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The Mechanism of the Ancient Ballad: William Motherwell's Explanation

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This uniformity of phraseology in describing incidents of a similar nature which pervades all our ancient ballads, might appear to argue a poverty both of expression and invention in these Minstrel Poets; but if the compositions were narratives of real facts produced on the spur of the occasion, as in most cases we have ventured to suppose them to be, the use of such common places becomes abundantly obvious. They not only assisted the memory in an eminent degree, but served as a kind of groundwork, on which the poem could be raised. With such common-places indelibly fixed in his memory, the minstrel could with ease to himself, and with the rapidity of extemporaneous delivery, rapidly model any event which came under his cognizance into song. They were like inns or baiting places on a journey, from one to the other of which he could speedily transport himself. They were the general outlines of every class of human incident and suffering then appropriated to song, and could be fitted easily to receive individual interest as circumstances might require, and that without any painful stretch of fancy or invention. Indeed the original production of these common-places betokens no slender ingenuity on the part of these song inditers. They were like a commodious garment that could be wrapped expeditiously round every subject of whatever nature or dimensions.

(Motherwell 1827:xxiii)

The extended passage above, published in 1827 in *Minstrelsy: Ancient and Modern*, presents William Motherwell's view of the ballad, most particularly its compositional make-up, and might be taken as an *avant la lettre* articulation of oral-formulaic composition. And that position was derived from a thorough study of the ancient ballads of Scotland—through books and manuscripts, by corresponding with the leading experts of the day, and by collecting from the singers. Thus Motherwell builds his description of the ballad and its compositional techniques from lived experience, rather than from library analysis alone.

William Motherwell came to an interest in balladry and song for nationalistic and antiquarian reasons: they represented to him inherited capital, symbolic capital that Scotland was in danger of losing as she was losing her language, her laws, her history. Change was rampant and it was not good. As poet he wrote of ancient times, appropriating characters and topics from the Eddas; as editor of one of Glasgow's leading Tory newspapers, the *Courier*, he spoke out against the Reform Bill of 1832 that would enfranchise members of the middle class and thus alter the class structure and the status quo; as citizen he joined the Orange Society to lobby against Irish and thus Catholic immigration to Scotland; as Sheriff Clerk Depute, essentially a clerical activity, he lavished attention on routine legal records by embellishing them with manuscript capitals and flourishes that gave them an "antique" flavor; and as ballad and song editor and collector, he was particularly interested in the earliest, oldest songs, songs that had certain characteristics indicating their antiquity, songs rich in formulae, structured in predictable ways, sung. And in 1827 a book that had begun as a collaborative project with several friends was published in book form, having been issued sequentially in fascicles beginning in 1824. In 1827 an introduction, musical examples, and an appendix were added to the texts and the whole was published as *Minstrelsy: Ancient and Modern*.

The *Minstrelsy* was one of Francis James Child's privileged sources for his first edition of ballads, which appeared in 1857; Child was particularly taken with Motherwell's texts and his lengthy headnotes. Later, when he was preparing his definitive edition, the publication of which began in 1882 (and continued through 1898), Child paid special attention to the introduction where Motherwell talked not only about the ballad's characteristics but also about editorial principles—questions of authenticity. Motherwell made it clear that ballads exist in a number of versions, each of equal authority. Child was taken with both questions and sought, in his own work, to go behind the published texts to discover the manuscripts on which the works had been based. One of the first manuscripts that he had copied was Motherwell's; and his final edition of *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* contains some 225 versions of 108 ballads, many from the manuscript that he had proclaimed "of hitherto unused materials, much the most important" (Child 1882:1, Advertisement). Child's stated model for his work, Svend Grundtvig's *Danmarks gamle Folkeviser*, had likewise been influenced by Motherwell, particularly on the questions of authenticity and variation: texts should be presented as collected and all texts should be given. And Motherwell's work has been cited frequently by many ballad scholars from Gordon Hall Gerould, M. J. C. Hodgart, Evelyn K. Wells, Sigurd Bernhard Hustvedt, and William Montgomerie to Emily Lyle, David

Buchan, Flemming Andersen, Dave Harker, and William McCarthy as well as myself, indicating its importance. And yet some of his most significant perspectives have been overlooked, not the least of which are his ideas about the ballads' composition and sung reality. Thus it seems appropriate to look again at Motherwell's work, most particularly the *Minstrelsy*, beginning with the publication history of that work.

An unsigned review of the work, dated March 3, 1828, and found in a file of clippings at the Paisley Central Library, offers an apt beginning to this exploration (B/Moth-Pam PC 3216):

. . . he resists every temptation to re-mould the broken grandeur of antiquity, and refuses to trick his Muse in the costume of other ages, to gain in masquerade the plaudits of his own. His observations are guided by sound masculine judgment—and if he occasionally inflicts severe chastisement for heresies, it is evident that the individual has no part in his resentments, and that he aims at nothing beyond the propagation of an uncorrupted text. To secure this, he has, in addition to ballads never before published, inserted many others in a more complete form than they have heretofore assumed, scrupulously adhering to the words of the reciter. A collection of thirty three melodies, the lawful spouses of as many Scottish ballads are given at the end of the volume. It is almost needless to observe, that their arrangement has been regulated by the same rigid antiquarian honesty for which the poetry is remarkable. The Historical Introduction and Notes are full of information, and might of themselves complete the education of a respectable collector of ancient song.

This assessment is not unlike the majority of subsequent assessments; the reviewer takes the published book at its word, neither examining the publishing history nor looking closely at the text at hand. There is, in fact, a disjunction among the introduction, music and appendix, and the texts proper that needs to be explained before detailing Motherwell's ballad theory, his ideas about "the Mechanism of the Ancient Ballad."

The *Minstrelsy* was published in fascicles and begun in concert with a group of fellow enthusiasts. Interestingly, Motherwell was involved throughout his short life (1797-1835) in a number of such collaborative publications and this was simply one of those. The title itself may well have been conceived by the original participants: anticipating a collection of old and new materials, that is, orally circulating texts as well as more contemporary material written by themselves and others, they called their projected book *Minstrelsy: Ancient and Modern*. At least one text early in the collection, *The Crusader's Farewell*, was actually the work of Motherwell and appeared in the 1832 edition of his poems. William Montgomerie, who did so much to reveal the sources of ballad manuscripts

in Scotland, suggested his authorship of two other items: *The Twa Corbies* and *The Master of Wemyss*. The 1828 reviewer took exception to the title itself (B/Moth-Pam PC 3216):

There is one trifling exception to our praises of “Minstrelsy, Ancient and Modern.” It lies in the name. A quarto, containing only four brief poems of contemporary composition, ought not to have announced them after so formal a fashion. Such a limited representation cannot fail to draw forth a cry for Radical Reform among our Modern Minstrels. It is but fair to state that the fault does not rest with Mr Motherwell. The work appeared in numbers, a few of which, containing the modern infusion, were published before his entrance on the editorial office. The four poems are good; two of them of first rate excellence, but they should be omitted in the next edition, and reserved for their proper place, where we hope to see them associated with others from the same fine fancy.

A letter written to his friend R. A. Smith in Edinburgh explicitly describes the editorial situation: “the whole labour save correcting the press has devolved on my shoulders. How I am to get through with it I don’t very well know but since our hand is on the oar we must een lug away as best can” (Robertson 3/25).

Motherwell and his friends, then, had embarked on a publication, assembling texts—ideally never before published—with a distinct preference for “old” examples over new. When the project became his, he embarked on a learning process that made of him the preeminent ballad scholar of his day and time, barring none.

In the introduction to the *Minstrelsy*, written after the texts themselves had already been published, he refers to the process of making the book and learning about the subject matter as his errantry, a word that itself suggests the quest that enabled him to offer his ballad theory. His quest began with correspondence to other ballad and song enthusiasts—C. K. Sharpe (to whom the *Minstrelsy* was dedicated), Peter Buchan, Walter Scott among others—to ask their opinions and sometimes to share texts. His well-known exchange of letters with Walter Scott, and most particularly Scott’s belated disclaimer of his own editorial tamperings, has been identified as the beginning of Motherwell’s enlightened editorial policy—praised by the reviewer and most subsequent critics.¹ Motherwell

¹ Manuscript copies of the letters can be found in Robertson 9/1. McCarthy (1987) prints the exchange of letters between Motherwell and Scott. Interestingly, Svend Grundtvig had pointed out Scott’s letter to Child in a letter dated 9 July 1874; he had chanced upon it himself quite by accident at a pension in Switzerland in the memoir attached to a book of Motherwell’s poetical works (see Hustvedt 1916).

looked up to Scott, praised him lavishly; yet his correspondence with the much maligned Peter Buchan may have made a more enduring impact on Motherwell's approach to ballads.² In a letter dated July 1826, Buchan writes Motherwell that "what will render it [the *Minstrelsy*] more dear to me, as well as every lover of Scottish song, is, your having given the ballads without the disagreeable and disgusting emendations and interpolations so frequently met with in works of this sort." The words "your having given" suggest that in the most recent fascicle Motherwell may well have printed his texts as collected. This had not always been the case.

The notes to the texts offer ample evidence of Motherwell's interventions. The note introducing *Johnie Scot* is quite explicit: "In preparing this ballad for the press, three recited copies, all obtained from people considerably advanced in years, have been used As is to be expected, in all poetry which depends on oral tradition for its transmission to our own times, the copies of this ballad which the Editor has recovered do not exactly correspond with each other. Numerous, though on the whole but trivial, verbal discrepancies exist among them; and in adjusting the text, he had therefore to rely on his own judgment in selecting, what he conceived, the best reading from each of his copies" (1827:204-5). Some seventy pages later, Motherwell provides an asterisked footnote, explaining the origin and status of the text of *Child Noryce*: "That the reader may have no room to doubt the genuineness of a ballad for which a very high antiquity is claimed, the editor thinks it right to mention, that it is given verbatim as it was taken down from the singing of widow M'Cormick, who, at this date (January, 1825), resides in Westbrae Street of Paisley" (1827:282). Finally, a song that fits the principles expounded in the introduction! Whether Buchan influenced Motherwell in this matter, whether Motherwell came to his opinion about the presentation of texts on his own or with the help of Scott, or whether his firsthand collecting

² Motherwell, of course, valued Peter Buchan and his work; in fact he wrote to his friend R. A. Smith, saying that Buchan "has done more than anyone I know to collect the ancient traditionary ballads of Scotland" (Robertson 3/60). Child's views were almost the opposite: in the preface to the 1857 edition he says that "some resolution has been exercised, and much disgust suppressed, in relating certain pieces from Buchan's collections, so strong is the suspicion that, after having been procured from very inferior sources, they were tampered with by the editor" (v). Grundtvig in his very first letter to Child says that he can authenticate Buchan's texts "through a comparison with undoubtedly genuine Scandinavian ballads" (Hustvedt 1916:244). See also David Buchan's defense of Peter Buchan in *The Ballad and the Folk* (1972:ch. 16).

experience solidified his thinking, the introduction clearly stakes out a position on authenticity and editing.

Buchan stimulated Motherwell's collecting, and his letters to Motherwell are filled with personal collecting experiences, as well as the collecting of the blind singer James Rankin whom he paid. In an instructive letter, Buchan describes one such foray: "one old woman of eighty got so much into the spirit of the olden time, that, on approach, altho' lying on a bed by the fire, and whose decayed body and limbs could not carry her to the door, sat up and repeated many fragments which I had never heard before" (25263.19.6F). Such accounts clearly gave Motherwell the idea that this was truly a way to gather the kinds of materials he had decided to privilege in the parts of the *Minstrelsy* definitely under his editorship. And collecting clearly opened his eyes to the nature of the tradition and culture of the ballad-singing and -performing community; William McCarthy in deconstructing Motherwell's notebook and manuscript has suggested that Motherwell moved beyond the text-centered approach, from grouping various versions together to a consideration of repertoires. Buchan's example led him to hire Thomas MacQueen to collect for him, as Emily Lyle has so meticulously recorded in her work on the Crawford collection. And Motherwell had, in fact, stimulated Crawford to collect balladry as well. The influence of Peter Buchan on Motherwell's errantry deserves to be acknowledged today, as it clearly was by Child, who may well have overcome in part some of his scruples about Buchan, based largely on Motherwell's association with Buchan, in addition to Grundtvig's persuasive statements.

These details seem relevant to a reassessment of the *Minstrelsy*. Motherwell inherited a project and then began to learn in earnest about the subject matter: he acquired books, he corresponded with leading enthusiasts, and he began to collect. I would suggest that this process opened his eyes to many things, not the least of which was the issue of *authenticity*. His experience in the field, with variation and with individual performances underlines what Scott's letter had suggested: there were many versions and it was wrong indeed to collate, for in collating and rewriting the real state of the tradition is misrepresented. And this is generously explained in his introduction, written at the end of his errantry. In fact, the introduction ought rather to be called an afterword: it records what he learned in the process of thinking about and studying balladry, but does not describe the process of arriving at the texts printed in the *Minstrelsy* proper. That is why, of course, his manuscript has been thought to be so important; in many ways it records the texts he acquired—from collecting and from correspondence—in the process of completing the *Minstrelsy* and thus more

nearly lives up to the editorial principles expounded in the introduction. That explains Child's enthusiasm for Motherwell's manuscript and other holograph and published materials he was able to assemble;³ they provided access to more authentic texts and versions. Child in fact privileges Motherwell's texts, using Motherwell's titles at times even when the Motherwell text is not designated "A." Yet he was vexed by the anomalies in those same texts, even the ones in the manuscript: "Motherwell professes to copy the ballad from Herd's MS. by way of supplying the stanzas wanting in Scott. There are, however, in Motherwell's transcript considerable deviations from Herd, a fact which I am unable to explain" (Child 1882-98:V, 218). In other words, he could present editorial principles that we today laud, as did the anonymous reviewer, but he did not exactly follow his own articulated example.

As noted above, the introduction represents the sum of what Motherwell learned preparing the *Minstrelsy*, and served in effect as an afterword to the texts that had already been published. In fact, many of those texts violated the very principles about which he wrote so vehemently. Yet, authenticity and the proper establishment of texts are clearly hallmarks of Motherwell's ballad theory. Authentic texts come from oral tradition, which he characterizes as "a safe and almost unerring guide" (1827:iii). And those texts should be collected "with scrupulous and unshrinking fidelity" (iv); they must be collected and printed "as they orally exist" (v): "What their texts or forms originally were, we have no means of knowing; what they are now, we do know; all then which remains by us to be done, is to transmit that knowledge unimpaired, and with rigid fidelity, to posterity. By publishing in this manner, we stamp upon them all the certainty and authenticity which their shadowy and mutable nature can receive" (cii). Collated texts give "inaccurate impressions of the state in which these compositions are actually extant among us" (vi); an overzealous editor does even worse in choosing "to impose on himself the thankless and uncalled for labour of piecing and patching up its imperfections, polishing its asperities, correcting its mistakes, embellishing its naked details, purging it of impurities, and of trimming it from top to toe with tailor-like fastidiousness and nicety, so as to be made fit for the press" (iv). Forgers come in for vivid condemnation: "those gentlemen who deem themselves fully better poets than ever earlier times produced; but who cannot persuade the publick to think so, or even prevail on it to read their compositions till

³ Child obtained copies of Motherwell's manuscript and notebook and also had access to letters Motherwell wrote to C. K. Sharpe, copies of the *Paisley Magazine* (a periodical publication edited by Motherwell in 1828), and miscellaneous papers.

they have given them a slight sprinkling of olden phraseology and stoutly maintained that they are genuine specimens of ancient song” (viii-ix).

The latter half of the introduction, which surveys the history of the publication of Scottish ballads, offers further and specific critiques of the editorial principles espoused by a number of earlier editors. Of Allan Ramsay, Motherwell writes gently that “at the time Ramsay published, the business of editing Ancient poesy was not well understood; nor were the duties of an Editor, in that department of letters, accurately defined In the liberties which he took with the antient [*sic*] Song of his country, he has however unfortunately supplied a precedent for posterity to quote, and set an example which men of less talent, and even less critical integrity, have been eager to imitate” (1827:lxix). But near contemporaries come in for criticism and bald denouncement. Of R. H. Cromek’s *Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song*, he writes: “More pretention, downright impudence, and literary falsehood, seldom or ever come into conjunction” (lxxxviii); and of Allan Cunningham’s *The Songs of Scotland*, Motherwell calls his editing, altering, and mutilating a “heartless, tasteless, and impious jest . . . violating ancient song . . . wholesale mode of hacking, and hewing, and breaking the joints of ancient and traditionary song” (xcvii). What an editor should do is to select from the copies available the “one . . . which appears the most complete and least vitiated” (vii).

Clearly, editing of all sorts was in part motivated by the fact that ballads exist in multiple copies, that ballads are in, as he suggests, “perpetual mutation” (x). One of his significant articulations has to do with this fact, that ballads exist in versions and that each has equal authority; each is equally authentic. Sometimes, of course, there are great differences between versions, the result of additions and confusions, misunderstandings, forgetting, inventing, and conflating events from several ballads. Sometimes there are so many changes—as the law of perpetual mutation progresses—that a virtually new ballad is sung. No doubt this recognition of variation and versions was the central most important contribution Motherwell made to ballad scholarship: Grundtvig decided to print all the versions he found; Child followed suit.

Motherwell’s experience collecting balladry impressed upon him the fact that there are many ways to sing or recite a ballad, that oral tradition preserves the versions far better than have the published editions of balladry. That very oral transmission insures variability and change, the law of perpetual mutation; and thus “the whole duty of a collector of traditionary ballads is to print them exactly as they were said or sung to him; to mention the district of the country where he recovers the version, and to abstain from all conjectural emendation of the text” (1828:657).

Only then will the texts be authentic. Thus the lengthy discussion of editorial principles is really a discussion about authenticity and reflects Motherwell's growing awareness, derived from his field experience, that each version has equal authority; that ballads are alive and vital in oral transmission.

In large measure he became concerned about authenticity because he believed the ballads were national poetry, records of Scotland's ancient national minstrelsy: "They convey to posterity, that description of song which is peculiarly national and characteristic; that body of poetry which has inwoven itself with the feelings and passions of the people, and which shadows forth as it were an actual embodiment of their Universal mind, and of its intellectual and moral tendencies" (1827:v). Of course, he knew that Scotland shared her body of ancient poetry with England and Scandinavia; but he believed that the particular versions produced in Scotland were Scottish and reflected something of that indigenous history and culture. Along those lines, he believed that the ballads represented a common reservoir that served as shared cultural and symbolic inheritance. Thus they should be gathered and collected before the changes that were taking place introduced other common references, perhaps less national, less Scottish, more print-inspired. His activity then was both nationalistic and antiquarian.

Part of the introduction offers a characterization of balladry as he sought to delineate its qualities. First of all, the ballad has a particular structure: it begins at once to create the scene; characters are revealed more through action than through description; the action always moves forward with no backward glances to fill in incidents and details; the story rather than embellishments is essential in yielding a succinct "perfect harmony and wholeness" (xiv). A good deal is left to the imagination to fill in; the texts make no appeals to tradition to affirm their verity as in the legend and whatever takes place is assumed to be comprehensible and accepted. Yet the style is even more distinctive: commonplaces—"their ever agreeing in describing certain actions in one uniform way—their identity of language, epithet, and expression, in numerous scenes where the least resemblance of incident occurs" (xix)—tie very different versions together. And he goes further in suggesting that "in all cases where there is an identity of incident, of circumstance, of action, each Ballad varies not from the established mode of clothing these in language. This simplicity of narrative and undeviating recurrence of identical expressions in analogous cases, is one never failing mark of the antiquity of these songs, and their absence the best argument to the contrary" (xxi). And these recurring commonplaces provide more than action; they may well have connotative significance, as he suggests in

offering several examples: “And it may be remarked, that the expressions of *wiping on the sleeve*, *drying on the grass*, and *slaiting owre the strae*, always occur in such ballads as indicate a dubious and protracted and somewhat equal combat; and I take it these expressions were meant to convey that idea to the mind, as opposed to cases in which an individual has been overpowered by superior numbers, or assassinated unawares” (xii-xxiii). Likewise, the seemingly perfunctory refrains or “burthens” whose words appear “totally unmeaning and extravagant” may once have “had a significance, and were a key to a whole family of associations and feelings, of which we can form little or no conception” (xxiv).

This structure and style have maintained “the purity and integrity” of the ballad; but more than that they have helped people hold the material in memory; they have provided the very groundwork on which ballads might be raised; they represent the bases of composition. Motherwell returned briefly to this radical suggestion in a review published in the *Paisley Magazine* in 1828, just a year after the appearance of the *Minstrelsy*. There he reiterates the “many features peculiar” to the ballad: “the identity of expression, where identity of action occurs in these ancient compositions—their perpetual use of the same imagery—betraying, as one might suppose, a poverty of invention, but which we believe was a device, ingenious as it was judicious, to fix them in the memory of the people, as well as to assist the professed minstrel on those occasions, wh[i]ch circumstances might call on him to produce extempore narratives of passing events” (1828:660). Versions themselves offer evidence of “so remarkable a class of compositions” (1827:x) and “their existence can be accounted for in no other way, than by supposing these different versions the productions of so many distinct minstrels, each of whom obtained the story, which he versified from a channel foreign to that accessible by his fellow poets” (vii).

I suggest that Motherwell came to these conclusions on the basis of the fieldwork he began to undertake in 1825, inspired by his correspondent Peter Buchan, that here for the first time there is tantalizing field-derived evidence that the ballad was orally formulated. This experience also introduced Motherwell to the performance practices of his day. First of all, a song might be prefaced by background information relative to the personages described, information that helped smooth over “abrupt transitions” (xiv); at times the prose commentary was formalized and at others not. He adds that “reciters frequently, when any part of the narrative appears incomplete, supply the defect in prose. When the ballad naturally terminates, they can tell what became of some inferior or subordinate character . . . some pieces too are prose and rhyme intermixed . . .” (xiv). One of the reasons for the prose extension of the sung performance was the

general belief that the ballads recounted the truth—if not specifically, then at least generally. He uses the word “legend” in referring to the story line and expands in a footnote on the detrimental effects of showing one’s own skepticism in collecting (xxvii). And he remarks on the performance mode as well, emphasizing that ballads are sung: “they have throughout the marks of a composition, not meant for being committed to writing, but whose musick formed as essential part of it, and from which it could not well be separated, without sensibly interfering with its unity and injuring its effect” (xvii).⁴ Words then are wed to music and that combination has enormous effect on the total performance. The thirty-three musical examples added to the *Minstrelsy* texts, like the introduction that actually concluded the process of publishing the book, suggest his recognition of the centrality of music to a consideration of the ballad. And in his review of Buchan’s *Ancient Ballads of the North of Scotland*, Motherwell returns to this point and thus underlines the essential role of the tunes, which he refers to as national music; he praises Buchan’s collecting and publishing of texts in lavish terms, but he faults the collection for its lack of tunes: “They lack the music, they lack the salt which preserved these ballads—the very atmosphere in which they lived and breathed, and had their being” (1828:643). Thus he urges their collection, regretting “that no attempt on a large scale has been made to gather all our ballad tunes” (*idem*).

Motherwell himself had gone to considerable lengths to have the tunes recorded by his musical friends Andrew Blaikie and R. A. Smith; he had singers brought to Paisley for that purpose. And he was no stranger himself to the wedding of text and tune, which he had been doing since his teenage years as a writer of songs. He was frequently called on by R. A. Smith and by George Thomson to write words for an extant tune and he knew that there were particular issues involved. In an amusing letter to Smith dated 15 November 1823—that is, presumably before the *Minstrelsy* project had even begun—he complains of his own failure to create verses for a given tune: “I am cramped every way when I have to write to a given tune and a given measure The better part of last Sunday I devoted to the task. With a laudable diligence I scratched my head and bit my pen, invoked all the benign shades of such defunct scribblers as my memory supplied me with and smoked sigars even to sickness in order to assist me in this minervan birth, but alas there was no true conception” (Robertson 3/15). He was able then to consider the wedding of text and tune in ballads

⁴ While he suggests that sometimes the ballads are recited, he focuses on the sung renditions: the meter is not always regular; in fact he calls it “licentious,” meaning that syllables are accented that would not be stressed in ordinary discourse.

from an informed vantage point: he recognized melodic variation from verse to verse, prefacing his examples with these words: "The following tunes having been taken down from the singing of particular verses in the respective ballads to which they belong, and these verses having sometimes happened not to be the initial stanza of the ballad, it has been deemed advisable to print the precise verses from the singing of which the several tunes are so noted. This is rendered the more necessary as some tunes are given to which no correspondent ballad will be found in this collection, while others refer to sets of a ballad different from those which it contains" (Motherwell 1827:xv). Thus Motherwell offers musical examples, comments on the characteristics of the tunes, and recognizes that the melodic line may well be altered from verse to verse; moreover, he urged the collection of national music, the tunes, in addition to the national poetry, the ballads.

In fact, collecting and urging others to collect became something of a *cause célèbre* with him: he returned to it in his 1828 review of Buchan; but there are other instances in the *Paisley Magazine*, which he founded and edited. In the editor's column of the 1828 issue, for example, he mentions having received for consideration some mediocre poetry; he muses, perhaps somewhat tongue-in-cheek, that the erstwhile poet might better spend his time in collecting, in gathering the remaining evidence of Scotland's heritage. He feared that the materials he favored were losing ground, were becoming less popular, were heard less. He realized, of course, that song continued; it was just that he did not like the newer examples. In his review he began by saying, "For your modern foisonless poetical inventions, called ballads, we care not a doit; but for the old traditionary, romantic, or heroic strain, which, like the shibboleth of free masonry, has lived upon the memory without the intervention of written character, and has been transmitted from sire to son, from generation unto generation, from the remotest times to the present graceless days, we profess a sincere and perfect love" (1828:639). Change may well have been Motherwell's greatest fear; he sought to valorize what he could of the past, to rescue evidences, to turn back the clock if he could because he recognized that the altered societal environment was not conducive to the kinds of ballads he preferred, that their production and transmission were dependent on a particular sort of milieu, unarticulated, but the "way things had been."

Because of his nationalism, his antiquarianism, and his dissatisfaction with the status quo, he sought to gather and preserve one evidence of Scotland's past. He saw the ballads and their tunes as a component of Scottish heritage; he delineated their qualities, characteristics, and performances as he observed them; he laid down strictures for their

preservation as they were found in oral tradition. Child and Grundtvig were compelled by his ideas on authenticity and variability; Child mined Motherwell's work for texts. But in every case everyone seems to have overlooked his comments on performance and on the music, and especially his intriguing ideas about memory and composition. Motherwell's introduction certainly influenced the work of David Buchan, provided the seeds for the work of Flemming Andersen; and William McCarthy could well have capitalized on Motherwell's own ideas of oral-formulaic composition in bolstering his case for Agnes Lyle as a creator or recreator of ballads, for Lyle was one of Motherwell's "old singing women." Have the synchronic biases of much contemporary folklore and ballad scholarship kept us from reading and receiving the lessons of the past? Perhaps scholarship has been too fixated on texts, ignoring the theoretical and methodological concerns and discoveries of our scholarly forefathers and foremothers?

Looking again at William Motherwell's life and work reveals not only an expert, an authority on traditional balladry, but a man whose interest in materials and contexts was very much a part of the world in which he lived. As a cultural nationalist, he was concerned with the changes that seemed to threaten older cultural patterns; he looked then to the past, not only in ballads but also in his own poetic endeavors. His conclusions reflect his own interests and the concerns of a coterie of other Scots, offering a counter-hegemonic perspective to the Enlightenment preference for progress, change, and improvement—the dominant social perspective and trajectory of his day and time. His study of the ballads and his discoveries suggest that certain cultural conditions favor their survival; progress, change, and improvement are foes. His ballad scholarship was thus part of an antiquarian and nationalistic movement, and in that sense his perspective was backward-looking. On the other hand, his viewpoint could also be characterized as forward-looking, as an interesting form of Scottish romanticism characterized by a yearning for bygone eras, distant cultures, and nature. Certainly his cultural activities reflect one complex Scottish perceptual framework in early nineteenth-century Glasgow. Most importantly, his ballad studies offer revealing suggestions that may, even today, alter the way we conceive of ballad-making.

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