the era when they lived to embody their plight in a changing and unstable society in their work. In "Glasgow" (1857) by the Glaswegian poet, Alexander Smith, the powerful image of the industrial city is described, the workers and himself being compared to the ebb and flow of the tide:

Black Labour draws his weary waves  
 Into their secret-moaning caves;  
       But with the morning light  
 That sea again will overflow  
 With a long, weary sound of woe,  
       Again to faint in night.  
 Wave am I in that sea of woes,  
 Which night and morning ebbs and flows.

(17-24, from *The Poetry of Scotland*)

Another poet, Janet Hamilton, who spent her whole life in an industrial town in old Lanarkshire, vividly describes noises from factories and the din

in the town using Scots in her “Oor Location”:

A hunner funnles bleezin', reekin',  
 Cóal an' ironstane, charrin', smee kin';  
 Navvies, miners, keepers, fillers,  
 Puddlers, rollers, iron millers;  
 Reestit, reekit, raggit laddies,  
 Firemen, enginemen, an' paddies;  
 Boatmen, banksmen, rough and rattlin',  
 'Bout the wecht wi' colliers battlin',  
 Sweatin', swearin', fechtin' drinkin',  
 Change-house bells an' gill-stoups clinkin'; (1-10)

Rough and lively Scots, alliteration, and the rhyming couplet traditional to Scottish poetry since Barbour's *Brus* create a picture of working people and their tough lives in a rapidly industrializing town.<sup>10</sup> A common attitude among Davidson, Smith, and Hamilton is identified: they never decollate the harsh reality with Arcadian retrospect, but see the reality they are set in, and straightforwardly tell their indignation against their circumstances. Smith calls Glasgow his destined place:

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<sup>10</sup> The tetrameter couplet is used in the earliest Scots long poem in the fourteenth century, John Barbour's *The Bruce*, which created the concept of patriotism and the image of the independent nation of Scotland. Robert Burns adopted the same tetrameter couplet in his “Tam o' Shanter: A Tale” (1790) to emphasize the burlesque aspect of the hero, Tam, and his adventure.

Then wherefore from thee should I range?  
    Thou hast my kith and kin,  
My childhood, youth, and manhood brave —  
Thou hast that unforgotten grave  
    Within thy central din.  
A sacredness of love and death  
Dwells in thy noise and smoky breath. (130-36)

And also Hamilton, with the same lively rhythm, sings ‘the havoc in the nation, / Wrocht by dirty, drucken wives’ (30-31), ‘bairnies’ lives / Lost ilk year through their neglec’ (32-33), or ‘sae many unwed mithers’ (37), and in the end, positively affirms the sin and death, people’s poverty, and heavy drinking generated by the city:

Thick and thrang we see them [sin and death] gaun,  
First the dram-shop, then the pawn;  
Over a’ kin’s o’ ruination,  
Drink’s the king in oor loation. (53-56)

The working poet is skillful enough to remind readers of the opening scene of a folk ballad, “Sir Patrick Spens”: ‘The king sits in Dumferling toune, / Drinking the blude-reid wine’ (1-2, Child 58A). Thus, Old John’s monologue represents the sincere confrontation with the plight of both the people and his contemporary writers in Scotland.

Old John’s criticism against Burnsian followers is loudly repeated by

MacDiarmid. His first step reestablishing Scottish literature and culture in the early twentieth century was to criticize the Burns tradition. In his *Lucky Poet* (1943), MacDiarmid announces that ‘My job in Scotland was to discredit and hustle off the stage a very different kind of poetry — of mawkish doggerel rather, into which the Burns tradition had degenerated.’ (177). And also about Burns himself, MacDiarmid is acrimonious:

He [Burns] owes his unique appeal to the fact that he was a song-writer rather than a poet, and composers invariably prefer poor to good poetry. It is true that Burns pleased — and still pleases — a vast public with his love songs, the horse-sense of his homespun philosophy, and his passionate love of Scotland. But these are all matters of the content of his poems and songs and not of the quality of the poetry as such. (Glen, 178)

MacDiarmid also caricatures those who blindly admire Burns in his masterpiece, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (1926). In this long Scots poem, a typical character in Scottish literature, a drunken hero,<sup>11</sup> tells his

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<sup>11</sup> On the drunken hero of Burns’ “Tam o’ Shanter” (1790), Bold states that ‘an epic drinker, . . . finds that pressures and problems dissolve into drink: . . . The scenario, with drinkers protecting themselves from the external cold by warming themselves internally by imbibing before a fire, is familiar from Burns . . . and, indeed, from the Scots tradition’ (*Burns Companion* 276). On the hero of MacDiarmid’s *Drunk Man*, M. P. McCulloch states that the drunk man persona ‘is also a very relevant *persona* in relation to the contradictory and controversial ideas explored: “there’s nocht sae sober as a man blin’ drunk’ (277) reminds the reader that the mythology of the philosophising drunk has a long history and that a drunk man can get away with behaviour that wouldn’t be sanctioned in the sober world. (“Hugh MacDiarmid, Edwin Muir and Poetry in the Inter-War

chaotic philosophy with the technique of stream of consciousness.

You canna gang to a Burns supper even  
 Wi'oot some wizened scrunt o' a knock-knee  
 Chinee turns roon to say, 'Him Haggis — velly goot!  
 And ten to wan the piper is a Cockney.

No' wan in fifty kens a wurd Burns wrote  
 But misapplied is a' body's property,  
 And gin there was his like alive the day  
 They'd be the last a kennin' haund to gi'e — (37-44)

A Burns supper is a historical Scottish gathering to celebrate the national poet, usually held on the poet's birthday, the 25th of January. MacDiarmid ironically sings the fact that a Burns supper is not a proud national event. Burns in the twentieth century is not a cultural symbol, but comes down to an excuse for a party. Everything at the supper is sham. Even Asians who cannot appreciate haggis come and celebrate it. The bagpiper who plays an important role at the ceremony of cutting haggis is not a Scot but a Cockney. It is nothing but a laughingstock that those who neither know nor understand Burns' poems respect them as the property of the world.

Burns' sentiments o' universal love,  
 In pidgin English or in wild-fowl Scots,

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Period" in *Scottish Literature in English and Scots* 522).

And toastin' ane wha's nocht to them but an  
Excuse for faitherin' Genius wi' *their* thochs.

A' *they've* to say was aften said afore  
A lad was born in Kyle to blaw about. (49-54)

At Burns suppers held in many places around the world, a toaster begins the ceremony with saying 'Robert Burns' in pidgin English or Scots-like pronunciation, and the toaster himself is just an excuse of a gathering. What they know at best is 'A lad was born in Kyle', the first line of "There was a lad".

The drunken narrator outrageously criticizes the absurdity of a Burns supper. Drunkenness in this work, however, is deliberately introduced by MacDiarmid as a way of developing his main themes: it is a gateway to develop the metaphysical discussion of the synthesis of various antitheses, called 'Caledonian antisyzygy',<sup>12</sup> as the essence of Scottish literature, to enlighten readers on Scottish national identity in the days of the Scottish Renaissance in the early twentieth century; and to cultivate artistically unknown areas of his unconscious.<sup>13</sup> For the drunken hero of MacDiarmid, the cynicism towards Burnsian cultists at a Burns club is a first step to get

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<sup>12</sup> G. G. Smith created the term for the essence of Scottish literature: 'Perhaps in the very combination of opposite . . . "the Caledonian Antisyzygy" — we have a reflection of the contrasts which the Scot shows at every turn, in his political and ecclesiastical history, in his polemical restlessness, in his adaptability, . . .'" (4)

<sup>13</sup> On the disguise of drunkenness, see Gish, 66-67; Oxenhorn, 65-67; Nakashima, "A *Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* — On the Logic of Drunkenness" (in Japanese).

out of the chaos of declining Scottish culture and to make his way to 'Caledonian antisyzygy'.

Here it should be again mentioned that Old John sees the vision of his good old cottage in poverty, isolation, and hopelessness, but it is also produced by his drunkenness:

My waning sight

See through the naked windows pass

A vision. Far within the night

A rough-cast cottage, creamy white,

With drooping eaves that need no gutters,

Flashes its bronze thatch in the light,

And flaps its od-style, sea-green shutters.

There I was born. . . . (34-41)

If the drunkenness is a characteristic representation of facing antitheses, 'Caledonian antisyzygy', in the history of Scottish literature, Old John's drunken vision conveys that Davidson has been concerned with the antisyzygy of Scottishness from the beginning of his poetic career, though Davidson makes Old John strongly disavow his Scottish identity. Along with MacDiarmid's drunken man, for Davidson's Old John, the criticism against Burnsian followers and the drunkenness is a way to face the instability of his identity.

## 2 Davidson's Defiance and Return towards Walter Scott

### Balladry for Davidson

Before discussing Davidson's defiance towards Scottish identity described in his literary ballads, the significance of balladry for Davidson should be stated. Davidson created many ballad poems, which gave him an important position in the genealogy of the literary ballad in the nineteenth century. He started his poetic career with a ballad at the age of twelve. *The Bookman* reported '[h]is twelfth year seems also to have been the date of his first essay in poetry — a sturdy ballad on the Defeat of the Moors by Ramiro, King of Spain, when under the celestial sword of St. Iago twice thirty thousand heathen fell. This heroic bugle-song the poet has willingly let die' (7: 48). One of the causes of Davidson's precocious commitment to writing the ballad was the influence of a predecessor in his homeland, Walter Scott. According to Townsend's simple description, '[a]t seven he discovered Scott, whom he read voraciously' (35). There is no doubt that Scott and his *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* had a great influence on literary people in those days. Alfred Tennyson was one of the most ardent readers of Scott, and was often asked by his college friends at Cambridge 'to declaim the many ballads he knew by heart, "Clerke Saunders", "Helen of Kirkconnel", "May Margaret", and others' (*Memoir* 1: 48).<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the era in which

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<sup>1</sup> The titles included in Part II: Romantic Ballads, *Minstrelsy* are "Clerk Saunders", "Fair Helen of Kirconnell", and "The Laird of o' Logie".

Davidson lived enjoyed a prosperous ballad culture. In the nineteenth century over sixty poets produced about four hundred ballad pieces, some of which showed their skillful, humorous, and parodying modification of traditional balladry.<sup>2</sup> As Malcolm Laws, Jr. points out, the prosperity was caused by the fact that '[t]he successful parody of a particular ballad type naturally depends on the reader's recognition of stylistic peculiarities', and this meant '[i]n nineteenth-century Britain almost everyone knew some Scottish balladry and could appreciate the author's reshaping of it for humorous purposes' (126). The matrix of balladry still survived in the daily life of both poets and readers in Davidson's days.

Davidson's two literary social-gatherings are worth mentioning. When Davidson worked as a teacher in Scotland in the late 1870s, he became a member of 'the Glasgow Ballad Club' founded in 1876. The aim of the club was 'the study of Ballads and Ballad Literature, and the production and friendly criticism of original Ballads contributed by the members, the word 'ballad' being interpreted in a sense sufficiently wide to include lyrical poems' (O'Connor 27). The other social-gathering was 'the Rhymer's Club' hosted by Yeats. Since 1889 Davidson had struggled to find a chance to publish some drafts ready for a publisher, and joined the "Rhymers' Club" to get in touch with other men of letters. Bernard Bergonzi introduces the club in "Aspects of the Fin de Siècle":

Yeats and Symons were associated in a group of poets calling

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<sup>2</sup> Literary ballads of the nineteenth century are accessible on *The English Literary Ballads Archive*, the world's first database of literary ballads. It has accumulated 742 literary ballads by 143 poets of the last 300 years.

themselves the Rhymer's Club that met during the nineties; in Yeats words, the Club 'for some years was to meet every night in an upper room with a sanded floor in an ancient eating-house in Fleet Street called the Cheshire Cheese.' The Rhymers as their name denoted, aimed at the unpretentious pursuit of pure song, purged of Victorian rhetoric or moralizing, and their habit of meeting regularly in such surroundings was an attempt to combine French literary café life with Johnsonian conviviality.' (471)

The Rhymers' Club, where famous and anonymous poets gathered, at first glance looks like 'The Club' founded in 1764 where Samuel Johnson was the central figure, but it had a philosophy of purging Victorianism and pursuing pure poetry, and actually published two anthologies. A part of the artistic philosophy of 'the Rhymers' Club' was the production of the *fin de siècle* and the Irish Renaissance. These two social clubs of the poets played the role of a literary driving force for Davidson. 'The Glasgow Ballad Club' complemented restless young Davidson with the environment of some literary friends (Townsend 42), and the early ballads of "Alice", "The Gleeman", and "Thomas the Rhymer" collected in *In a Music-Hall and Other Poems* 'were ready for publication as early as 1884' (Peterson 19). And also 'the Rhymers' Club' in London oriented Davidson towards his own way. In spite of getting his first success in London by *Fleet Street Eclogues*, Davidson exacerbated his isolation in 'the Rhymers' Club'. As well as Yeats' scorning at Davidson with the phrases of 'a fire of straw' and 'useless in the

arts', Derek Stanford in *Three Poets of the Rhymers Club* explained the artistic distance between Davidson and his fellow members, Ernest Dowson and Lionel Johnson. 'Davidson refused to contribute to the two anthologies of the Rhymers' Club' (27), and instead, he issued a series of anthologies with 'ballad' in the title: *Ballads and Songs*, *New Ballads* (1897), and *The Last Ballad and Other Poems* (1899). The early direction of Davidson's work was established by this series of ballad anthologies. One of the most famous and controversial ballads of Davidson's ballads is "A Ballad of Nun" in *Ballads and Songs*, first issued in *The Yellow Book* in October 1894. It is a story of a keeper of a convent door: yielding to the temptation of a carnival of the secular world, she ran down to the city and knew life's great meaning through an encounter with a young man. Noticing her long desire was fulfilled, she came back to the convent, where a vision of the Virgin Mary let her in because the nun is 'sister to the mountains now, / And sister to the day and night; / Sister to God' (149-51). The ballad directly conveys Davidson's ironic treatment of divinity embodied by appeasing sexual desire. Immediately after the issuing, numerous parodies were created, the most satirical being "A Ballad of a Bun" (1896) by Owen Seaman, who became an editor of *Punch* later.<sup>3</sup> In reality Yeats paid attention to Davidson's way of writing: 'Both writers [John Davidson and Arthur Symons] are, whether they succeed or fail, interesting signs of the times. Not merely are they examples of that desire for new subject matter . . . but of the reaction from

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<sup>3</sup> Seaman's parody begins with two citations from lines 91 and 92 of "A Ballad of a Nun" and line 20 of "A Ballad of the Exodus from Houndsditch": "I am sister to the mountains now, /And sister to the sun and moon." / "Heed not belletrist jargon." / John Davidson.'

the super-refinement of much recent life and poetry' (*Letters to the New Island* 59).

Davidson's ballad writing was intensified with his experience at the social gathering in London. The ballad style gave Davidson a familiar but experimental form to convey what he would like to express. "Alice" (1891) describes a paradoxical sexual awakening of a man and his lover after she was raped in front of him. "A Ballad of Hell" (1893) and "A Ballad of Euthanasia" (1894) sing Davidson's fierce opposition against conventional Christian virtue. "A Woman and Her Son" (1897) uncovers the death in life of ordinary people. Davidson's early ballads are modified with ballad techniques and styles: ballad measures, ballad stanzas, dialogues between the two characters, refrain, repetition, parallelism, narrative lacuna, rapidity, and typical motifs and phrases taken from traditional and literary ballads. His early ballads are distant in time and place often with medieval flavour, but they are neither simple nor romantic narratives. Modern manners and customs of people and himself described in the traditional form make Davidson's irony, anger, or criticism more intensive. As O'Connor points out, 'they also show signs of the later more rebellious poet with a taste for ironic inversions' (27).

#### Davidson's Defiance towards Scott's Ballads

Davidson's defiance towards Walter Scott's ballads is another aspect to show his unstable attitude to national identity. Davidson imitated Scott's "Thomas the Rhymer" (1802-03) and "William and Helen" (1796) to create

his own "Thomas the Rhymer" (1891) and "A Ballad of Euthanasia" (1894).

As the difference of identity between Davidson and Scott as expressed in their "Thomas the Rhymer" ballads will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, the main points of Davidson's defiance are briefly explained here. Davidson intentionally imitates Scott's 'Part Second' of "Thomas the Rhymer"; his "Thomas the Rhymer" has an epigraph from Scott's *Tales of a Grandfather* (1827-29). Since the source of Scott's work is a traditional ballad "Thomas Rhymer" (37), Davidson achieves a kind of double deviation from the original source by using the motif of the Scottish legendary figure of Thomas Learmont of Erceldoune. In the part second of "Thomas the Rhymer", Scott, using the ballad technique of employing mystic numbers, makes Thomas tell three curses Scotland has suffered from. The first curse is the accidental death of Alexander III (1249-86); the second is the death of James IV (1488-1513) and the defeat of Scotland by England at the battle of Flodden Field; the third is the Scottish defeat in the battle of Pinkie (1547). The three curses, however, end with James VI's succession to the thrones of both countries due to the Union of Crowns of England and Scotland (1603). The ending shows Scott's enthusiastic patriotism. On the contrary, Davidson adds another motif of a skeleton at a wedding reception, a typical description of which is in "Alonzo the Brave and Fair Imogine" by M. G. Lewis, and Davidson creates a Gothic narrative in which Thomas foretells the accidental death of Alexander III by means of catastrophic natural phenomena. The Gothicism Davidson produced causes anxiety and sensation in the country and the people, which has nothing to do with the national pride of Scott's work.

Another interesting point of Davidson's "Thomas the Rhymer" is his characterization of the hero. The personalities of characters in the ballad world and other oral cultures are created rather flat and unsophisticated, because their light and shade in personality emerge through their actions narrated. Thomas in tradition is described as a naive and innocent man seduced and mesmerized by the queen of the elfland to go to the supernatural world with her. He takes the richly-dressed and lively queen for a glorious Virgin Mary, and exults in their encounter:

True Thomas lay oer yond grassy bank,  
 And he beheld a ladie gay,  
 A ladie that was brisk and bold,  
 Come riding oer the fernie brae.

Her skirt was of the grass-green silk,  
 Her mantel of the velvet fine,  
 At ilka tett of her horse's mane  
 Hung fifty silver bells and nine. (37A 1-8)

Thomas sees a lady riding on a horse over a hill where giant ferns grow thick and wild. She and her horse are gorgeously dressed. 'Grass-green' and 'fifty nine' have distinctive meanings in the ballad world: green is recognized as a fairy colour, and nine is a mystic number foretelling tragedy or the supernatural. The lady's beauty and boldness, and garment and bells of extraordinary colours are experiences beyond Thomas's daily life, which

overwhelm him.

True Thomas he took off his hat,  
And bowed him low down till his knee:  
'All hail, thou mighty Queen of Heaven!  
For your peer on earth I never did see.' (37A 1-12)

Thomas genuinely shows his homage to the Queen of Heaven by bowing low. Scott's Thomas, created from a prophetic collection published by Hart, is the same good-natured prophet, cheerfully welcoming a gallant knight with 'Christ thee save, Corspatrick brave! / Thrice welcome, good Dunbar, to me!' (15-16). On the other hand, Davidson's ballad is inspired by Scott, but his Thomas is called 'The elfin lord of Ercildoune, / That weary wizard' (19-20) and described as a solitary outsider. He is utterly unmoved by the Earl's scornful reproach for his incorrect foretelling. To the contrary, he scornfully laughs at the Earl's rash judgment after he made the Earl tell a bizarre episode at the King's wedding reception:

Three times aloud laughed Ercildoune,  
He laughed a woeful laugh.  
'A sign!' he cried. 'Say not I lied  
Till night-fall.' . . . (49-52)

Thomas of Davidson never sides with Scott's ideology of national pride. Or rather, he insists on rioting nature beyond human understanding.

The hero who does not obey authority and is proudly independent in solitude is a motif repeated in Davidson's other ballads. In "The Gleeman", a minstrel in a marketplace is singing neither a romantic tale nor of exotic customs he has observed through his wandering, but his own humanistic philosophy. He appeals to the people in the marketplace to hear his message:

'Loose your knotted brains awhile,  
 Market-people, sore bested;  
 Traffic palsies all you isle;  
 Hear a message from the dead. (23-26)

However, he does not care whether people pay attention to him or not, because he appeals to the universe around him, saying 'Hear, O heaven, and earth, give ear, / I will sing though men be deaf!' (41-42). The prologue of his monologue is a kind of parody of the typical opening of broadside ballads. Most broadside ballads begin with a narrator's appealing to his audience to hear him. Attention should be paid to him at the beginning of a broadside, because it is created not by the cooperation of a main singer and his audience, but by a single author.<sup>4</sup> One of the best-known broadside ballads

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<sup>4</sup> Broadside ballads are written narratives in the form of ballad by anonymous or unknown authors, printed on broad sheets, and sung in public places or on the street. Their topics were crimes, executions and other social affairs, and functioned as a primitive type of journalism after the invention of typography in the fifteenth century. However, broadside ballads were often inherited as oral songs, and oral ballads were printed as broadside. They interacted with each other when they are transmitted to

is "The Babes in the Wood" which 'was licensed to be printed 15 October 1595 under the title "The Norfolk gent his will and Testament and howe he Commytted the keepinge of his Chidren to his owne brother whoe delte most wickedly with them and howe God plagued him for it"'. (Opie 387) It begins with a singer's asking the audience to hear the tragedy:

Now ponder well, you parents dear,  
                   These words which I shall write;  
 A dolefull story you shall hear,  
                   In time brought forth to light. (1-4)

Inevitably at the end, the narrator concludes his singing with a moral lesson in return for their having listened to him.

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next generations.

Under the influence of Percy's *Reliques*, one of the most skillful literary balladists in the eighteenth century, Oliver Goldsmith, wrote "Elegy on the Death of a Mad Dog" (1766) with the broadside style beginning:

Good people all, of every sort,  
                   Give ear unto my song;  
 And if you find it wondrous short,  
                   It cannot hold you long. (1-4)

This is 'a kind of antidote to the sonorous elegies that had become fashionable following the publication of Gray's Elegy written in a Country Church Yard, . . .' (Opie 388)

On the detailed discussion on the characteristics of broadside ballads, see Friedman, "The Broadside Ballads", *The Ballad Revival*; Laws, "The Contemporary Literary Ballad", *The British Literary Ballad*; Gerould, "The Ballad and Broadside", *The Ballad of Tradition*; and Bold, *The Ballad*.

Take you example by this thing,  
And yield to each his right,  
Lest God with such like misery  
Your wicked minds requite. (157-60)

Davidson's gleeman is also exposing a kind of moral lesson, that is the unnoticed but doubtless truth behind the superficially satisfied daily life. He says 'For the world is evil-starred, / But the vision still remains' (53-54), or 'Cities sweet as forests are, / Sin unthought, unknown, unnamed' (61-62). And before leaving the bustling marketplace, he preaches his own philosophy on the status of human beings in the universe:

'Man by hunger unsubdued,  
Conqueror of the primal curse,  
Master of his subtlest mood,  
Master of the universe.' (71-74)

However, he has no audience: no one in the market spares time to see the gleeman in such a weird array as, 'His scarlet cloak and sandal shoon, / His tunic with the silver fur, / Of forest green and minever' (8-10), nor to listen to his unpleasant and unbalanced song in which his solid philosophy is conveyed in a simple ballad stanza. What was paid to the gleeman is only cold neglect. The ballad ends with bitter irony: mundane businesses and concerns prosper beside the gleeman in solitude.

He wrapped his cloak about his face,  
And left the bustling market-place.  
The juggler had an audience,  
The mountebank drew showers of pence,  
The pardoner cheapened heaven for gold'  
I ween the market-folk were sold. (75-80)

Scorned and neglected, he still retains his independent pride.

The gleeman's social criticism in a highly solemn tone recalls Shelley's slightly haughty definition of a poet: 'Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World' (*Shelley's Poetry and Prose* 508). Or, critics combine the proud independence in solitude of Davidson's personas with Nietzsche. Sloan says 'Davidson had already read about Nietzsche in an article by Theodor de Wyzewa in the Paris journal *Revue politique et littéraire* in 1891 and may have heard of him even earlier' (159). It might be too simplistic to attribute a motif of Davidson to Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, but there are certainly some resemblances between the solitary and proud gleeman in the marketplace and Zarathustra preaching 'Flee, my friend, into thy solitude!' in "The Flies in the Market-Place" of "First Part".

The narrator of "Thirty Bob a Week" also represents the motif of the solitary and proud hero. With a dramatic monologue which flourished in nineteenth-century poetry, 'a clerk at thirty bob' (6) working and living in a city tells his life: he and his wife, who 'stitches towels for a hunks' (20), raises the noisy little kids in 'Three rooms about the size of travelling

trunks' (22), by mole-like hard work from early morning to late at night. But the narrator neither indulges in self-pity, nor complains of his living in poverty, nor shifts the cause of his plight to social inequality. Accompanied by the steady and rhythmical rhyming of 'ababcb', the clerk keeps his proud independence. The core of his disimpassioned monologue is whether he has courage to face his harsh reality, and whether he can retain a cool and objective viewpoint on his situation:

But I don't allow it's luck and all a toss;  
 There's no such thing as being starved and crossed;  
 It's just the power of some to be a boss,  
 And bally power of others to be bossed:  
 I face the music, sir; you bet I ain't a cur;  
 Strike me lucky if I don't believe I'm lost! (7-12)

He never ascribes his bitter situation of being a poor worker to his own fate. He proclaims that he is never an underdog. Although he happens to be influenced by the negative power of being bossed at this moment, he is strong enough to call such ups and downs 'the music' (11). He is also strong enough to be sober when he faces his reality. Scottish literature has a tradition of drunken heroes who put on a mask of drunkenness in order to meditate a synthesis of antitheses: in other words, to face the contradictions of reality. The sober clerk in the poem, however, faces directly his reality without the mask.

I mean that having children and a wife  
With thirty bob on which to come and go,  
Isn't dancing to the tabor and the fife:  
When it doesn't make you drink, by Heaven! It makes you think,  
And notice curious items about life. (38-42)

He is never drunken but philosophical and cool enough to notice life's curiosity and to say that 'He knows the seas are deeper than tureens' (55). Towards the end of the poem, his monologue accelerates the severe inner struggle between the bitterness of his difficulty and his proud independence, all told in a detached tone:

But the difficultest go to understand,  
And the difficultest job a man can do,  
Is to come it brave and meek with thirty bob a week,  
And feel that that's the proper thing for you.

It's a naked child against a hungry wolf;  
It's playing bowls upon a splitting wreck;  
It's walking on a string across a gulf  
With millstones fore-and-aft about your neck; (87-94)

It is the most difficult job to make a living bravely but meekly with a little income, and to persuade himself to feel the situation properly. Striking a balance between reality and pride is just like a circus performer's acrobatic

walk on a string. However, in the end, he can keep his pride and independence: 'But the thing is daily done by many and many a one; / And we fall, face forward, fighting, on the deck.' (95-96). The solitary self-respecting narrators of Davidson lead to the ones in his later *Testaments*, one of whom is 'a man forbid'.

Davidson's another imitation of Scott is "A Ballad of Euthanasia" (1894). Scott created a ballad, "William and Helen" (1796) by imitating a German ballad, "Lenore" (1773) by Gottfried August Bürger (1747-94), and Davidson audaciously modifies Scott's ballad. In Scott's story, when Helen laments over her lover William's missing on the battle field, his ghost of him comes back to her, and the two lovers ride to his grave where William transforms himself into a ghastly skeleton. The ballad has two scenes highlighted: one is the two lovers' ride through this world to another, the uplifting dynamism of which is intensified by onomatopoeia in the brisk ballad stanza:

Tramp! tramp! along the land they rode,  
 Splash! splash! along the sea;  
 The scourge is wight, the spur is bright,  
 The flashing pebbles flee.

Fled past on right and left how fast  
 Each forest, grove, and bower!  
 On right and left fled past how fast  
 Each city, town, and tower! (185-92)

The other is William's transformation to a skeleton at his tomb: his gauntlet, casque, cuirass, and spur drop down one by one, and in the end, 'Helen's lily arms entwine / A ghastly skeleton' (251-52). The visually detailed description of William's transformation intensifies the horror and Gothic taste of the ballad.

In Davidson's story, a scornful and decadent princess of Norway, who read magic books and 'found all things to be / a spectral pageant brought to light / by nameless sorcery' (2-4), never listens to the King's encouragement to get married. Her worldview seems *fin de siècle*:

'The sun grows dim on heaven's brow;  
The world's worn blood runs cold;  
Time staggers in his dotage now;  
Nature is growing old' (17-20).

Therefore she declares that 'I / Shall be the bride of Death' (23-24). One night, the Death she had waited eagerly for came in the form of a warrior. Davidson describes their running off, using the same motif of the lovers' ride in "William and Helen", but the ride of Death and the princess is surreally brighter and swifter than that of William and Helen. Death arrives at midnight in blackest mail, but he is accompanied with various glittering lights: she took him for 'what meteor' (43), 'a crescent lustre' (49) gleamed on his helm, his war-horse is 'shod with flame' (50) and flashed 'like summer-lightning' (64), and their marriage token is a glowing star he

had on his helm:

She sprang behind him; on her brow  
He placed his glowing star.  
Back o' er the roofs the fire-shod hoofs  
Like lightning flashed afar.

Through hissing sand and shrivelled grass  
And flowers singed and dead,  
By wood and lea, by stream and sea,  
The pale horse panting sped. (69-76)

Instead of the uplifting dynamism of onomatopoeia Scott keeps, the heavy tone of the war-horse's 'trampling feet' (39) is now modulated into prominently repeated hissing and hushing sounds in 'hissing', 'sand', 'shrivelled', 'grass', 'singed', 'stream', 'sea', and 'sped', which evoke their unworldly speedy riding to another world.

The ending of the story definitely modified Scott. Through 'a marble tomb' (80) she went with Death, and found 'a golden land' (91) filled with life force:

'The sun is bright on heaven's brow,  
The world's fresh blood runs fleet;  
Time is as young as ever now,  
Nature as fresh and sweet,' (101-104)

It turns out that euthanasia means the reverse of life and death. Death transforms himself into a young man proclaiming 'Lo! I am Life' (109), which completely parodies the ghastly skeleton of Scott's William. Scott was fascinated by the Gothic descriptions of Bürger, and drew his contemporary readers into the Gothic world with rhythmical onomatopoeia and the horrible skeleton. Davidson reverses Scott's vector from death to life to create an ironical story in which the lady haunted by death finally faces life directly. The brisk ballad metre of 'abab' seems to intensify his irony towards Scott's gloomy mood and heavy dynamism.

Davidson had a good control of the ballad form and the motifs of his predecessors. However, Davidson's early ballads are underestimated. O'Connor regards Davidson's ballads as examples of 'his struggle with form' and admits his own taste for 'ironic inversions' (27) as beyond the simple imitation of the traditional form and previous motifs. Yet, she does not fully value Davidson's achievement in ballad writing. She takes as an example of Davidson's unnatural line breaks an outburst of Lancelot's emotion in "A Ballad of Lancelot" (1899):

on the burnished road

The milkwhite steed, the dazzling mail

Advanced and flamed against the wind;

And Lancelot, his body rent

With the fierce trial of his mind

To know, reeled down the steep descent. (191-96)

From line 92 to 93, there is an unnatural line break. She explains that '[t]he line breaks reinforce the reader's sense of Lancelot's agony ('rent') and struggle ('mind / To know') (47). About Davidson's ballad writing, she sums up that '[a]lthough the ballad had provided Davidson with a form of control and a process of transforming both convictions and personal experience into legend, it would rarely contain the 'high' matters of his thought and experience' (49). Another critic, Turnbull, simply says that '[t]he ballads, also, are a neat example of the backward-looking aspect of Davidson's work, ultimately deriving, as they seem to do, from Scott: not merely the Scott of the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, or, indeed, of the Scottish ballad imitations, but the Scott who was one of the first translators of the German Romantic poets' (1: xxiv).

When his two imitation ballads from Scott are read in the context of national identity and the history of Scottish literature, they will be estimated differently from these criticisms: Davidson reveals a kind of backlash against his predecessor in his homeland. As discussed already in section 1 "John Davidson and Unstable Scottish Identity", the era when Davidson wrote his literary ballads was called 'neglected' because of the cultural diminishment caused by the loss of great national literary figures and the radical social changes. Burns in the eighteenth century and Scott at the beginning of nineteenth century were tremendous literary symbols of Scottish national identity. After them, Scottish poets had to face their literary fate: as Edwin Morgan points out, the cultural diminishment

'leaves endless and largely unanswerable questions about a poet's "Scottishness"' (*History of Scottish Literature* 337). Davidson was brought up under the circumstance of being 'isolated from the latest trends in art and literature', and his 'reading, at this formative period in his life, was limited to a fairly restricted field' (Turnbull 1: xxiv). This environment paradoxically means that Davidson was overwhelmingly influenced by great national literary figures. After growing up, he became one of the diaspora Scottish writers from Scotland to London. His environment and his decision were haunted by the contemporary question of what 'Scottishness' was. It was indispensable for Davidson to face the literary symbols of national identity, and to question them. Davidson's persona in "Thomas the Rhymer" is irrelevant to Scott's 'national pride', but proudly isolated. The ending of the ballad, "A Ballad of Euthanasia", is reversed as well. Davidson tries to betray Scott and parodies him.

It should be mentioned as well that Davidson's constantly ironical viewpoints are not a loser's complaints but are based on one of Davidson's philosophical notions. Davidson defines irony in "Thought on Irony" in *The Man Forbid and Other Essays* (1910). He begins the essay with his aesthetic understanding of irony: 'I may ultimately find that irony includes beauty and is greater than beauty' (133), or '[i]t is centric, the adamant axis of the universe' (134). But the main point is that irony includes antitheses:

Irony is not a creed. The makers of creeds have always, miscalled, denied some part of the world. Irony affirms and delights in the whole. Consciously, it is the deep complacency which

contemplates with unalloyed satisfaction Love and Hate, the tiger and the nightingale, the house and the blow-fly, Messalina and Galahad, the village natural and Napoleon. Unconsciously, it is the soul of the Universe. (135)

Davidson's opinion of irony reminds us of 'Caledonian antisyzygy' as the essence of Scottish literature, and of MacDiarmid's intentional drunken persona in *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*. The drunken hero cries his conviction of staying in a contradiction:

I'll ha'e nae hauf-way hoose, but aye be whaur  
Extremes meet — it's the only way I ken  
To dodge the curst conceit o' bein' richt  
That damns the vast majority o' men. (141-44)

Davidson's imitation and ironical deviation from Scott's ballads is both a way to overcome his own question of what 'Scottishness' is, and to reaffirm 'Scottishness' as his identity. At the same time, Davidson's struggle was a cornerstone for the Scottish Renaissance led by MacDiarmid in the next century.

### The Last Stage of Davidson as a Balladist

In 1899 Davidson published *The Last Ballad and Other Poems*. After that he drew apart from the ballad form, and began to write a series of

*Testaments*. However, as “A Ballad in Blank Verse” which was refined and published in 1905 suggests, he never did break away entirely with ballads in the last stage of his poetic career. In “A Runnable Stag” (1905), the original title of which was “A Ballad of a Runnable Stag”, his lifelong commitment to ballads and the proudly independent is also described. As the possible inspiring source of “A Runnable Stag”, Turnbull refers to a nature writer Richard Jefferies’s *Red Deer* (1884), or a Scottish novelist, G. White-Melville’s *Katerfelto* (1875) (2: 498). The setting in both works is the ancient royal hunting forest, Exmoor, the moorland in west Somerset and north Devon. It should be noted that at that time Davidson was living in the more westerly part of Cornwall, Penzance. Sloan points out that the image of hunting was common in those days, and introduces Goethe’s comparison of the Irish to a pack of hounds introduced in Yeats’s *Autobiographies*, and Arthur Conan Doyle’s ballad “The old Huntsman” (1898).<sup>5</sup> Thus, “A Runnable Stag” shows little originality, but it ‘celebrates the liberating outdoor life and the spirit of holiday’, and ‘Davidson was in touch with the mood of the Edwardian age with its enthusiasm for hunting, games, sports, and bicycles’ (Sloan 226).

Truly the ballad begins with natural bounty.

When the pods went pop on the broom, green broom,

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<sup>5</sup> ‘During the quarrel over Parnell’s grave a quotation from Goethe ran through the papers describing our Irish jealousy: The Irish seem to me like a pack of hounds always dragging down some noble stag.’ (*Autobiographies* 390). Doyle’s ‘The Old Huntsman’ has no stag in the story, but compares the huntsman and his hound to death and time, whose games are human beings. (*Songs of Action* 133)

And apples began to be golden-skinned,  
We harboured a stag in the Priory comb,  
And we feathered his trail up-wind, up-wind,  
We feathered his trail up-wind —  
    A stag of warrant, a stag, a stag,  
    A runnable stag, a kingly crop,  
    Brow, bay and tray and three on top,  
    A stag, a runnable stag.

As we observed in “A Ballad in Blank Verse”, the first two lines have the same impressionistic touch of colors and pleasant outdoors atmosphere. In the best season for hunting when pods and apples ripen, the huntsman and his hunting dogs follow a stag’s trail upwind.

Then the huntsman’s horn rang yap, yap, yap,  
    And ‘Forward’ we heard the harbourer shout;  
But ’twas only a brocket that broke a gap  
    In the beechen underwood, driven out,  
    From the underwood antlered out  
    By warrant and might of the stag, the stag,  
    The runnable stag, whose lordly mind  
    Was bent on sleep, though beamed and tined  
    He stood, a runnable stag. (1-18)

The huntsman’s horn echoes with his dogs’ yapping. ‘Forward’, sharp and

strong, sounds on the moor just like an order of a commander in "The Charge of the Light Brigade" (1854) by Tennyson. However, they found not a stag but a small fawn driven out of the underwood of beeches by a runnable stag. As the story goes on, it becomes evident that the main character, the stag, is neither meek nor doomed to be hunted, but has its own strong will. The stag who 'never was caught alive' (61), driven to the dead end, makes his last stand:

And he saw in a vision of peaceful sleep,  
In a wonderful vision of sleep,  
A stag of warrant, a stag, a stag,  
A runnable stag in a jeweled bed,  
Under the sheltering ocean dead,  
A stag, a runnable stag. (67-72)

The runnable stag, like the prophet Thomas Rhymer, foretells his own destiny as a vision in which a stag sleeps peacefully at the bottom of the sheltering ocean.

So a fateful hope lit up his eye,  
And he opened his nostrils wide again,  
And he tossed his branching antlers high  
As he headed the hunt down the Charlock glen,  
As he raced down the echoing glen  
For five miles more, the stag, the stag,

For twenty miles, and five and five,  
Not to be caught now, dead or alive,  
The stag, the runnable stag. (73-81)

At the last minute, hope lit up the stag's eye, and it ran through the glen down to the sea. He protects his dignity of life by choosing death. In the last stanza, the pursuers, stunned by his heroic decision, are only watching him sinking into the Bristle Channel:

Three hundred gentlemen, able to ride,  
Three hundred horses as gallant and free,  
Beheld him escape on the evening tide,  
Far out till the sink in the Severn Sea  
Till he sank in the depths of the sea —  
The stag, the buoyant stag, the stag  
That slept at last in a jeweled bed  
The stag, the runnable stag. (82-89)

The runnable stag's vision was embodied. 'A stag' in his vision became the stag who slept in a jeweled bed at last. The stag never plays a subordinate role to the huntsman and his hounds engaging in their hunting pleasure. The motif of a proudly independent hero in Davidson's early ballads is clearly projected on the stag. The stag, ironically accompanied with a light rhythm and a sporting atmosphere to the end of the story, attains his tough goal. The stag's heroism is similar to that of Davidson's personas like

Thomas and a gleeman.

The runnable stag commits suicide by running down the glen into the sea, and therefore, the ballad is also interpreted as Davidson's poetical notice of his drowning himself.<sup>6</sup> In 1909, four years after "A Runnable Stag", Davidson mysteriously disappeared. His body was found six months later off the coast of Penzance. It had been over thirty years since Davidson created the persona of Old John in "Ayrshire Jock" who throws out his original identity and tries to create a new one. And it had been about twenty years since Davidson, like Old John, trusting his future to his own pen, arrived in London. It can be truly said that, as a result of mental disorder and such abject poverty as Old John suffered from, the poet, like the stag, was driven to the place near Land's End in Cornwall, and protected his dignity of life by choosing death. Thus, the life of Davidson can be symbolically traced in his two personas: the hardship and the end of the exiled Scottish writer are projected on Old John of the early ballad and the stag of the last one. It is not incidental that both Old John and the stag see a vision at the crucial moment, which functions as a mental refuge for the two characters. Old John saw the vision of his good old cottage in poverty, isolation, and hopelessness. And the stag, just before his desperate running down the glen, also sees himself at peace in a vision. In the 1870s, a vision was used to show the original place of Old John. Again in 1905, it was used

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<sup>6</sup> 'The poem is all the more poignant in that it so early anticipates Davidson's own death in 1909, almost as though deep in his own fascination with the predicament of the recluse [moving from London to Penzance] is an inkling that his fascination has but one inevitable destination.' (Gifford, Dunnigan, and MacGillivray, eds., *Scottish Literature* 373)

to show the stag's ideal end of his existence. Davidson's last ballad, "A Runnable Stag", shares crucial characteristics with his early ballads.

Here again we should pay attention to the sound effect of "A Runnable Stag". The mood and rhythm of the ballad are quite different from *Testaments*, which he was working on in those days. The ballad is full of lightness and uplifting feeling produced by many short syllables as well as its sporting atmosphere. Each stanza has the rhyme scheme of 'ababbddc', the anterior five lines of which are close to Spenserian stanza of 'ababbcbcc'. However, instead of the flowing, courtly, and long lines of the Spenserian stanza, the posterior half lines of Davidson are brisk and short. The sixth and the ninth lines of every stanza end with 'stag', which also produces an uplifting, stable rhythm like trotting on horseback. As quoted above, the eighth line in the first stanza of 'Brow, bay and tray and three on top' is repeated in the third, the fifth, and the sixth stanzas, in which the alliteration of 'brow' and 'bay', and 'tray' and 'top' make the rhythm heavy and stable. The ninth line of each stanza is the refrain of 'A stag, a runnable stag' or its incremental repetition like 'He stood, a runnable stag,' (18). The typical ballad refrain and repetition techniques make the poem a literary ballad with a high level of completion.<sup>7</sup> Such a rhythmical scheme is not so prominent in his early ballads. When Davidson wrote "A Ballad of Euthanasia" by imitating Scott's "William and Helen", Scott's heavy dynamism produced by onomatopoeia was not effectively used, but was

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<sup>7</sup> It is also interesting that Davidson himself mentioned the influence of Poe on the fine rhythm of the poem: 'the exquisite invention of the most original genius in words the world has known — Edgar Allan Poe' (*Holiday and Other Poems* 155).

modulated into surreal hissing and hushing sounds. However, the fascinatingly light but stable rhythm, the impressive hunting sound of 'yap, yap, yap' (10), and the repeated phrase of 'a stag, a stag' of "A Runnable Stag" seem to revive the dynamism of the 'tramp! tramp!' (185) and 'splash! splash!' (186) William and Helen made during their ride to a graveyard. Davidson's "A Runnable Stag" has a sound effect similar to Scott's "William and Helen". Davidson imitated some of Scott's ballads and intentionally deviated from them to face and overcome the crucial issue of their 'Scottishness', but as the sound effect of the ballad shows, Scott played the role of consummation and that of initiation of Davidson's poetic career as a literary balladist. Davidson's defiance to Scott transmutes into his return towards him in the end.

In order to show Davidson's unstable identity-consciousness and his defiance and return towards Scottish identity, the discussion began with the question of what relationship Davidson as a literary balladist had with some literary predecessors of his native land. Through his early works, Davidson curses the cult of Burns, breaks away from nostalgic literary manners, and conveys urban plight. These are completely coincident with MacDiarmid's claim of the Scottish Renaissance. And Davidson intentionally imitates Scott's ballads but finally parodies them. Davidson's total attitude to his predecessors is simply defiant. However, when the last ballad is analyzed from the viewpoint of Davidson's keeping his characteristic hero and the sound effect similar to Scott's "William and Helen", it clearly shows that Davidson never breaks away from his interest

in balladry, and it exposes Davidson's life-long commitment to Scott. Davidson lived and created literary ballads in the 'neglected' nineteenth century under the shadow of his predecessors. He had to face and overcome the crucial identity issue of 'Scottishness'. Davidson's unstable notion of identity and his defiance and return towards Scott are straightforwardly but elaborately conveyed in his literary ballads. The ballad, "A Runnable Stag", plays a key role for us in seeing Davidson's whole struggle concerning Scottishness. Davidson remained Scottish in some important sense while nevertheless exiling himself and writing critically about Scotland from a distance.

## Chapter III

### “Thomas Rhymer” and Unstable Scottish Identity

## 1 National Identity for Scott and Davidson as Imitators of “Thomas Rhymer”

### 1 Thomas of Erceldoune as an Image of Communion

Any discussion of poetry and national identity includes the notion of a nation not only as a political idea, but also as a cultural one. Benedict Anderson carefully distinguishes one interpretation of nationalism from a Marxian one, and suggests that with the rise of print culture, all modern nations have evolved to be virtual communities. He says, ‘[the nation] is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion’ (*Imagined Communities* 6). A nation can be interpreted as a group of people holding a common image of their communality. This interpretation of a nation logically leads to the notion that the identity of a nation is never fixed, but can change according to the passing of eras that people experience or to variations of the environments in which they live. Stuart Hall points out the changing nature of identities:

Though they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or

‘where we came from’, so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. . . . [Identities] relate to the invention of tradition as much as to tradition itself: . . . not the so-called return to roots but a coming-to-terms-with our ‘routes.’  
 (*Questions of Cultural Identity* 4)

Hall’s point of discussion on identities is that they are not the fixed consequences of past experiences but processes we are experiencing.

Scottish ballads and poems have contributed to recovering Scottish national identity in accordance with the theories of Anderson and Hall. Hereafter my discussion will focus on a traditional ballad, “Thomas Rhymer” (37), which evokes the image of communality in audience, and some literary ballads on the legendary figure by Walter Scott and John Davidson, in order to examine how the legendary figure of the traditional and literary ballads have expressed Scottish identity, and how the image of the legendary hero has been changed from a traditional to a modern one.

Thomas Learmont of Erceldoune, a Scottish legendary prophet and poet of the thirteenth century, has been called Thomas the Rhymer, or True Thomas. He is said to have met the queen of fairyland and to have been endowed with prophetic ability. He has been described in medieval romances as well as in traditional ballads. F. J. Child discusses the established popularity and fame of the prophet Thomas in his *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*: “The “Whole Prophecie” of Merlin, Thomas Rymour, and others, collected and issued as early as 1603, continued to be

printed as a chapbook down to the beginning of this century, when, says Dr Murray, few farm-houses in Scotland were without a copy of it' (1: 317).<sup>1</sup> Erceldoune, presently called Earlston, a small village on the Borders, has a church, on one of whose wall-blocks the name of the prophet is engraved. And also the village preserves as a local heritage a part of the Rhymer's Tower. The Eildon Hills on the Borders, where Thomas is said to have met the fairy queen, are known as a mysterious place to trace his trip to the fairyland. Kylie Murray remarks about the general nature of prophecy: 'Prophetic writings concern themselves with authorizing the present. . . . From the twelfth century onwards, prophecy became especially associated with political culture and national identity' (320). The prophet Thomas is a communal image in Scotland, and one of the typical creators of Scottish national identity.

"Thomas the Rhymer" by Scott and Advocacy of National Identity

Walter Scott introduces three pieces from "Thomas the Rhymer" in the "Imitations of the Ancient Ballad" section of his *Minstrelsy*. "Part First — Ancient" is incorporated into Child's *ESPB* as version C. Compared with version A, which is 'transmitted to Alexander Fraser Tytler by Mrs Brown in April, 1800' (*ESPB* 1: 317), Scott's version has a notable feature: he

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<sup>1</sup> James A. H. Murray, ed., *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*: 'The "Whole Prophecies" continued to be printed as a chap-book down to the beginning of the present century, when few farm-houses in Scotland were without a copy of the mystic predictions of the Rhymer and his associates' (xlii).

employs the actual local names of ‘Huntlie bank’ and ‘Eildon Tree’ in his work:

True Thomas lay on Huntlie bank,  
 A ferlie he spied wi’ his ee,  
 And there he saw a lady bright,  
 Come riding down by the Eildon Tree. (37C, 1-4)

However, in the world of traditional balladry, place names as well as personal names quite often have been distorted or changed into ones unrelated to the original story while they have been handed down to the next generation. In another example of “Bonny Barbara Allan” (84), the lover cursed to die by the heroine, Barbara Allan, is ‘Sir John Græme, in the West Country’ (3) in A version, but in B version, the place is changed to ‘Scarlet Town’ (1), and the name of the narrating man disappears. The disintegration of names is caused by the fundamental anonymity of traditional balladry. The curse and death people sing and hear cease to be a specific individual affair between Sir John Græme and Barbara Allan through the inheritance of the story, and the sentiment people entertain from the narrative is crystalized as a general experience, but at the same time and paradoxically, their own one. Anonymity produces generality.<sup>2</sup> Version A does not identify the place where the narrative unfolds, but

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<sup>2</sup> Child mentions the changing of historical facts in ballads: ‘Ballad singers and their hearers would be as indifferent to the facts as the readers of ballads are now; it is only editors who feel bound to look closely into such matters.’ (*ESPB* II: 19)

simply refers to the 'grassy bank' and 'oer the fernie brae':

True Thomas lay oer yond grassy bank,  
 And he beheld a ladie gay,  
 A ladie that was brisk and bold,  
 Come riding oer the fernie brae. (37A, 1-4)

On the contrary, Scott emphasizes Thomas's belongingness by referring to the existing 'Huntlie bank' and 'Eildon Tree'. Scott's passionate adherence to the Border areas and Scotland is obvious from his enthusiastic and precise headnote on the locality and its history to each ballad in *Minstrelsy*. And also, Scott tried to explain his righteous attachment to Scottish localities to his contemporary Romantic poet, Anna Seward. In reply to her poor opinions of ballad poetry, Scott introduced a comic Border ballad which had been repeatedly told in his childhood days: a handsome gentleman gets married to an ugly woman with a curious hand at making pickles, and they become a very happy couple. Scott insists in the letter of June 29 1802 as follows:

It [the comic Border ballad] will at least so far disclose your correspondent's weak side, . . . Much of its peculiar charm is indeed, I believe, to be attributed solely to its *locality*. A very commonplace and obvious epithet, when applied to a scene which we have been accustomed to view with pleasure, recalls to us not merely the local scenery, but a thousand little nameless

associations, which we are unable to separate or to define. . . .  
 Why else did Sir Philip Sydney feel that the tale of Percy and  
 Douglas moved him like the sound of a trumpet? (*Letters* 1:  
 146,).

Scott rigidly adheres to the locality and its history. For Scott, a locality is not merely a place, but combined with our numerous associations with it, forms a whole body of our existence. Furthermore, in his “Essay on Imitations of the Ancient Ballad”, Scott declares that folk poetry with rudeness of locality should be more enjoyed, and also says that ‘[the] poetry addressed to the populace, and enjoyed by them alone, was animated by the spirit that was breathed around’ (*Minstrelsy* 536). Clarifying the locality of poetry is indispensable to Scott. Marinell Ash infers that Scott’s experience of spending infantile days in his grandfather’s country farm at Sandyknowe, ‘the ageless Scottish countryside’, produced ‘his first consciousness of existence’ (13), and points out that Scott’s recognition of locality is closely connected to his notion of history:

[H]e was enveloped in a living skin of song, story and landscape. This experience meant that . . . he first entered the past through actual experience of a surviving historical society and its geographical setting. . . . [T]he past grew from itself *towards* the present. . . . [T]he past must speak directly for itself. Scott’s first historical experiences at Sandyknowe helped reverse the flow of man’s conception of history. (13-14)

Scott's adherence to the locality and its history is equal to experiencing both the past and the present of the place. This is a way for Scott to be conscious of his own existence, that is, a way to see his identity.

In "Part Second — Altered from Ancient Prophecies", as Scott declares in the headnote to the ballad, '[all] the prophetic verses are selected from Hart's publication' (*Minstrelsy* 597). Scott basically uses some stories of Thomas's prophecies included in a prophetic collection published in 1615 by Andrew Hart, an Edinburgh publisher.<sup>3</sup> In this ballad again are employed the actual local names of 'Huntlie bank' and 'the Eildon-tree' in the opening stanzas:

When seven years were come and gane,  
 The sun blinked fair on pool and stream;  
 And Thomas lay on Huntlie bank  
 Like one awakened from a dream.

He heard the trampling of a steed,

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<sup>3</sup> In the extraordinarily long headnote to this ballad, Scott introduces the historical prophetic writings of Thomas in chronological order, pursues which writings are ascribed to Thomas's own words, and penetrates the forgeries behind the stories. Scott does not mention the name of the collection by Hart, but its existence is proved in a reference book: 'The whole Prophecies of Scotland, England, Ireland, France and Denmark, prophesied by Thomas Rhymer, Marvellous Merling, Beid, Berlington, Waldhave, Eltrain, Bannester and Sybilla. In Latin Verse and Scottish Metre. The earliest known edition of this collection was published by Andrew Hart, in the year 1615' (Lowndes 2:1509).

He saw the flash of armour flee,  
 And he beheld a gallant knight,  
 Come riding down by the Eildon-tree. (1-8)

Using the ballad technique of mystic number to foretell a tragedy, in the phrases of ‘Thrice welcome, good Dunbar, to me!’ (16), and ‘And I will shew thee curses three’ (18), Scott develops the narrative of the prophecies of the ‘curses three’ Scotland has suffered from.

The first curse is the accidental death of Alexander III (1249-86). The king, who had lost all his heirs but his three-year-old grand-daughter, Margaret the Maid of Norway, fell down from his horse near Kinghorn and was killed as he hurried to his newly married wife on a stormy night. The end of the house of Canmore followed the accident by the death of Margaret in 1290 (*History of Scotland* 61). Although Scott declares Hart as his source of the ballad, he introduces another source written by Bishop James Spottiswoode (1567-1645), Anglican divine educated at Glasgow, to refer to Thomas’s prophecy of the king’s death. Spottiswoode was a ‘learned and pious’ person of religion, whose assertion of Thomas’s prophecy must have supported his reputation.<sup>4</sup> Scott cites and modernizes the prophecy of the death from Spottiswoode, but below is the original version translated from Latin to Scots by John Bellenden.

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<sup>4</sup> The bishop is introduced in *Lives of Eminent Scotsmen*: ‘Among the higher order of believers in Thomas’s Prophecies was the learned and pious Bishop Spottiswoode.’ (37)

“It is said, the day afore the kingis deith, the Erle of Marche demandit ane prophet, namit Thomas Rymour, otherwayis namit Ersiltoun, quhat wedder suld be on the morow? To quhome answerit this Thomas, that on the morow afore noon, sall blow the gretist wynd that ever was hard afore in Scotland. On the morow, quehn it was neir noon, the lift appering loune, but ony din or tempest, the erle send for this prophet, and reprovit him that he prognosticat sic wynd to be and nae appearance thair of. This Thomas maid litel answer, bot said, noon is not gane. And incontenent ane man cam to the yet (gate) schawing the king was slane. Than, said the prophet, yone is the wynd that sall blow to the gret calamity and truble of al Scotland.” (*Lives of Eminent Scotsmen* 38)

Requested by the Earl of March the day before the king’s death, Thomas foretold the greatest storm that Scotland had experienced would come the next day. On the day there was no change in the air and the Earl reproached Thomas for his false prophecy. But at that time a messenger came to tell of the king’s accidental death. The greatest storm meant his death. Thomas’s prophecy turned out to be right. Scott simply versifies the prose of Spottiswoode while mentioning the actual places of ‘Rosse’s Hills’ in Highland and ‘Solway sea’:

“A storm shall roar this very hour,  
From Rosse’s Hills to Solway sea.”

“Ye lied, ye lied, ye warlock hoar!

For the sun shines sweet on fauld and lea.”

He put his hand on the Earlie’s head;

He shewed him a rock, beside the sea,

Where a king lay stiff, beneath his steed,

And steel-dight nobles wiped their e’e.” (21-28).

But in order to emphasize Thomas’s prophetic ability, Scott invents Thomas projecting the vision of the dead king on a rock by the seaside. Thus, the first curse is told by using Hart and Spottiswoode, and his own invention.

The second curse is the death of James IV (1488-1513) and the defeat of Scotland by England at the Battle of Flodden Field in 1513. Comparing the two citations below, we see that Scott not only introduces lines from Hart, but also quite faithfully imitates them:

[“The Prophetie of Thomas Rhymer”]

Our Scottish King shal come full keen,

The red Lyon beareth he:

A feddered arrow sharp, I ween,

Shal make him wink, and warre to see,

Out of the field he shall be led,

When he is bloody and wo for blood;

Yet to his men then shal he say,

For Gods love turn you again,

And give yon Southern folk a fray:  
Why should I loose? the right is mine,  
My date is not to die this day.

(109-19, from *The Whole Prophecies*)

["Thomas the Rhymer — Part Second"]

"A Scottish king shall come full keen;  
The ruddy lion beareth he:  
A feather'd arrow sharp, I ween,  
Shall make him wink and warre to see.

"When he is bloody, and all to bledde,  
Thus to his men he still shall say —  
'For God's sake, turn ye back again,  
And give yon southern folk a fray!  
Why should I lose the right is mine?  
My doom is not to die this day." (33-42)

Scott describes the heroic image of the Scottish king in quite similar terms to Hart.

Another faithful imitation from Hart is seen when Thomas reveals the third curse of the Scottish defeat on the battle of Pinkie in 1547:

["The Propheisie of Thomas Rhymer"]

At Pinkin Cleugh there shal be spilt,

Much gentle blood that day,  
There shal the Bear loose the gylt,  
And the Eagle bear it away. (193-96)

[“Thomas the Rhymer — Part Second”]

“There shall the lion lose the gylte,  
And the libbards bear it clean away;  
At Pinkyn Cleuch there shall be spilt  
Much gentil blude that day.” (47-50)

Scott simply replaces ‘bear’ with ‘lion’ (47) and ‘eagle’ with ‘libbards’ (48).

After describing the successive three tragedies which befell Scotland, Scott ends the narrative with an episode that seems to compensate his native country for three curses and to redeem the vanishing national pride: it is the Union of Crowns of England and Scotland in 1603. According to Hart, Thomas foretold the succession to the thrones of Scotland and England by James VI (1566-1625). He is the ninth son of the House of Bruce, the son of Mary, Queen of Scots (1542-87) who married into a French royal family. Scotland had been defeated by her southern neighbour, but the unexpected succession to the English throne by a Scottish king seemed to have avenged the history of the humiliation of the country.<sup>5</sup> This episode is described by Scott in another faithful imitation of Hart:

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<sup>5</sup> It is generally understood that the Union of the Crowns ironically spoiled Scottish national pride, because ‘[James VI] would devote most of his attention to the greater and wealthier kingdom.’ (*History of Scotland* 188-89).

["The Propheisie of Thomas Rhymer"]

Then to the beirn cou'd I say,  
Where dwells thou: Or in what country:  
Or who shall rule the Isle Britain,  
From the North to the South sea?  
The French wife shal bear the Son,  
Shal rule all Britain to the sea:  
That of the Bruces blood shal come,  
As near as the ninth degree. (227-34)

["Thomas the Rhymer — Part Second"]

"But tell me now," said brave Dunbar,  
"True Thomas, tell now unto me,  
What man shall rule the isle Britain,  
Even from the north to the southern sea?"

"A French Queen shall bear the son,  
Shall rule all Britain to the sea:  
He of the Bruce's blude shall come,  
As near as in the ninth degree. (69-76)

Scott's "Part Second" directly conveys his attitude to his nation and Thomas as its communal image. The accidental death of Alexander III, the defeat of the Battle of Flodden Field and the death of James IV, and the defeat of the

Battle of Pinkie — three curses representing the successive calamitous affairs for Scotland lead to the unexpected recovery of national pride by the Union of Crowns. At the same time, the historical authenticity and impact of Thomas's prophecies are certified by Scott's close imitation from Hart and Spottiswoode. And also by stopping the vicissitudes of the nation before the complete deprivation of Scottish national identity at the time of the Union of Parliaments of England and Scotland in 1707, Scott advocates the Scottish throne and shows his enthusiastic patriotism or attachment to the country. Scott's stated intention to edit traditional ballads and imitate them to create his own literary ballads can be found in the "Introduction" of *Minstrelsy*:

By such efforts [adding a variety of remarks regarding popular superstitions and legendary history], feeble as they are, I may contribute somewhat to the history of my native country, the peculiar features of whose manners and character are daily melting and dissolving into those of her sister and ally. And trivial as may appear such an offering to the manes of kingdom once proud and independent, I hang it upon her altar with a mixture of feelings which I shall not attempt to describe. (70)

He was conscious of contributing to his country at a time when its identity was being lost precipitously at the beginning of the nineteenth century. His "Thomas the Rhymer" is a way of showing his advocacy of national identity.

## Gothic Anxiety in “Thomas the Rhymer” by John Davidson

John Davidson included the imitation of “Thomas the Rhymer” in his first anthology, *In a Music-Hall and Other Poems*, published in 1891. The fact that Davidson was inspired by Scott is evident in an epigraph cited from Scott’s *Tales of a Grandfather* (1827-29) attached to the ballad:

“Thomas the Rhymer . . . had said to a great Scotch nobleman, called the Earl of March, that the sixteenth day of March should be the stormiest day that ever was witnessed in Scotland. That day came, and was remarkably clear, mild, and temperate. But while they were all laughing at Thomas the Rhymer, on account of his false prophecy, an express brought the news of the king’s death. ‘There,’ said Thomas, ‘that is the storm which I meant; and there was never tempest which will bring more ill-luck to Scotland.’ — *Tales of a Grandfather*. (31)

Davidson ignores Scott’s following remarks: ‘This story may very possibly be false; but the general belief in it serves to show that the death of Alexander the Third was looked upon as an event of the most threatening and calamitous nature’ (*Tales of a Grandfather* 1: 57). The actual achievement of Davidson’s “Thomas the Rhymer”, however, was the emphasis on ‘the most threatening and calamitous nature’ of the death of Alexander III. The opening scene where an earl meets a wizard, Thomas of Ercildoune, is similar to Scott’s “Part Second,” but Davidson’s narrative develops quite

differently from Scott's, and Davidson's "Thomas" is closer to Spottiswoode's narrative. Going back from the wedding of the king, the earl meets Thomas and scorns him for his mistaken prophecy of a storm: "And this" said then the scornful earl, / "This is your stormiest day!" (7-8). After these spiteful words, the earl describes the weather and the scenery around them:

The clouds that drift across the lift

Are soft and silver-grey;

One sail, too near to be a bird,

Glides o'er to Norroway.

'A blush in son the weather—gleam,

The sun sinks low and lower;

The gloaming fills the cup he spills,

The faint moon bending o'er

The sleepy waves, reluctant, poised,

Drop peacefully share.' (9-18)

An impressionistic imagery is also used in this scene: soft and silver-grey clouds, a sailing ship gliding to Norway, the glow of the sunset, the faint moon, and the sleepy waves on the shore. The halcyon but tedious surroundings never anticipate a strange guest at the wedding reception, nor the natural disaster Thomas witnessed. Ignoring the earl's spite, Thomas makes the earl confess the presence of an unexpected guest at the wedding reception: a skeleton. The earl begins to tell of his threatening and

calamitous experience:

A shout rang to the roof;  
Each star-bright eye shone eagerly  
To weave the viewless woof  
Of airy motion through the warp  
Of music. Swift reproof

“Fell on us; for a soundless wind  
Blew purple every light;  
The dancing ceased; the dancers clasped  
Each other’s hands; each knight  
Before his trembling lady stood,  
Blanched, breathless, at the sight.

“An odour, chill, sepulchral, spread,  
And lo, a skeleton!  
A creaking stack of bones as black  
As peat! It seemed to con  
Each face with yawning eyeless holes,  
And in a breath ’twas gone.” (32-48)

By his confession of the unexpected skeleton, the halcyon and tedious atmosphere of the ballad is turned into a Gothic narrative. Among literary ballads, the Gothic motif of a skeleton at a wedding reception obviously

reminds readers of the skeleton at the wedding in “Alonzo the Brave and Fair Imogine” (1795) by M. G. Lewis. As mentioned in Chapter I, Section 2, Scott highly valued Lewis as an introducer of the Gothic taste into English poetry from German literature. Imogine betrayed her lover, Alonzo, who had gone to Palestine to fight, to get married to “a baron all cover’d with jewels and gold” (25). “When the bell of the castle toll’d — ‘one!’ ” (36) in the heat of the wedding feast, Imogine noticed a strange knight sitting next to her, and asked him to lay his helmet aside:

The lady is silent: the stranger complies,  
 His vizor he slowly unclosed:  
 Oh! Then what a sight met Fair Imogine’s eyes!  
 What words can express her dismay and surprise,  
 When a skeleton’s head was exposed!

All present then utter’d a terrified shout;  
 All turn’d with disgust from the scene.  
 The worms they crept in, and the worms they crept out,  
 And sported his eyes and his temples about,  
 While the spectre address’d Imogine:

“Behold me, thou false one! Behold me!” he cried;  
 “Remember Alonzo the Brave! (52-63)

The strange guest exposed his skeletal identity under the vizor. The

similarity between the horrible skeletons in Davidson's and Lewis's ballads cannot be doubted. Scott had a keen interest in the Gothic tendency brought into English poetry, and under the influence of Lewis he himself imitated Gottfried August Bürger's Gothic ballad "Lenore" to create "William and Helen". And then, obviously Davidson knew very well the Gothic influence on Scott by Lewis.

The terror caused by an unexpected skeleton at the wedding feast leads Davidson's Thomas to describe the natural disaster that he witnessed, but the earl does not recall. The description begins with a plague of vermin on the ground. In the sky, the evil star near the Orion, Sirius, is witnessed even in the daytime:

Recall, my lord, the weltering horde  
 Of loathly worms that passed  
 Northward, and like a filthy sponge  
 Wiped greenness off as fast

"As west winds wash the snow; that orb  
 That shook its spear of awe  
 Beside the brand Orion's hand  
 Is still in act to draw,  
 A hideous star — these eyes of mine  
 Its glare at noonday saw; (57-66)

Biblical catastrophes follow: the Deluge in Genesis (6.5-9.17), the violent

earthquake in Revelation (6.12), and the fire that fell on Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis (19.24):

“The floods that swamped flocks, fields, and towns,  
While men in throngs were slain;  
Earthquakes that took the land and shook  
The meads beneath the main —  
Shells gleamed by drenched flowers, tangle clung  
Like snakes about the grain:

“Herewith strange fire from heaven fell,  
Mayhap for priestly crimes,  
On abbyes fair; the hinds still stare,  
And mutter saving rhyes,  
At belfries in fantastic heaps  
Resoldered by their chimes. (67-78)

The natural disasters Thomas mentions are uncanny, grotesque, and enough to intensify the Gothicism produced by the skeleton at the feast. And Thomas says that these natural phenomena mean a storm which ‘shall break to-day’ (80). At the very moment when the terror by the skeleton is mixed with the awe and sensation by the biblical natural disasters, a herald comes to convey “‘the king of Scots is dead!’” (86). Thus, Thomas’s prophecy of a storm has been proved true. The contrast between the halcyon and tedious opening and the dramatically grotesque ending has a tremendous

impact on our reading of the ballad and implies the overwhelming power of Thomas's prophecy. Davidson's ballad on Thomas of Erceldoune has nothing to do with the topic of advocacy of national identity. Or rather, the Gothicism the narrative describes with the earl who 'grew white' (87) saying 'in truth are we stormstead!' (90) reflects the anxiety of losing one's national pride.

The advocacy of national identity in Scott's "Thomas the Rhymer" was transformed into Gothic anxiety in Davidson's "Thomas the Rhymer". Scottish national identity, which Thomas of Erceldoune represents, is also modified between Scott and Davidson. The different images of Thomas are not created simply by the difference of artistic direction or of taste between the two poets. It should not be overlooked that the tremendous social change of the late nineteenth century in Scotland casts a huge shadow over the image of communion. As discussed in Chapter II, Section 1: "John Davidson and Unstable Scottish Identity", from the early nineteenth century when Scott enthusiastically collected traditional ballads and published *Minstrelsy*, to the late nineteenth century when Davidson struggled to be a poet, Scotland experienced a serious contradiction between the unprecedented economic growth as a part of the United Kingdom and the loss of national identity due to this growth. An aspect of the drastic social changes of Scotland in those days described by a historian is worth hearing:

On the one hand it is clear that, overall, Scotland was one of the most prosperous parts of Victorian Britain; on the other, the

working population of entire cities like Dundee were effectively condemned to very low wages indeed. . . . the unskilled labour market was permanently and grossly oversupplied, partly due to the continuing mass immigration by very poor people from Ireland and from the Highlands. (*History of Scotland* 351)

‘The continuing mass immigration from Ireland and from the Highlands’ refers to the Highland Clearances of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the Great Famine of the nineteenth century in Ireland. Scotland was threatened from inside and outside the nation. Davidson must have witnessed the social plight of workers owing to the oversupply of labour and natural disaster, and the insoluble but increasing contradiction between the impoverishment and the high economic growth. At the same time, as Edwin Morgan points out, Davidson must have experienced skepticism towards Scottish identity and the existential anxiety of “Scottishness” in the days of being culturally ‘neglected’. Davidson’s Gothic anxiety is an honest representation of the identity crisis which he realized in an era of social and cultural changes throughout the nation.

Davidson’s “Thomas the Rhymer” was published three years after he had arrived in London, which implies that “Thomas the Rhymer” projects Davidson’s existential anxiety not only in Scotland but also in London. In 1889, with hopes of being a poet, Davidson left his grotesque and anxiety-arousing hometown in Scotland for London, but unfortunately the metropolitan centre of England was a more grotesque and unstable city for the aspiring writer to survive in. His struggle and isolation is symbolically

described in “Ayrshire Jock”, “Thirty Bob a Week”, and *The Testament of a Man Forbid*, as discussed in Chapter II, Section 2: “Davidson’s Defiance and Return towards Scottish Identity”. Davidson’s ambition made him abandon his old Scottish identity, but he could not acquire a new identity in London. Davidson’s Scottishness might have prevented him from acquiring a new identity, and as a result, as Kenneth Milliard infers, it might have ironically ‘contributed to his artistic isolation during his career in London’ (139). His desperate attempt to find a new identity as an English poet in “Ayrshire Jock” would be rewarded with people’s neglect later in *The Testament of a Man Forbid*. The narrator cries:

They mocked me: ‘Yah!  
The fox who lost his tail! Though you are crazed  
We have our wits about us.’ (60-62)

‘The fox who lost his tail’ seems to be Davidson without a stable identity. The anxiety of Davidson’s “Thomas the Rhymer” foretells the anxiety haunting the exile Davidson to the end of his life.

#### Equivocal Identity of Thomas of Erceldoune

What the image of Thomas of Erceldoune represents was transformed in the two literary ballads of the nineteenth century we have been looking at. This shows the identity the image evokes was also inconsistent. As Stuart Hall argues, the communal image does not represent a fixed consequence of the



Dunbar to have asked Thomas to meet each other while Thomas was alive, and therefore declares ‘[i]f the Editor [Scott] might indulge a conjecture, he would suppose that the prophecy was contrived for the encouragement of the English invaders, during the Scottish wars; and that the names of the Countess of Dunbar and of Thomas of Ercildoune were used for the greater credit of the forgery’ (*Minstrelsy* 588). James Murray, supporting Scott’s presumption, also assumes more accurately that the incident ‘within twenty-one years’ is the battle of Bannockburn in 1314, and concludes that ‘I am inclined . . . to suppose that it was actually composed on the eve of the Battle of Bannockburn, and circulated under Thomas’s name, in order to discourage the Scots and encourage the English in the battle’ (xix). Thomas was not always standing for Scottish identity. Both Scott and Murray acknowledged the inconsistency of Thomas’s prophecies.

Scott uses the harsh word of ‘forgery’ against Thomas’s prophecies supporting the English side. And yet when Scott refers to “the prophecy of Berlington” after Pinkerton’s work in the headnote to “Part Second”, he defends Berlington’s intentional disguising of a Scottish noble. The prophecy in question runs as follows:

Of Bruce’s left side shall spring out a leafe  
 As near as the ninth degree,  
 And shall be fleemed of fiar Scotland  
 In France far beyond the sea:  
 .....  
 Yet shall there come a keen knight over the salt sea,

A keen man of courage, and bold man of armes,  
 A Duke's son doubled, a born man in France,  
 That shall our mirths amend, and mend all our harmes,  
 After the date of our Lord 1513 and thrice three thereafter:

*(Collection of Ancient Scottish Prophecies 15-17)*

It is quite natural that the “leafe” related to Bruce in the ninth degree should be regarded as James VI, and that the person who shall ‘mend all our harmes’ would be James VI as James I reigning over England, until readers reach the line of ‘[a]fter the date of our Lord 1513’. The prophecy in reality tells the restoration of Duke of Albany, ‘who was descended to Bruce by the left, *i.e.*, by the female side, within the ninth degree’, and ‘arrived from France in 1515, two years after the death of James IV in the fatal field of Flodden’ (*Minstrelsy* 590). The phrase “of the ninth degree of Bruce” is used intentionally in order to disguise ostensibly the Duke of Albany as James VI. Scot admits ‘[t]here cannot be any doubt that this prophecy was intended to excite the confidence of the Scottish nation in the Duke of Albany’, and ‘[a]ll this was a pious fraud, to excite the confidence and spirit of the country’ (*Minstrelsy* 590). Dalrymple in *Annals of Scotland*, disagreeing with Scott’s explanation of the ninth degree by the female side, supports Scott’s understanding of ‘the pious fraud’. He explains the reason why the ‘pious fraud’ was needed:

At that period Scotland was reduced very low. James IV, and the flower of the nobility, had fallen at Floudden: his son an

infant; faction, distrust, and despondency, every where.

This was a fit season for a politic impostor to revive the hopes of a superstitious people.

The person assuming the name of Berlington boldly prophesied an *immediate* change of fortune, from the most humiliating disasters, to unparalleled prosperity. (46)

Whether it might be a pious fraud or a political impostor, Scott, James Murray, and Dalrymple analyzed the prophecies of the two leading soothsayers and found that they had been deeply connected with the ebb and flow of British political history, and that their prophecies had been described to the advantage of the nation concerned. They found Thomas equivocal. But Thomas's equivocality does not matter for the people who hold his prophecies in common. The name of Thomas is of overwhelming significance for them, which Dalrymple in the early nineteenth century affirmed:

Let it, however, be considered, that the name of Thomas the Rhymer is not forgotten in Scotland, nor his authority altogether slighted, even at this day.

Within the memory of man, his prophecies, and the prophecies of other Scottish soothsayers, have not only been reprinted, but have been consulted with a weak, . . . (52)

Thomas of Erceldoune has been a national image of communion.

More recently, Kylie Murray has discussed the equivocality of Thomas. In her “Rhyme(r) and Reason: Thomas of Erceldoune, Prophecy and Anglo-Scottish Identity”, she points out that the historical equivocality of Thomas’s prophecies contributed to the conception of identity in medieval English and Scottish literature. As well as the medieval manuscript of Thomas’s prophecies by Pinkerton, Murray digs up ‘an Anglocentric viewpoint’ from another manuscript of the mid fourteenth century. Thomas of Erceldoune, a Scottish seer, answers the question of Alexander III of Scotland:

To-nyght is boren a barn in Kaernervam,  
 That ssal wold the out ydlis ylcan.  
 The kyng Alesandre acsede,  
 Hwan sall that be? The menstral zede:  
 Hwan Banockesbourne is y-det myd mannis bonis;

(1-5, from “Ercyldoun’s Prophecy” from *Medieval English Political Writings*)

Thomas foretells that Edward II of England, who was born in Caernarvon in Wales, would rule all the outer islands of Britain after the battle of Bannockburn in 1314, that is, the line of Scottish kings would end. Alexander III died without leaving a male heir, which caused a crisis of succession at the time. The Scottish seer, Thomas, asserts English superiority to Scotland. Murray says as follows:

These prophecies are intended to sustain English authority and morale, while subverting the notion that Scotland is a recipient of divine favour. This is strongly suggestive of the fact that prophecies linked with Thomas became a medium for nationalistic claims of sovereignty and superiority south of the Borders as well as north of it. (325)

From a Scotcentric viewpoint, Murray introduces John Barbour's *The Brus* (c. 1375), the oldest Scots literary work and a national epic. In Book II, when King Edward of England hears of Bruce's flight to Lochmaben, William Lamberton, Bishop of St Andrews, supports Bruce as the rightful successor to the Scottish throne, because Thomas regards Bruce as the future Scottish king in his letter to Lamberton. Barbour describes a sense of exaltation of Lamberton's response to the prophecy of Thomas:

The letter tauld him [Bishop of St Andrews] all the deid,  
 And he till his men gert reid  
 And sythyn said thaim, 'Sekyrly  
 I hop Thomas prophecy  
 Off Hersildounce sall veryfyd be  
 In him, for swa Our Lord help me  
 I haiff get hop he sall be king  
 And haiff this land all in leding.' (II: 83-90)

Also in Book IV, Barbour furthermore tries to authorize Thomas's prophecy

by referring to Biblical prophets such as Jeremiah, Samuel, Joel, and Isaiah, and the role of their prophecies as God's will (IV: 668-87). There is no doubt that Thomas's prophecies in the Scottish epic were absolutely right and always advocated legitimate claims to the throne of the nation. The influence of his prophecies was tremendous in the political culture of Scotland. After discussing the nature of Thomas's prophecies from both sides of England and Scotland, Murray concludes: 'We can be in little doubt of Thomas's identity as a prophet of national significance on both sides of the Border' (334).

Those historical records of Thomas's prophecies have produced a series of discussions on his ambiguous identity since Scott's days until the present. Thomas of Erceldoune was from Scotland, but his image contributed to demonstrating national significance for both Scotland and England. Thomas of Erceldoune is a perfect example of a communal image of a nation, and at the same time, of a signifier of identity which is always changing according to the passing of eras. What identity Thomas projects and how he expresses this identity vary according to the era in which poets describe him. Thomas of Erceldoune makes poets and readers accept 'a coming-to-terms-with their routes'. In the medieval literature, Thomas's identity supports the causes of Scotland and England. In the early nineteenth century, Scott, explicitly acknowledging Thomas's equivocal identity, enthusiastically advocates Scottish national pride by creating the patriotic "Thomas the Rhymer". In the late nineteenth century, Davidson, imitating Scott's Thomas, transforms the image to produce the poet's Gothic

anxiety in a modern city. In a sense, the transformation of the image of Thomas from Scott to Davidson might have been inevitable. Dalrymple's joke on the changing role of the soothsayer, Berlington, touches the core of the issue: 'Had he [Berlington] lived in our age, in stead of uttering a prophecy, he would have written a pamphlet or a ballad. — Different ages require different tools' (49). It must be exiting to trace the transformation of the image and identity of Thomas Rhymer in later days. He has survived in Edwin Muir's "The Enchanted Knight" (1937). In the next section, the poem will be discussed.

## 2 “The Enchanted Knight” and Muir’s Identity Consciousness of ‘Half-a-Scot’

### Muir as a Ballad Critic

Along with Scott and Davidson of the nineteenth century, Edwin Muir was a representative Scottish ballad poet and critic of the twentieth century. Unlike Scott and Davidson, however, Muir was not a prolific ballad poet. Instead, he developed perceptive criticism against modern poetry through his discussion on traditional balladry. As his major contribution, he highly evaluated the unsentimental and unmoral spirit of traditional ballads, and emphasized the existence of the audience who played an important role for traditional balladry.

In “Chapter II: The South” of *Scottish Journey* (1935), Muir recorded his drive from Edinburgh to the south through little Border towns. Witnessing how drastically the capital city was changed, he arrived at one of the Border towns, Galashiels. There he appreciated Border towns’ historically independent life, and a kind of frontier spirit nurtured there due to the fact that ‘for centuries they existed almost on the frontier of a hostile foreign nation’ (44). Muir’s appreciation leads to another reference to the national spirit reflected on the Border ballads:

That genius [of the Border people] was partly heroic and partly poetical, and its most essential expression is the ballads, which

form the greatest body of Catholic poetry in Scottish literature, greater even than that of Henryson and Dunbar. These ballads continued to be sung and written long after the Reformation without any fundamental change of spirit, . . . In calling the ballads Catholic I am using that term very loosely, and mean by it nothing more than that the ballads possess a quality which the rest of Scottish poetry after the Reformation lacks. Burns is a very Protestant poet. Even in his remoulding of old folk songs he never goes back in sentiment past the Reformation. . . . His ribaldry, blasphemy, libertinism and sentimentality are all Protestant, and quite narrowly so. The ballads are without this local Lowland Scots limitation. In their view of life they are older than Protestantism; and it is this depth of inspiration which is their distinctive quality. (45-46)

Muir values ballads created by the ancient anonymous common people more than the works of the Makars of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Scottish literature. He insists that, compared to the Catholic ballads, Burnsian songs are Protestant. Although it is not clear which work Muir targets with his severe criticism against the narrow Protestantism, there is no doubt that for Muir, even the Scottish national poet, Robert Burns, is a historically deformed and sentimentalized figure. Ballads genuinely reflect Scottish genius partly heroic and partly poetical.

As another contribution, Muir insists in *The Estate of Poetry* (1962) that the audience of traditional balladry played an important role of

co-creators when they sang ballads together with a singer or a leading figure, and that traditional balladry was not passively handed down, but positively created through the cooperation of singers and audience.

As far as we know, these anonymous songs and ballads rose among the peasantry and were made by them. The authors, if that is what they should be called, know nothing of poetry except by inheritance. . . . On the other hand, if we can think of their creation in time rather than in space, we realize that there was after all a cooperation in their making, for it is clear from the many versions of them that exist that they were not merely transmitted in a passive way, but modified in their transmission, often to their advantage. It may take hundreds of years to bring a ballad to its perfection, and many generations may participate in its making, and the critical faculty cannot help coming into play. ("The Natural Estate" 11)

His assertion of the critical faculty of audience leads us to recognize the significance of audience whom modern poetry might have lost.

And why should the death of Sir Patrick Spens and the Scottish lords have been lamented for hundreds of years in the cottar houses of the Scottish peasantry? . . . [T]he audience is part of the business [of poetry], though we nowadays are disposed to ignore it, knowing that its part has become so small. . . . The

immediate participation of the audience in the poetry makes the strangeness of the poetic experience immediate and palpable, and restores to it something it has lacked, . . . perhaps ever since the invention of printing. ("Wordsworth: Return to Sources" 28)

The participation of audience can make poetry immediate and palpable, and never isolates poets and their poetry in their solitary tower of art for art's sake. Muir's assertion that audience is part of making poetry can be justified by the genealogy of literary balladry, in which over one hundred and forty poets have created over eight hundred literary ballads from the early eighteenth century to the present. One of the reasons why so many poets have been attracted by the ancient anonymous narrative poems might be that they attempted to regain their lost audience for their works using the style of ballad. Literary balladists might have fully recognized the audience had been lost 'since the invention of printing'.

As mentioned in Chapter I, Tennyson was the Victorian refrain technician. "The Sisters" demonstrates his skillful use of ballad refrain as the description of complicated sentiments. Tennyson was also curious about regaining lost audience by imitating ballad refrain. In "The Charge of the Light Brigade", Tennyson tried to disguise a patriotic message as the entire voice of the British people by placing the message in the ballad-like incremental refrains. On 25th October 1854, at Balaclava of the Crimean peninsula, only six hundred and seven British soldiers made a lethal attack against the Russian army. Highly moved by the article in *The Times* (Ricks 325), Tennyson described their brave march and survival in the face of

death.

Half a league, half a league,  
 Half a league onward,  
 All in the valley of Death  
 Rode the six hundred.  
 'Forward, the Light Brigade!  
 Charge for the guns!' he said:  
 Into the valley of Death  
 Rode the six hundred. (1-8)

Under the command of 'Forward, the Light Brigade! / Charge for the guns', the cellular unit rode 'Into the valley of Death' through 'Cannon to right of them, / Cannon to left of them, / Cannon in front of them' (18-20), and honorably came 'Back from the mouth of Hell' (47). The lines of 'All in the valley of Death' (3) and 'Rode the six hundred' (4) in the first stanza are repeated as a sort of incremental refrain in the following stanzas. The first refrain gradually changes to 'Into the valley of Death' (7, 16), 'Into the jaws of Death' (24), 'Into the mouth of Hell' (25), and finally to 'Came through the jaws of Death' (46), which so economically conveys the sequence from the unit's lethal attack to their miraculous survival. The second refrain, after repeated three times in the 8th, the 17th, and the 26th lines, also gradually changes to 'Not the six hundred' (38), 'Left of six hundred' (49), and in the end to 'Noble six hundred' (55), which loudly celebrates the heroism of the soldiers. In reality, the British soldiers failed to survive the attack. However,

knowing that the ballad refrain originally functioned the audience's reaction in chorus to a leading figure of the ballad, Tennyson expressed the exalted emotion by means of the ballad refrain, and successfully conveyed the people's sympathy for the 'Noble six hundred' (55). In regard to the purpose of Tennyson's use of the ballad refrain technique, Charles Morrissey not directly agrees to, but just introduces a sensitive and interesting insight into the poet's conflict of his social role:

They [young intellectuals around Tennyson] saw the poet as having a prophetic function in society; he helped the regeneration of mankind by rousing men with song. But the means by which he is to rouse them is clearly indicated by Wordsworth. "A poet," he says in the *Preface*, "is a man speaking to men." The poet, that is, deals with the great common emotions displayed in the common activities of men. It was Tennyson's apparent withdrawal from the commonplace in human life, his escape into fantasy, which distressed his friends. . . . He must not waste his tales in the composition of beautiful but private verse (Pitt 51).

Tennyson, Poet Laureate of England in 1850 after Wordsworth, seriously needed people's affirmative voice for the message of "the Charge of the Light Brigade". He overcame the conflict to be artful enough to regain the audience lost in his days as his co-creator by using the ballad refrain technique.

## Genealogy of "Thomas Rhymer"

So far is Muir's representative contribution to ballad criticism. However, our expectation that Muir himself reflects the insistence of the independent Scottish spirit or the participation of audience in his work is unfortunately betrayed. Or rather, his modern ballads are symbolic and retrospective. "The Enchanted Knight" is one of his modern ballads, and it belongs to the genealogy of "Thomas Rhymer". In order to discuss what Muir's "The Enchanted Knight" means and symbolizes, it is necessary to see the ballad in the context of Thomas's genealogy.

Thomas Learmont of Erceldoune, is fully introduced in the previous section. However, Thomas is not only a figure in the ancient narrative world, but has been employed as a key motif in Scottish, British, and other anonymous and onymous poems, ballads, and stories from the Middle Ages to the present. These works on Thomas form the genealogy of "Thomas Rhymer".

Some manuscripts of Thomas of Erceldoune of the Middle Ages highlight his prophecies and the romance with a fairy queen, with whom Thomas is physically involved.<sup>1</sup> Child's three versions are from about early

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<sup>1</sup> Murry scrutinizes the portrait of Thomas in "Introduction" of *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*, ix-lxxxv. Kamata points out the physical relationship of Thomas and the fairy queen as one of the significant differences between Keats's "La Belle Dame sans Merci" and the romance of Thomas in "Chapter III: A New Mythology: 'La Belle Dame sans Merci' as a Recreated Ballad" in *Mythological Impersonation in John Keats* (116-18).

nineteenth century manuscripts. They tell how Thomas met the queen of fair elfland, and how he rode with her from the mandarin world to another (I: 317-29). In the part second of Scott's three works of "Thomas the Rhymer", Thomas foretells that the legitimate heir to Robert the Bruce would rule all Britain both as James I, King of Scotland and James VI, King of England and Ireland. By imitating and developing original sources, Scott tried to show his advocacy of Scottish national pride. On the other hand, a Romantic poet, John Keats, describes another Thomas enthralled by a fairy's child in "La Belle Dame sans Merci" (1819). After awaking from a dream of love with a wild lady, the wretched man is loitering alone and palely on the cold hillside. He is no longer a descendant of the legendary prophet and poet, but just a man haunted by Romantic agony. The legendary Thomas by Scott was transmitted to the next generation of Scottish poets, John Davidson. Davidson was inspired by Scott's "Thomas the Rhymer" to issue his own "Thomas the Rhymer" in 1891. Davidson's Thomas has nothing to do with advocacy of national identity, but implies anxiety of losing national pride through the Gothic description of the embodiment of his prophecy on the death of Alexander III. One of Davidson's British contemporaries, Rudyard Kipling, wrote "The Last Rhyme of True Thomas" in 1893. His Thomas is no longer an obedient subject to the throne, but admonishes the king for his royal misconduct. Thomas himself, as a king in his own country, does not find anything worthwhile that the mundane king would bestow on him; an honor of belted knight, a horse of pride, and a knightly set of blazon, spur, page and squire. Kipling's Thomas denies human vanity and secular authority. He surpasses

his Scottish ancestor, an honest prophet in the ballad of “Thomas Rhymer”, to be a dignified moralist.<sup>2</sup> In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, Thomas is adapted for several literary works, one of which is “1991 World Fantasy Award” winning novel, *Thomas the Rhymer* (1990), by Ellen Kushner. This is a kind of Bildungsroman of young Thomas the Rhymer. He was a compulsive liar out of his vanity and pride, but through the captivity by the Elf queen as her lover and the experience of being forced to keep dumb for seven years long in her land, grows up as True Thomas.<sup>3</sup> From the romance to the modern fantasy, Thomas has excited the creativity of Western writers.

“La Belle Dame sans Merci” versus “The Enchanted Knight”

“The Enchanted Knight” was originally issued in *Journey and Places* (1937). Although the main character, the knight, has no name, nor is mentioned as the Scottish soothsayer Thomas Rhymer at all, he is a descendant of Keats’s Thomas who was enchanted by a fairy’s child and haunted by Romantic agony, because Muir’s knight lies ‘Lulled by La Belle Dame Sans Merci’ (1).

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<sup>2</sup> T. S. Eliot highly celebrates the simplicity of purpose of Kipling as a ballad writer: “What is unusual about Kipling’s ballads is his singleness of intention in attempting to convey no more to the simple minded than can be taken in on one reading or hearing. They are best when read aloud, and the ear requires no training to follow them easily. With this simplicity of purpose goes a consummate gift of word, phrase, and rhythm.” (*On Poetry and Poets*, 232)

<sup>3</sup> On the analysis of the plot, see Takamoto “The Narrative Paradoxes in Ellen Kushner’s *Thomas the Rhymer*” (in Japanese).

Keats borrows from the traditional "Thomas Rhymer" the motif of an encounter between a man and a woman from another world, and of their travelling on her horse to her land, but he describes the main character as a 'wretched wight' (1) and his pain and agony of love generated by the encounter with 'a faery's child' (14). Keats varies the rhymer given prophetic instinct to a Romantic and agonized man:

Ah, what can ail thee, wretched wight,  
 Alone and palely loitering;  
 The sedge is wither'd from the lake,  
 And no birds sing. (1-4)

.....

She took me to her elfin grot,  
 And there she gaz'd and sighed deep,  
 And there I shut her wild sad eyes —  
 So kiss'd to sleep.

And there we slumber'd on the moss,  
 And there I dream'd, ah woe betide,  
 The latest dream I ever dream'd  
 On the cold hill side.

I saw pale kings, and princes too,  
 Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;  
 Who cry'd — "La belle Dame sans merci

Hath thee in thrall!" (29-40)

After awaking from a vision or a nightmare, the wretched man is loitering alone and palely on the cold hillside. The wretched man is committed to tell his latest nightmare in which kings and princes enthralled by the same fairy gave him a warning that he himself had been enthralled by her. Acknowledging that palely haunted human beings mirror himself, the wretched man cannot find whether the love for the fairy was a reality or a dream at all. Nor can he find the exit from his enthralled situation, loitering eternally. He is no longer a descendant of the legendary prophet and poet, but just a man haunted by Romantic agony. His endless commitment to the agony is suggested by the structure of this ballad. The three lines of the first stanza are repeated in the last stanza, and this repetition as a technique does not end the story. The question of 'what can ail thee' from an interlocutor is repeated again at the end of the answer of the hero. However, it should be pointed out that the focus of the ballad is not only on his endless Romantic sentiment. Elaborately using the ballad-like dialogue in the opening stanza and the ballad metre, Keats also makes audience pay attention to the subtle balance between the subjectivity of the wretched wight's agony and the objectivity ballad techniques produce.<sup>4</sup> According to Friedman, 'its connection with the ballads is deeply compromised by its participation in romance' (Friedman 300).

While the enthralled man of Keats is destined for loitering 'alone and

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<sup>4</sup> Kamata analyzes Keats's characteristic meter in this ballad and its fresh effect in *Mythological Impersonation* (114-15).

palely', Muir's knight parodies the miserable end of his loitering. The knight has been lulled by the cruel beauty, perhaps on the cold hillside, to be forsaken for long years, and in the end just lies still with his armour being completely rusted and cobwebby:

Lulled by La Belle Dame Sans Merci he lies  
In the bare wood below the blackening hill.  
The plough drives nearer now, the shadow flies  
Past him across the plain, but he lies still.

Long since the rust its gardens here has planned,  
Flowering his armour like an autumn field.  
From his sharp breast-plate to his iron hand  
A spider's web is stretched, a phantom shield.

When footsteps pound the turf beside his ear  
Armies pass through his dream in endless line,  
And one by one his ancient friends appear;  
They pass all day, but he can make no sign.

When a bird cries within the silent grove  
The long-lost voice goes by, he makes to rise  
And follow, but his cold limbs never move,  
And on the turf unstirred his shadow lies.

But if a withered leaf should drift  
 Across his face and rest, the dread drops start  
 Chill on his forehead. Now he tries to lift  
 The insulting weight that stays and breaks his heart. (1-20)

Over a hundred years might have passed since Keats's wretched man lay on the hillside. Beside the lying knight, the world is moving and changing. As Matthew Arnold was surprised at the drastic change of the scenery at the Oxford hillside after twenty years, and recollected his days with Arthur Clough in "Thrysis" (1866) (Trevelyan 549)<sup>5</sup>, the cold hillside might have been cultivated under Parliamentary Enclosure and British Agricultural Revolution in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Below the hillside, farmers are ploughing the open field where the rusted and cobwebby knight is lying. The lonely figure of the knight reminds ballad readers of a 'slain knight' of "The Twa Corbies".<sup>6</sup> And then, just like Keats's wretched man

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<sup>5</sup> Trevelyan cites the twelfth stanza from Arnold in explaining the rapid progress of Parliament Enclosure:

I know these slopes; who knows them if not I?  
 But many a dingle on the loved hill-side,  
 With thorns once studded, old, white-blossomed trees,  
 Where thick the cowslips grew, an far descried  
 High towered the spikes of purple orchises,  
 Hath since our day put by  
 The coronals of that forgotten time;  
 Down each green bank hath gone the ploughboy's team,  
 And only in the hidden brookside gleam  
 Primroses, orphans of the flowery prime. (111-20)

<sup>6</sup> Child edited the ballad in the headnote of "The Three Ravens" as its parody. The corbies sit on the white bone, pick out the blue eyes, and repair

dreamt a nightmare, people's footsteps makes Muir's knight have a nightmare of a war breaking out, and of his old friends coming as soldiers one by one. He can do nothing nor can he move at all under this situation. However, having been restrained for years, he still struggles to move again. Nothing changes on Keats's wretched man, who would like to loiter forever when 'The sedge is wither'd from the lake' (3). On the contrary, Muir's knight 'tries to lift / The insulting weight that stays and breaks his heart' (19-20) 'if a withered leaf should drift / Across his face and rest, the dread drops start / Chill on his forehead' (17-18). When the winter has come and dreadful snow starts falling on him, that is, when time has changed and an epiphanic moment has come, he will lift the inexplicable weight of long years on him.

What does the mysterious, restrained knight symbolize? As 'Muir was strongly influenced by Romantic poetry and thought' (McCulloch, *Edwin Muir* xi), was it his own intention that he tried to create a Thomas Rhymer along with Keats's agonized Thomas? McCulloch points out the other influence on "The Enchanted Knight": "The much-praised but ultimately enigmatic "Enchanted Knight" is an amalgam of Keats's "La Belle Dame sans Merci" and Heine's "Nacht lag auf meinen Augen", which Muir read in

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their nest with the golden hair of a new slain knight, because 'His hound is to the hunting gane, / His hawk to fetch the wild-fowl hame, / His lady's ta'en another mate' (9-11). The lonely knight symbolizes the transience of life:

'Mony a one for his makes mane,  
But nane sall ken where he is gane;  
Oer his whitebanes, when they are bare,  
The wind sall blaw for evermair.' (17-20)

his Glasgow days in George MacDonald's translation in the Canterbury Poets edition of Heine' (*Edwin Muir* 13). In *An Autobiography* Muir himself explains the mental situation when he read Heine's poem.

During these months when I was tormented by my stomach and racked by my cough I had another Heine phase; yet this time, instead of helping me to recover, it merely weakened what resistance I had left. . . . There is, as well as exquisite wit, a sickly, graveyard strain in Heine's poetry. It was this that attracted me now. . . . This poem, with its sickly lingering on death, took a deep hold on me. I identified my self with the dead man who knew so well that he was dead. Something in myself was buried, and I was only half there as I worked in the office and wandered about the roads. I felt that I had gone far away from myself; I could see myself as from a distance, a pallid, ill-nourished, vulnerable young man in a world bursting with dangerous energy. (144-45)<sup>7</sup>

During the time mentioned above, Muir as a lonely, unhealthy young man

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<sup>7</sup> Muir remembers the beginning stanza of the translated version of the poem by Heine in *Autobiography* (144):

Night lay upon my eyelids,  
 Upon my mouth lay lead;  
 With rigid brain and bosom  
 I lay among the dead.

worked at a bone factory in Fairport, Greenock (*Autobiography* 130) after losing Edenic life in Orkney and losing his parents and two elder brothers in industrialized Glasgow. What he found in Heine is 'sickly, graveyard strain', but at the same time, it could be understood that he still held 'resistance he had left', 'something in himself buried', or 'dangerous energy'. It is true that these psychological aspects are reflected totally in "The Enchanted Knight." The knight has been forsaken and restrained, but he still feels 'The insulting weight that stays and breaks his heart' (20). While Keats describes the wretched man haunted by Romantic agony, Muir, using the same motif of the agonized knight and the mood influenced by Heine, describes his agonized self, who is waiting for a moment of awakening. In a sense, Muir has ambivalence towards his own existence.

#### Scotland as a Second Country

"The Enchanted Knight" belongs to the genealogy of "Thomas Rhymer" by way of Keats's "La Belle Dame sans Merci". It is interesting to compare Muir's modern ballad with his Scottish predecessors' ballads on Thomas in the context of national identity. Scott advocates Scottish national pride by his work, but Davidson implies anxiety of losing national pride through the Gothic description of the embodiment of Thomas's prophecy. As for Muir, the offspring of ancient Thomas has neither name, place, nor time. He seems to be totally detached from his nation, legend, history, and identity. Instead, he represents a kind of Muir's skepticism or ambivalence towards his own existence. Muir's attitude towards his nation and its literature is

also skeptical and ambivalent. While he advocates traditional balladry as a cultural heritage of the nation, he bitterly criticizes Robert Burns for his Protestantism accompanied with sentimentalism. Muir also takes a harsh attitude towards Scott. When he gave a lecture on Scott at the University of Edinburgh in 1944, he referred to the imperfection of the great writer, saying that 'the full impact of a great mind, changing and illuminating one's apprehension of life, is not' in his poetry and Waverley novels:

Certain scenes and characters remain, along with a sense of abounding stir and bustle; but the full impact of a great mind, changing and illuminating one's apprehension of life, is not there. . . . What reason can be found for this peculiarity of Scott's imagination? The most obvious one is a certain lack of intimacy. . . . It has been said of Scott that he was too busy living to have much time or energy for writing. (*Essays on Literature and Society*, 64-65)

It depends on the readers whether a literary work illuminates their apprehension of life or not. Is this too much ironical and mocking? Another cultural opponent of Muir is Hugh MacDiarmid, who tried to expand the possibility of synthetic Scots in the days of Scottish Renaissance. Muir declared in *Scott and Scotland* that 'Scotland can only create a national literature by writing in English' (178).

In the article titled 'Nooks of Scotland' in *The Listener* in 1958, Orcadian Muir referred to Scotland as his 'second country', and McCulloch declares that 'this "half-a-Scot" perspective characterized his attitude to things Scottish throughout his life' (*Scottish Modernism* 169). The 'half-a-Scot' perspective can be shown clearly in Muir's two poems on Scotland. In "Scotland 1941" he sneers at the solidarity of the nation by saying 'We were a tribe, a family, a people' (1) united by the independent wars of 'Wallace and Bruce' (2). He attacks John Knox and his successor, Andrew Melville, who 'clapped their preaching palms / And bundled all the harvesters away' (8-9), and calls Burns and Scott 'sham birds of a sham nation' (30). The total tone of cynicism and skepticism to the national history and culture is apparent. The other poem, "Scotland's Winter", is set at the end of "Chapter I: Edinburgh" in *Scottish Journey* (1935) as the end-piece of visiting the royal burgh of the nation. He crystallizes 'the contrast between [Edinburgh's] legendary past and its tawdry present' (38).

The miller's daughter walking by  
 With frozen fingers soldered to her basket  
 Seems to be knocking  
 Upon a hundred leagues of floor  
 With her light heels, and mocking  
 Percy and Douglas dead,  
 And Bruce on his burial bed,  
 Where he lies white as may  
 With wars and leprosy, (7-15)

.....  
 But they, powerless dead,  
 Listening can hear no more  
 Than a hard tapping on the sounding floor  
 A little overhead  
 Of common heels that do not know  
 Whence they come or where they go  
 And are content  
 With their poor frozen life and shallow banishment. (21-28)

The footsteps of miller’s daughter seem to be knocking at the frosty land and mocking the famous historical figures of Scotland buried under the ground. Around the dead who lie still, the living creature is briskly walking with her light heels, neither caring about the past nor the future. Noticing that the plot and the setting of “Scotland’s Winter” are similar to those of “The Enchanted Knight”, we wonder if the agonized descendant from Thomas Learmont of Erceldoune lulled by a cruel beauty, was Percy, Douglas, or Bruce; Muir felt for sure that those who represented Scotland were already ‘powerless dead’.

Muir was not able to treat the motif of Thomas the Rhymer in his modern ballad so directly as Scott and Davidson. Like his own favourite Romantic poet, Muir made another transformation necessary for his own identity consciousness of ‘half-a-Scot’. Muir’s skepticism and ambivalence towards his nation is clearly symbolized in “The Enchanted Knight”.

## Conclusion

MacDiarmid was born in 1892 in Langholm, Dumfries and Galloway in the east of the Scottish Borders. As Muir praised the genius of the Border people for being ‘heroic and poetical’ (45) in *Scottish Journey*, MacDiarmid and the people of Langholm call their place ‘Muckle Toun’, and are proud of the valiant spirit of the Borderers and its manifestation as ‘Common Riding’.<sup>1</sup> MacDiarmid proudly sings his birthplace in the dedication poem to his wife and son on the front page of *Stony Limits and Other Poems* (1934):

Nae maitter hoo faur I’ve travelled sinsyne  
The cast o’ Dumfriesshire’s aye in me like wine;  
And my sangs are gleids o’ the candent spirit  
Its sons inherit. (5-8)

MacDiarmid was filled with the spirit of Dumfries like wine. For a native Borderer MacDiarmid, Scottish national identity was self-evident and concrete. Therefore, MacDiarmid became the driving force of ‘Scottish Renaissance’, and a firm believer in the independence of Scottish language and nation. Like Scott, MacDiarmid’s Scottish identity was blissfully forged

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<sup>1</sup> [MacDiarmid] was thrilled each year at the sight of the whole population of Langholm turning out to celebrate the Common Riding, a pageant deriving from the old custom of riding round the boundaries of a burgh’ (Bold, *MacDiarmid* 27).

by the spirit of his locality.

MacDiarmid and Muir are like ‘the polar twins of Scottish Muse’ (G. Gregory Smith 20). Muir was born in 1887 in Mainland, Orkney, and spent his blissful childhood on a timeless small island, Wyre. But he was forced to move to industrialized Glasgow, and his harsh experience there produced the ‘half-a-Scot’ consciousness. Muir confessed in *Scottish Journey* that he could not reconcile vice he witnessed in the city and virtue the same people showed at a different time, and searched for the cause of the contradiction: ‘This division in the nature of these people was due directly to the corrupting influence of Industrialism’ (112). For Muir, industrialized Scotland was the soil of distrust. Muir’s criticism against industrialization and economic growth are fiercely repeated. At the end of *Scottish Journey*, Muir concludes that the economic growth of the industrialization of Scotland caused de-nationalization:

The conclusion that I came to after seeing what I saw of Scotland was that the fundamental cause of its many ills, including even the de-nationalisation of its people, was economic and not national. (248)

Like Davidson, the industrialized urban city deprived him of identity and nation. Scottish national identity was fundamentally unreliable and unstable. This is the cause of his antagonism to MacDiarmid’s advocacy for Scots or synthetic ‘Lalans.’ Muir did not recognize Scots as ‘a homogeneous language in which everything can be expressed that people wish to express’

(*Scott and Scotland* 111). The discrepancy on the issue of Scottish language between MacDiarmid and Muir was not due to their different notion of the roles and functions of the first language of their nation, but came from their complete difference regarding the reliance on national identity.

Scottish balladry and national identity have been discussed so far through Scott's Gothicism, Davidson's defiance and return toward Scott, fundamental equivocality of the legendary Thomas, and three Scottish literary ballads imitating "Thomas Rhymer". The whole discussion clarifies that Scott, Davidson, and Muir in the genealogy of Scottish literary balladry are precisely related in the context of national identity. Davidson criticizes Burns, and resists and parodies Scott; Muir criticizes Burns, too, but transforms Thomas as a Romantic and agonized figure. On the form of balladry, Scottish balladists are trying to overcome previous Scottish identity forged by their predecessors. They are 'inventing tradition' and 'coming-to-terms-with their routes' in order to recognize their own identity.

Christopher Whyte jokingly says that the "question about Scottishness" might best be defined as "agnostic" (8). However, the joke implies the bare fact that we face eternally what the question of Scottishness is. Whyte repeats the question in diverse forms: 'What is "Scottishness"? Of what is it composed? Where does it come from? How can it be defined?' (12) As the closing part of this dissertation on Scottish balladry and Scottish identity, I will introduce Professor Cairns Craig's elaborate words from *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination*:

The nature of a national imagination . . . is an unending series of interactions between different strands of tradition, between influences from within and without, between the impact of new experiences and the reinterpretation of past experiences: the nation is a series of ongoing debates, founded in institutions and patterns of life, whose elements are continually changing but which constitute, by the nature of the issues which they foreground, and by their reiteration of elements of the past, a dialogue which is unique to that particular place.(31)

The question of Scottishness can be answered by unending interactions between the two opposites and ongoing debates.

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