'Leaping broken narration': Ballads, Oral Storytelling and the Cinema

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Writer and director Paul Schrader (in an interview with Mikael Colville-Anderson) has said: 'Screenwriting for me is part of the oral tradition. It's like telling a story. It's not like literature' (1998).

This chapter explores Schrader's contention that the screenplay is an oral medium by looking at it in the context of other oral media, specifically the ballad. Most often screenwriting manuals have used as a model the three-act structure first outlined by Aristotle as applied to, first of all, the nineteenth-century play, and then the classic Hollywood screenplay. Increasingly this model of screenplay structure has come to dominate the teaching and theorising of the screenplay, with writers like Robert McKee and Syd Field coming to dominate the way screenplays are analysed and developed.

I also want to speculate about the relationship between storytelling and the visual and suggest that for screenwriting, considering the ballad – as opposed to the Aristotelian drama – may offer more helpful models for thinking about and analysing screenplays, especially as shifting technology makes the screenplay more fluid and able to change during the making of the film, able to include chance and contingency as well as structure and planning.

In a book which looks at storytelling in world cinemas, it seems appropriate to rethink the relationship between storytelling and screenwriting. For too long one particular storytelling model has dominated the discourse about the screenplay – and more generally, the making of cinema – largely to the exclusion of other forms of narrative, which may be seen as poetic, episodic and much more linked to oral forms

71

of narrative, of which the Scottish ballad series is just one example. The result has tended to be the separation of the story from the teller. As Adrian Martin has written, 'for many reasons, there has been a historical drift towards scriptwriting as an autonomous activity, breaking apart the ideal unity of script conception and screen realisation – an alienation that the current manuals help to reinforce' (1999).

There are many reasons why funding bodies and other gatekeepers of national cinemas might prefer a script-based cinema: as a means of retaining control, as a way of avoiding tackling the more difficult questions of what is involved in creating a national cinematic culture or simply from a desire to see the screenplay as 'literature'. But as digital technologies place the tools of storytelling back in the hands of storytellers, those cultures with strong oral traditions are in a peculiarly strong position to draw on a range of such traditions to make cinematic stories which can be integrated and hybridised with the range of influences from cinema, music and games from within and beyond any given culture.

This link between oral storytelling and cinema can be seen directly in for example Souleiman Cisse's *Yeelen* (1987) which draws on Bambara and Dogon oral traditions, or Zacharias Kunuk's *Atanarjuat, The Fast Runner* (2001) which is based on an ancient Inuit legend. But this is not just about the cinema in cultures with active oral traditions. Schrader's contention is that it is the screenplay itself which is close to the oral tradition. We should therefore acknowledge that the similarity to oral narrative is not only found in non-Western cultures. Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), for example, is structurally and thematically far closer to the ballad tradition than to literature. Indeed the very misspelling of the title marks out the work as something which is not from a 'literary' or even a fully literate tradition. Tarantino's film, in its borrowings and retellings, its relation to history, to plot and to other films, in its use of music, in the way it focuses on essential moments of action, expanding some, omitting others and compressing meanings is much closer to the storytelling techniques of oral narrative. Its aim is less to tell a structured story than to create a series of unforgettable and vivid tableaux which are both hyper-real and symbolic, using the audience's active imagination to make these moments come alive in the 'now' of its audience.

The techniques of screenwriting should not be seen as coming from a European dramatic literary tradition but from something which is much older, and both more particular and more universal. Oral storytelling is improvisational, adaptable, collaborative as opposed to the model of the screenplay-as-text, envisioned as separate from the film which arises from it. Moreover an oral model has the notion of visualisation at its very heart, an active audience complicit in creating the tale both from what the story they are told is and what they imagine as a result.

Ballads are not only oral narratives but rhythmic and time-based narratives which unfold in real time in front of an audience. Many storytelling techniques are shared between the two forms and for this reason I have chosen the ballad as a useful form to analyse.

Ballads: An early poetics of cinema

In January 1914 John Robert Moore, then a young graduate student, published what appears to have been his first academic paper, *The Omission of The Central Action in English Ballads* in *Modern Philology*, as he was completing his MA at the University of Missouri. He was 24 years old. Moore attempts to engage with the sophistication which he finds in this form of dramatic storytelling, a sophistication which had not yet been recognised by other literary critics, and which seemed at the time to go against the grain of literary thinking. He is dealing with an unauthored and demotic form and he tries to engage with it. He meditates on the quality of anonymous art. 'In the case of the ballads', he points out, 'not only is the author unknown but the school itself is and in most cases has always been an anonymous one'; the ballads, he continues, constitute 'not merely an anonymous school of poetry but a school of anonymous poetry' (1914: 391, 393).

Moore makes explicit the link between the ballads and contemporary mass culture:

> We see something of the same sort today even now the personal element is everywhere so pronounced. Who writes the articles in a metropolitan newspaper? How many people know or care about the composer when they whistle an air from the music halls? Who makes the jokes of the day which are re-passed from mouth to mouth? (1914: 391)

Moore was undertaking this work at time when the cinema was just starting to leave its early anonymity. By the time the article was written the techniques of cross cutting, flashback, point of view, shot/reverse-shot cutting had all been used. What Moore is describing in this analysis about the ballads could be called an early poetics of the cinema. In particular he makes reference to storytelling techniques of montage and elisions which have come to be seen as 'cinematic':

> In many of the best and most characteristic of the simple ballads, the central action of the story is omitted entirely, or else is withheld to furnish a climax at the end. Sometimes this suspense exists only for the characters in the story. […] There is little effort on the part of the balladist to attribute speeches to the characters that utter them or to supply transition in the story. Leaping broken narration is characteristic rather than exceptional. (1914: 396)

It is interesting to think about how radical this form of storytelling appeared to a literate and literary culture, at the moment it was starting to re-examine its relationship to the popular and the non-literate and coming to understand that the approaches to literary texts it has at its disposal are no longer sufficient to understand the new dramatic form which is springing to life. Specifically, Moore recognises that he is dealing with storytelling through inference:

> Not only is the news of the death withheld but in many cases the death itself is to be inferred. […] Is this omission a stronger device than detailed narration would afford? Obviously it is. The only objection to the method is that it may make the story too vague and obscure if carried to an excess. (1914: 400)

He puzzles over the absence of 'story' as it had been conventionally understood up until that time: 'It is the story which seems to drop out first; it is the situation ... which remains' (1914: 394). Stephen King, the contemporary author whose work has been responsible for more original films than perhaps any other working today, has written that 'plotting and the spontaneity of real creation aren't compatible' (2002: 164). Plot, he calls 'a dullard's first choice. The story which results from it is apt to feel artificial and labored' (ibid.). So instead of starting with plot, Stephen King puts his characters in a situation and likes to 'watch them try to work themselves free' (ibid.).

Moore observes that the ballads, which he recognises as a demotic form, differing from the written literature he has been studying, are nonetheless extremely sophisticated. As the new medium of cinema is beginning to attain its full potential Moore makes explicit the connection between the ballads and emerging modernist forms:

> The simple ballad with its selection of details, with its deliberately chosen situation with its antecedent action implied or but slightly expressed, with its resultant action merely foreshadowed is in close conformity with the modern short-story, the most highly developed form of the narrative art. (1914: 397)

Ballads and visualisation

The ballads always have had a relationship with the visual which goes beyond the vividness of their descriptions. Often balladeers made use of visual material – for example singers of German *Moritat* ballads (referenced by Bertolt Brecht in the *Ballad of Mack the Knife* [1928] – in German *Die Moritat von Mackie Messer*) used *Moritattäfel* or illustrative boards with pictures of key scenes. The singer would point to the appropriate scenes on the boards at the relevant moment. Elsewhere, particularly in Eastern Asian cinema, film became an extension of these links between the visual and oral traditions. In Japan the tradition of *benshi* meant that films were first shown with a narrator, who might use poetry as well as aspects of the *Noh* theatre and *kabuki* traditions to narrate the film to the audience.

But there is a more intriguing relationship between oral poetry and the visual: the importance of imagery embedded within the narrative to aid both the teller and the audience. These themes are explored in an interview with a Canadian balladeer:

> What do singers 'see' when they sing? The idea … came to me from essays … by D. A. MacDonald and Vivian Labrie. Both dealt with the way that storytellers could follow the

adventures of their protagonists, as they narrated, as though watching a film or set of slides projected on a wall in front of them … here is Clarence's response, which surprised and delighted me:

MJL: What do you think of when you see that song? Well do you see kind of a picture? In your mind when you sing a song?
CB: Well it's more like looking at a moving picture, or something like that you understand … you'd have to have just a picture in your mind going like a film, to really, really put the right music and everything to it, to do it right.
MJL: So each verse would sort of be a separate sort of a scene?
CB: Yes, it's like a motion picture … And it makes it so much easier if you can picture it. In your mind. And then that you can back it up with the music no matter how high or how low. (Quoted in Lovelace 1985)

The ballad, in performance, conjures up a series of vivid images, which in turn enable the storyteller to recall the ballad as they tell it. In the telling, these images are invoked in the mind of the audience. It is this dynamic invocation of images which is an essential element of oral narrative. Egbert J. Bakker states the difference between the two forms thus: 'the prose narrator fictionalises the act of perception, in order to represent the reality described, whereas presentation on the part of the epic poet is by itself an act of visualisation' (1996: 8). These ideas are also discussed in the work of Elizabeth Minchin: 'The storyteller's language serves as a prompt and a guide to stimulate us to perform the exercise of visualisation and to ensure that the picture which we build up is appropriate' (2001: 142).

Some of the characteristics of oral traditions noted by David Rubin in his analysis of memory in oral traditions are that they:

- exist in genres
- are transmitted in a special social situation
- are entertaining.
- are considered as special speech, either art or ritual
- transmit useful cultural information or increase group cohesion
- are poetic, using rhyme alliteration assonance or some repetition of sound pattern
- are rhythmic
- are sung
- are narratives
- are high in imagery both spatial and descriptive (1995: 8)

All of these apply to a greater or lesser degree to a film text. Other elements which ballads and screenplays share are a single storyteller and a rhythmically controlled dramatic story unfolding in real time with an active audience.

Rubin analyses the purpose of imagery in oral literature and its role in memory. In so doing he singles out some of the distinctive features of the oral tradition as making a narrative which is dynamic, specific and spatial. The role of the spatial in ballads is especially significant. As Rubin points out: 'There are no one scene epics, travel is the rule' (1995: 62). In film, certain genres, like the road movie, are dependent on journey.

This implied presence of the visual in oral narrative clearly has great implications when considering it as a model for writing for the screen. Ballads work with these invoked images and narrative points in a very different, more allusive and inductive way, which can be directly related to how film works with edited images. It seems to be self-evident that film is a visual medium. But this is often ignored in the poetics of screenwriting. Similarly Rubin also looks at the role of sound and music in organising the story. Rather than looking only at structure as an overall event, the use of the ballad as a comparative model for the screenplay allows structure to be considered as something that is constantly developing as ballads do, organising itself to retain audience attention moment to moment.

There are major narrative techniques which we can identify as being common to both genres. The techniques with which this is achieved include juxtaposition, multiple interconnected narrative, expansions and contractions of time and omissions of action. Broadly, these can be defined as 'storytelling through editing', juxtaposing different story elements and requiring the audience to find the connection between them.

It is possible to think of editing as the process of asking and answering questions, in which a cut proposes a question about the connection between the two shots which follow each other. The next cut answers this question and poses a question of its own. The ability to cut away from action before it is completed, to leave questions unanswered and deal with a number of simultaneous events which occur in different locations or at different times but are placed in the same story space, are distinctive features both of film storytelling and of the oral tradition. In both film and ballad, the collaboration consists of a series of speculations about the possible relationship between the different story elements. Both forms make use of the audience's active imagination to deduce the story from what they are told. They do not explicitly tell the story; rather they invite the audience to deduce the story, which is created through the audience's active engagement with the story material. As Rubin writes, 'members of a culture have considerable knowledge about the kinds of routine that scripts describe and they can use this knowledge to make inferences and set expectations' (1995: 24).

It is the audience's speculation which enables the story to be recreated. It may be said that these techniques are also used in prose fiction, and to some extent that is true (though I would argue that these techniques are themselves greatly influenced by the cinema). But there are some crucial differences. Firstly, as Bakker states above, oral narrative involves an act of visualisation by teller and audience. Secondly,

unlike a novel, where the audience is able to pick up or put down the text at will and explore it at their own pace, the ballad is a time-based medium, with a relentless forward narrative unfolding in real time in the presence of a real audience. As Walter J. Ong (1975) has said, the audience for the novel is always fictitious. In both ballad and screenplay, not only is the audience not fictional, it is required to become an active collaborator in making the story with the teller in real time.

Storytelling techniques in ballads

In a ballad, which has been sung many times, nothing irrelevant or extraneous should remain. It has been tested in the wind tunnel of audience response, constantly being remade in the interface between performer and audience. The text does not (or rather did not until collected) exist separate from its being performed (recited, sung, danced, acted). I would therefore like to look in a more focused way at the storytelling techniques the ballads employ and what kinds of comparison can be made between storytelling techniques in ballads and cinematic techniques and structure. I think that what I am talking about is relevant for oral and written epic poetry and for written epic poetry connected with the oral tradition.

I want to analyse in some detail these techniques in a specific ballad, and I have chosen for this purpose *Lamkin* (*Child 93*), a bloodthirsty revenge tragedy which still has the power to shock. The opening situation which generates the story is clearly and precisely described.

> 93A.1 It's Lamkin was a mason good
>   As ever built wi stane;
>   He built Lord Wearie's castle,
>   But payment got he nane.

The first verse is the seed from which the story grows – 'the inciting incident' as it would be described in screenwriting terminology.

Although the tone is apparently neutral, in the opening stanza we are told what the story seems to be about, and what it is not about. The subsequent conflict between Lamkin and Lord Wearie is not about the quality of the workmanship. At the beginning, then, our sympathies are with Lamkin who has been the victim of an injustice, and what immediately follows is the confrontation that arises from this injustice. After this first stanza we are in what Stephen King would call a 'situation'. A man owes another man money and is refusing to pay. We 'cut', from this piece of apparently uninflected reporting, to a dramatised scene in which these two characters argue.

> 93A.2 'O pay me, Lord Wearie,
>   Come, pay me my fee:'

> 'I canna pay you, Lamkin,
> For I maun gang oer the sea.'

93A.3 'O pay me now, Lord Wearie,
      Come, pay me out o hand:'
      'I canna pay you, Lamkin,
      Unless I sell my land.'

93A.4 'O gin ye winna pay me,
      I here sall mak a vow,
      Before that ye come hame again,
      ye sall hae cause to rue.'

It is worth noting here that this transition does not need to be explained or described. The audience is able to make a narrative connection between the events, as they are unfolded rhythmically in real time. Indeed the audience has no choice but to make sense of them. They are not told what is happening; instead they are given the tools to reproduce the conflict for themselves. The first speaker is not introduced but deduced. It can only be Lamkin who is speaking. This is the Occam's razor of story-telling where the simplest solution is the best one. This supposition is confirmed in the subsequent couplet and the argument continues as three times Lamkin asks and twice Wearie refuses.

The rule of three is a well-established trope, identified by Vladimir Propp in his *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928) and Lewis Carroll in *The Hunting of the Snark* (1874). In *Lamkin* each repetition adds story information and prepares the terrain on which the story will be played out. Each version of Lord Wearie's excuse intensi-fies our understanding of the nature of the conflict between the two men and sets up the subsequent developments in the narrative. We learn that Lord Wearie will be leaving the country (and therefore out of reach) and we also learn about his pri-orities. Although there is no description of the two men, the exchange also reveals something of their characters. Wearie is a man of vacillation and excuses. Lamkin is direct and clear.

We learn about Wearie's priorities. He cannot pay without selling his land. The drama introduces elements of class conflict and dynastic obligation – the reason why land cannot be sold, traditionally, is that it must be passed on to the next generation – so the notion of Wearie's heir is subliminally introduced here. And here we see the sophistication of this demotic and pre-literate form. We are introduced to the way the story will subsequently develop without being aware that that is happening. This is the mark of very sophisticated storytelling. As Billy Wilder has said, 'the more subtle and elegant you are in hiding your plot points, the better you are as a writer' (quoted in Crowe 1999: 168).

The confrontation between Lamkin and Lord Wearie echoes a shot/reverse-shot

structure. It's like a shoot-out. The word 'pay' is repeated six times in the first two verses, a word which will reverberate through until the end of the story, since it is Lord Wearie's refusal to pay which leads to his being called to account by Lamkin in such an extreme form. At the end of the exchange the word 'pay' is repeated once more, this time accompanied by the threat Lamkin issues, to which Wearie does not respond. Did this conversation happen once? Or on many occasions? It is not important; what is important is that we have left the world of real time and entered the world of narrative time, emotional time. There is a condensation of events. And the scene ends before the action does. The scene is left unresolved – it is through the cut to the next scene that the outcome is revealed.

We are informed of Lamkin's threat and we are left with two linked questions. How serious was the threat and how did Lord Wearie respond? What kind of people are we dealing with here? We discover who they are in what they do. Moreover this information is not imparted directly; instead it is left for the audience to deduce. This technique is an example of what screenwriting books call: 'Action is Character'. The phrase has been traced to screenwriter and novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald (see Bruccoli 1978: 332). We are also starting to establish a multiplicity of points of view and locations.

In time-based media (of which the ballads are a subsection), there are always questions about what will happen and what has happened in relation to what is happening. Here those cross-temporal connections are reinforced by thematic links about ownership and inheritance, which have resonance across the story. To pay for the castle, Wearie would have to lose his status – and that he is not prepared to do. His land – and the social distinction it confers – is what is at stake. In the next verse we see Lord Wearie's response to the challenge: he carries on regardless. There is no description of Wearie's state of mind. We are told what he does; in fact we observe it. And in taking the action forward we meet the next character, his wife. Every piece of story information is introduced dynamically, and we meet characters only as they directly become part of the narrative and are in direct interaction with characters we already know.

> 93A.5 Lord Wearie got a bonny ship,
>   to sail the saut sea faem;
>   Bade his lady weel the castle keep,
>   ay till he should come hame

These lines not only contextualise that the conflict is about the castle, we are subliminally prepared for the conflict to take place in the castle. 'Home' is both the castle and what it contains – family and domesticity. Normally the home is attacked in order to get to the family. In the inversion which *Lamkin* explores, the family is attacked in order to get to the home. This incident contains a moment of unease. By invoking something it proposes the opposite. It reminds us of the castle as the origin of the

dispute, and simultaneously, as a symbol of injustice and a place of protection. It is of course full of dramatic irony – since the castle is the only thing that will be 'kept' when he comes home.

> 93A.6 But the nourice was a fause limmer
> as eer hung on a tree;
> She laid a plot wi Lamkin,
> whan her lord was oer the sea.

> 93A.7 She laid a plot wi Lamkin,
> when the servants were awa,
> Loot him in at a little shot-window,
> and brought him to the ha.

In these next verses we meet yet another character: Lamkin's accomplice, the nurse. The nurse implicitly confirms the supposition about the existence of a child (although the child is still not explicitly mentioned), reinforcing the implied threat. We are being prepared for a shock which will not be delivered until several stanzas later. And our point of view shifts from Lord Wearie and back to Lamkin. It is this shifting of implicit point of view which is the distinctive quality of filmic storytelling – and which is a major component of the balladic form.

If we analyse these opening stanzas, we can see the narrative strategies used and the different implicit points of view and locations used.

Stanza 1

Location: none specified

Story Elements: exposition; introduction of protagonist and antagonist. Lamkin (L) and Lord Wearie (W); neutral POV

Action: L builds the castle and W refuses to pay

Stanzas 2, 3, 4

Location: none specified

Story Elements: conflict between L and W

Action: repeated demands for payment by L refused by W, L issues threat

Visualisation: unspecific location, but clearly using two points of view, shot/reverse-shot structure

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Stanza 5

Location: port

Story Elements: introduction of third character Lady Wearie (LW)

Action: W goes abroad and ignores L's threat

Ironic inversion: LW enjoined to keep the castle till L returns

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Stanza 6

Introduction of fourth character Nurse (N) and implication of fifth, baby (B)

Action: L and N conspire

Contextualisation: a reminder of the absence of W

Stanza 7

Specific Location (castle)

Action: L enters the castle aided by N

Visual elements: L's entry to the Castle, from the inside

We enter the castle with Lamkin and – in a re-echoing of Lamkin's address to Lord Wearie – the rule of three is repeated, and the vow (which concluded the first rule of three) is made real. Lamkin is in the house, which he built, active and seeking revenge. What one would expect to be dramatic revelation or development is simply omitted. We are not party to his thoughts or his intention. The characters in the ballads, like those in film, rarely soliloquise. They act.

If we consider the first sequence to be shot/reverse-shot, this second is a more complicated sequence; in addition to Lamkin and the Nurse, the montage would include long shots of the different groups who are unable to help, confirming the isolation of the castle and those within it. They also indirectly show the power and wealth of Lord Wearie, and the extent of the lands he refused to sell.

At a moment of high drama, Lamkin asks the nurse rhetorical questions which emphasise the helplessness of Lady Wearie, and which deliberately slow down the narrative. But the very lack of action in this sequence means the change of pace which comes after the fourth stanza, 'we soon can bring her down' – which concludes and transforms the three verses preceding it – is all the more shocking. Moreover it is given an unforgettable visual equivalence, which acts as a powerful marker for teller and audience alike.

> 93A.13 Then Lamkin he rocked,
> and the fause nourice sang,
> Till frae ilkae bore o the cradle
> the red blood out sprang.

This visual image works on many different levels. Lamkin and the Nurse, singing and rocking the child with the blood pouring out at every corner of the cradle and ignoring the child's pain (which they have created), are the present false parents who are contrasted with the absent true parents who are also to some degree complicit in the child's suffering. And there is a third complicit absent present at the scene – the audience. We long to stop the child's suffering, and cannot. Instead we are forced to enjoy our complicated pleasure. We are in the room with the screaming child and

those that are harming it. We are powerless. We are forced to know the awful secret of the fate of the child which the mother is excluded from. We see what she can hear. And it is this difference between seeing and hearing which gives rise to the subsequent question and answer scenes. In the confrontation between Lamkin and Lord Wearie culminating in Lamkin's vow of revenge, which concluded the fourth stanza, the men were confronting each other aggressively and face to face. The two women cannot see each other and are apparently friendly, but there is an enormous and terrifying difference between them which we, the audience, are party to. Dissembling is at the very heart of the scene. And we are present, complicit, in a scene familiar from numerous horror films. We know something terrible, which the victim does not, yet.

Lady Wearie is on the stair, halfway between above and below. Though she cannot see what goes on, she is compelled to hear it. The difference between seeing and hearing is made terrifyingly apparent here. Hearing is speculation. Seeing is confirmation.

In the dialogue we are given an ironic reference back to the first conversation, and the reason for the conflict: 'he will not still for all his father's land'. If that first conflict ended with an ominous separation of the two participants, the second ends with a horrific coming together, building to the unbearable moment when Lady Wearie will be compelled to see with her own eyes what we have already visualised on her behalf: her dying child. And then that revelatory scene, which we have also already visualised, and which we are both anticipating and dreading, does not occur. We are faced, again, with uncompleted action. The story is moved on through a cut. Her decision to come down is expressed in her movement.

> 93A.18   O the firsten step she steppit,
>   she steppit on a stane;
>   But the neisten step she steppit,
>   she met him Lamkin.

> 93A.19   'O mercy, mercy, Lamkin,
>   hae mercy upon me!
>   Though you've taen my young son's life,
>   Ye may let mysel be.'

Here is an extraordinary shift of time – which is utterly filmic in its complexity and in the shifts of perspective and understanding it involves. In verse 18 she is on her way to see her dead child. In verse 19 she has already realised his life has been taken, and she is pleading for her own. All this happens in the gap between the verses, 'off-screen' so to speak. Any description of the key moment of this sequence, perhaps of the whole drama, is omitted. Between verses 18 and 19 Lady Wearie has moved from innocence to knowledge. She has realised that her son is dead and that her own life

is at stake. The most significant change of all is that her position relative to the narrative and the audience has changed. From knowing less than us she knows more. And the question we were asking, how will she react when she discovers the terrible news?, has been replaced by another: will she live or die? And that has all been imagined in a breach, an absence, a moment of silence.

There now follows a very rapid unfolding of the story. Lamkin asks the nurse whether Lady Wearie should live or die, and in a reassertion of the class aspects of the drama, she is condemned to death because of the way she has treated her servant.

> 93A.20 'O sall I kill her, nourice,
> or sall I lat her be?'
> 'O kill her, kill her, Lamkin,
> for she neer was good to me.'

> 93A.21 'O scour the bason, nourice,
> and mak it fair and clean,
> For to keep this lady's heart's blood,
> For she's come o noble kin.'

> 93A.22 'There need nae bason, Lamkin,
> lat it run through the floor;
> What better is the heart's blood
> o the rich than o the poor?'

And again we leave the scene before this act of violence is consummated. The murder of Lady Wearie, like that of her child, does not occur on screen. We leave the action not on the death, but on the decision to kill. Instead we cut to three months later.

> 93A.23 But ere three months were at an end,
> Lord Wearie came again;
> But dowie, dowie was his heart
> when first he came hame.

And it is not until this 23rd verse that we find the first piece of emotional description in the piece. Lord Wearie's heart is 'dowie' (sad).

> 93A.24 'O wha's blood is this,' he says,
> 'That lies in the chamer?'
> 'It is your lady's heart's blood;
> 'tis as clear as the lamer.'

93A.25 'And wha's blood is this,' he says,
        'That lies in my ha?'
        'It is your young son's heart's blood;
        'tis the clearest ava.'

This moment shows the primacy of the visual in the storytelling. Clearly it is not in any sense 'realistic' that three months after the death, the blood was left for Lord Wearie to examine. What this achieves is to make the exposition both dynamic and dramatic. What of course he is being asked to do is to confront the consequences of his own actions. The coming together of the blood with the building, whose construction led to this violent conflict, is expressed visually and symbolically. The two exchanges of question, and without the third we have come to expect from previous occasions, remind of us of incompleteness and loss. A reversion to normality is impossible for Lord Wearie now his wife and son are dead.

The final two verses conclude the story with, like the end of Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), a deliberately downbeat ending. They tell us that the killers faced justice – of a kind. By contrasting the death of Lamkin and the Nurse with the two birds who continue to sing after their death, our attention is drawn to the persistence of art, and to the ballad itself.

Conclusion

Stanley Kubrick has said 'a film is – or should be – more like music than like fiction. It should be a progression of moods and feelings. The theme, what's behind the emotion, the meaning, all that comes later' (quoted in Kagan 1989: 231). If we see film as like a ballad, we can conceive of many different forms of envisaging and recording the 'pre-film' process. We can think of its origins as originally written (as for example Rudyard Kipling's *The Ballad of Danny Deever* [1890]), we can think of it being a set of structured improvisations, given shape after recording, like Teo Mancero producing Miles Davis's *Kind of Blue* (1959), we can think of it as a retelling of a familiar story (like Davis's reinterpretation of *Someday My Prince Will Come* [1961]). What all these models have in common is that the ultimate focus is on the unfolding of a story in real time in conjunction with an audience. It does not see the writing and the telling as two separate practices but as one.

It is the nature of storytelling to improvise, to patch together, to juxtapose, in order to make its meanings. Rather than separating the screenplay from the film, we should see that it is the nature of storytelling to borrow and steal, to merge, to bring together, to combine. Any attempt to separate the tale from the teller does a disservice to both. As technology makes cameras almost universal, we can see the written screenplay as a form of notation – a necessary stage on the way to the creation of a film at a particular historical moment. As with recorded music, the relationship with the notation fundamentally changes when technology allows the work to be

recorded directly. Notation allows different kinds of screenplays to be written as they allow different kinds of film to be written.

As Adrian Martin has said: 'Scripts, of course, are very important, though they're not necessarily the most important things in a movie. What's important in a movie is the movie. It's the cinema' (quoted in Michaels 2009: 28). [XXX again, best to finish on one closing line from the author, not with a quote from an external source]

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