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CHARLES G. ZUG III

## Sir Walter Scott and the Ballad Forgery

Sir Walter Scott has never enjoyed a very high reputation as a ballad scholar. On innumerable occasions he has been accused, both by his contemporaries and by succeeding generations of ballad devotees, of inventing lines, stanzas, and even whole ballads for his *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. Perhaps most damaging have been the many comments of Francis James Child to the effect that "Scott's variations, the contrary not being alleged, must be supposed to be his own."<sup>1</sup> This dictum recurs in a variety of forms throughout *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* and has been generally accepted by modern ballad scholars. Put another way, Child's judgment means that the burden of proof rests with the defense: Scott is always guilty until proved otherwise. But guilty of what, exactly? Most contemporary students of the ballad would glibly assert that Scott was guilty of ballad forgery and then let the issue pass. But the issue is nowhere as simple as this, and such a verdict is much too unjust to Sir Walter.

Perhaps the main difficulty in assessing Scott's guilt centers on the word "forgery." Clearly there are various degrees of forgery, and the term may take on different meanings in different eras. To the modern ballad collector, Scott and his contemporaries were all forgers, in that they rarely hesitated to restore, improve or conflate their original texts. For Scott, however, the term had a very different meaning: it was the attempt, usually on the part of a poetical antiquary, to create a totally original ballad poem and then hand it off "as the production of genuine antiquity." In this sense, forgery was an exercise in ballad imitation, but one in which the author, instead of owning his efforts, passed them "as contraband goods on the skilful [sic] antiquary."<sup>2</sup> Thus, from the modern point of view, ballad forgery involves *any* alteration or interpolation—no matter how minor—in a collected text; to Scott, on the other hand, forgery represented the dishonest attempt to present an original poem as a traditional ballad. Was Scott, then, a forger?

Clearly, Scott was a "forger" if the very rigid, modern definition of the term is used. However, it must be remembered that Scott composed

1. *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (New York, 1965), II, 423.

2. Scott, "Essay on Imitations of the Ancient Ballad," *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, ed. J. G. Lockhart (London, 1833), pp. 180, 181.

the *Minstrelsy* almost half a century before the word "folklore" was even coined. In taking editorial liberties with his collected texts, Scott was merely adhering to the taste of his times, for his readers demanded that his ballads be complete and fully intelligible, and appear in a meaningful artistic or historical context. The idea of producing a long and detailed series of variants in the manner of Child would have been totally foreign to Scott's generation.<sup>3</sup> Thus, it is both unfair and unrealistic to label Scott a ballad forger on the basis of modern definitions and practices. However, it is both just and essential to consider whether Scott was a forger by his own definition of the term.

Over the years, Scott has been accused of having written a number of the historic and romantic ballads that occur in the first two sections of the *Minstrelsy*. "Auld Maitland," for example, which Child stoutly refused to admit into his collection, has been attributed to Scott's hand. That no other copies of this ballad have ever been discovered is indeed suspicious. However, to accuse Scott of having invented the ballad is absurd, for the original MS. in the hand of James Hogg is readily available in The National Library of Scotland.<sup>4</sup> Scott, of course, made a large number of minor editorial changes in adapting the ballad for publication in the *Minstrelsy*, but if it is a forgery, it is clearly Hogg's and not his. Still another, better known ballad which is occasionally ascribed to Scott's pen is the very lyrical "Twa Corbies." Scott received the ballad from Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe, who had obtained it from a Miss Erskine of Alva, who, in turn, had "written it down from the recitation of an old woman at Alva."<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, the original text has not survived, and it is now unlikely that the true source of this ballad will ever be discovered. Possibly, Scott polished the text a bit before he placed it in his collection, but he clearly did not invent the ballad, for as the remaining evidence reveals, there are at least three potential authors in line ahead of him.

One other ballad that deserves mention is "Kinmont Willie," which, as Child observes, "celebrates a bold and masterly exploit of Sir Walter

3. Child's methods are, of course, also open to considerable criticism from the modern viewpoint, for his approach is essentially literary, and, in contrast to Scott, he isolates the ballads from their living contexts.

4. MS. 877, ff. 144-5. The MS. is actually a letter from Hogg to William Laidlaw at Blackhouse, and was written before Hogg met Scott. For this and subsequent references to Scottish manuscript materials, I am indebted to the University Research Council at the University of North Carolina for a grant used for a trip to Scotland in the summer of 1969.

5. *Letters from and to Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe, Esq.*, ed. Alexander Allardyce (Edinburgh and London, 1888), I, 136.

Scott of Branxholm, laird of Buccleugh."<sup>6</sup> As in the case of the two examples above, the only text is the one appearing in the *Minstrelsy*, a circumstance sure to invoke the curiosity and doubt of any folklorist. Scott's exact source and original text remain unknown, and his only comment on his text is that "this ballad is preserved, by tradition, on the West Borders, but much mangled by reciters; so that some conjectural emendations have been absolutely necessary to render it intelligible."<sup>7</sup> As vague as it is, Scott's comment suggests that he did get the ballad from tradition—probably during his "raids" into Liddesdale with Robert Shortreed—and that he edited it in his usual fashion. In addition, there are two other "rescue ballads" in the *Minstrelsy* which are virtually identical in structure—"Jock o' the Side" and "Archie of Ca'field"—suggesting that this was a common type of ballad on the Border. Admittedly, Scott may have interpolated a few extra stanzas lauding the feats of his ancestors, but once again the existing evidence fails to support the view that Scott simply forged the ballad.

The frequent lack of original texts, especially for the historical ballads in the *Minstrelsy*, is easily explained by Scott's editorial methods and aims. Since he was only interested in producing a *single, finished* text, Scott was apparently very careless about saving the often incomplete variants which served as the bases for his finished products. For example, even as early as April 14, 1806, Scott informed Malcolm Laing, who was already questioning the authenticity of several ballads in the *Minstrelsy*, that "I cannot find the copy of Cowden knowes but I will make a further search & at any rate if the original copy sent to me has been lost I will procure an exact history of the song from the person who sent it me."<sup>8</sup> Scott does not appear to have been successful in his search for his sources on "The Broom of Cowdenknowes," for neither "the original copy" nor "the person who sent it" are known today. Such "carelessness" seems the natural result of Scott's editorial objectives, and it is perhaps remarkable that so many of Scott's sources are known today.<sup>9</sup> Another possibility, suggested by David Laing to Child, is that "Sir Walter himself may have cut out the missing leaves when preparing his 'Border Minstrelsy' and sent them to the printers."<sup>10</sup> In other words, Scott may have sent his original texts, appropriately

6. Child, III, 469.

7. *Minstrelsy*, p. 74.

8. *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. H. J. C. Grierson (London, 1932), I, 294.

9. The most important are MSS. 877 and 893 in The National Library of Scotland.

10. MS. La. IV.6., #5, Library of the University of Edinburgh.

edited of course, directly to James Ballantyne. In either case, the lack of materials is the direct result of Scott's editorial work, and there is absolutely no evidence to convict Scott of forging spurious traditional ballads for the *Minstrelsy*. What is more important, Scott always spoke out strongly on the immorality of ballad forgery, and he made repeated efforts to ensure that the ballads in the first two sections of the *Minstrelsy* were essentially traditional.

Prior to and during Scott's lifetime, the practice of ballad forgery was very widespread in Scotland, and the ballad editor who wished to authenticate his traditional materials had to be very cautious, indeed. Scott's early favorite "Hardyknute" was one such example, as were the equally famous — and successful — efforts of James MacPherson and John Pinkerton. In fact, as that arch-enemy of all forgery, Joseph Ritson, observed, "The history of Scottish poetry exhibits a series of fraud, forgery, and imposture, practiced with impunity and success."<sup>11</sup> Scott himself was fully aware of this tendency and frequently rebuked those who countenanced forgery and attempted to deceive the public. Nowhere was he more pointed or specific than in a review of *Chatterton's Works*, written in 1804, in which he admonished the youthful reader with the following advice:

He may learn, that if neglect or contempt obstruct him in the fair pursuit of fame, it is better to prefer obscurity, than to attain, by the crooked path of literary forgery, the ambiguous reputation of an ingenious imposter.<sup>12</sup>

It was not the product of forgery that Scott disliked, for he expressed open admiration for Chatterton's poetry; rather, it was the act of outright dishonesty that lay behind such an attempt. Such an act was clearly immoral from Scott's point of view, and in view of this attitude it is difficult to believe, as many critics have done, that Scott would have invented whole ballads for the first two sections of the *Minstrelsy*.

In addition to this clear moral aversion to forgery, Scott made special efforts to ensure the authenticity and essential genuineness of his historical and romantic ballads. In his preface to "Fause Foodrage," for example, Scott wrote that the resemblance to "Hardyknute" in stanza 31 "led the Editor to make the strictest inquiry into the authenticity of the song. But every doubt was removed by the evidence of a lady of high rank, who not only recollected the ballad, as having amused her infancy, but could repeat many of the verses, particularly those beautiful stanzas from the 20th to the 25th." Scott concluded that "the author

11. *Scottish Songs* (Glasgow, 1869), I, 67.

12. *Edinburgh Review* IV (1804), 230.

of *Hardyknute* copied the old ballad,<sup>13</sup> although it is no less likely that the singer, Mrs. Brown of Falkland, interpolated a stanza which was loosely based on her memory of "Hardyknute." In either case, Scott's diligence in searching for variants reveals the extent of his concern to ensure that his ballads were traditional. At the same time, his willingness to accept stanza 31 shows that he would include materials that were modern or of doubtful origin, as long as he was sure that the ballad, itself, was substantially genuine. A similar example is seen in "The Young Tamlane," in which Scott added eleven obviously modern stanzas,<sup>14</sup> even though he seriously questioned their origin. Scott's general method, then, was to ascertain that each of his historical or romantic ballads was traditional, either by collecting directly from oral tradition, or, in the case of written texts, by locating variants. Once the genuineness of the ballad was determined, Scott could then alter or add to the text in order to enhance its intelligibility or general merit.

One ballad that Scott did not accept, even though he uncovered at least three variants of it, was "Jock o' Milk," which he first obtained either from David Herd or the Glenriddell MS. Scott wished to publish the ballad in the *Minstrelsy*, but hesitated to do so, because, as he wrote R. Cleator, who supplied the third copy, he felt that it had "more the character of an imitation than of a real ancient ballad." The following stanzas, with their regular meter, alliteration, and internal rhyme, should quickly illustrate just why Scott was suspicious of the ballad:

She as a Star at Scotland's Court  
Did shine with beauty bright  
He was the Border's Sword and Shield  
For mighty prowess in Fight

His Mother peerless Marg'ret was  
A Ward to Scotland's King  
Wha's Sire died fighting by his side  
He took the lovely thing<sup>15</sup>

Typically, Scott asked Cleator for copies of the ballad "with as much of the traditionary history as you recollect." Scott also wanted to know whether "the verses were taken down from recitation or from a MS., ancient or modern," and added: "I have been very desirous as far as possible to ascertain the authenticity of the old poems which I have

13. *Minstrelsy*, p. 159.

14. Specifically, stanzas 32-36, 52-53, and 55-58, all of which came from a Mr. Beattie of Meikledale.

15. Stanzas 4-5, Herd text, The National Library of Scotland, MS. 2211, ff. 3-4.

given to the world, as literary forgeries have been but too often and too justly imputed to the Scottish antiquaries."<sup>16</sup> This example provides another excellent illustration of the thoroughness of Scott's methods, for along with the variants he also questioned the context and "traditional history" associated with the ballad. Although he eventually obtained three copies, Scott still rejected the ballad because, "if it is not entirely and radically a modern fabrication, the ancient verses are what the French call *beaucoup brodées*."<sup>17</sup> In other words, in this case Scott considered the ballad a forgery on the basis of internal rather than contextual evidence.

As a ballad editor and ballad poet, Scott possessed no small understanding of the internal characteristics of forgeries such as "Jock o' Milk." In particular, he identified them by the following traits:

1. Inaccuracies concerning history, manners, and traditions: obvious errors or inconsistencies, such as those in Chatterton's Rowley poems. However, Scott readily admitted that historical accuracy was, at best, a secondary criterion, since traditional ballads contained numerous anachronisms.

2. Orthography: the attempt to create an antique patina, largely through the use of double consonants, the exchange of "y" for "i," and the addition of a final "e."

3. Phraseology: the extravagant use of old words from a glossary, or conversely, a heavy reliance on contemporary poetic diction. Scott recognized that the traditional ballad was largely composed of words in common use among those who recited or sang it.

4. Form: very regular meter or an unusually complicated stanza. Here again, however, Scott acknowledged that there were exceptions, such as "The Fray of Suport."

5. Sentiment: bathos, affected simplicity, or overrefined feeling.<sup>18</sup>

Scott's criteria are clearly well-founded, as far as they go, and provide a concise summary of the extent of his knowledge concerning the characteristics of the traditional ballad. In attempting to isolate the flaws inherent in most ballad forgeries, Scott might also have considered other identifying features such as excessive description, smooth transition between scenes or episodes, or the lack of a dramatic focus

16. *Letters*, I, 140-141.

17. *Letters*, I, 142.

18. For Scott's writings on the problem of forgery, see *Letters*, I, 142-143, 160; his review of *Chatterton's Works* in *The Edinburgh Review* IV (1804), 222-4; his review of Evans' *Old Ballads* in *The Quarterly Review* III (1810), 484; and his "Essay on Imitations," pp. 180-181.

on an "emotional core."<sup>19</sup> As revealed in his editing, however, Scott was generally not aware of these characteristics of the traditional ballad, and so he never applied them to his investigation of ballad forgeries. It is also noteworthy that, in editing the traditional ballads for the *Minstrelsy*, Scott indulged in many of the activities of the forger as listed above. In particular, he injected historical inaccuracies into certain ballads in order to give them a specific historical or regional setting; he pursued an inconsistent policy with respect to spelling, occasionally giving words a more antique appearance; he inevitably improved the meter; and he did not hesitate to interpolate passages which consisted of contemporary poetic diction and sentiment. For all this, Scott was not a forger, at least not from his point of view, for he invented none of the traditional ballads in the *Minstrelsy*, and included only those which he felt were substantially genuine.

For all his knowledge and caution, Scott unknowingly admitted three outright forgeries into the historical section of the *Minstrelsy*, all of them sent from his antiquarian friend Robert Surtees: "Lord Ewrie," "The Death of Featherstonhaugh," and "Barthram's Dirge." There are no doubts as to the spurious origin of these ballads, as Surtees later freely admitted his own handiwork.<sup>20</sup> The problem is thus not one of identifying the forgeries, but of determining why Scott so readily accepted them. In view of his knowledge of the techniques of forging, why did Scott not recognize these ballads for what they were?

The answer is that Surtees was no ordinary forger, and his three ballads in no way resembled mere typical forgeries—such as "Jock o' Milk." Surtees, like Scott, was very skillful in antiquarian matters, and so was well aware of the telltale characteristics of the forged ballads as outlined above. More important, he had read the early editions of the *Minstrelsy* very carefully, and recognized the type of Border ballad and associated contextual matter that would most appeal to Scott. Surtees apparently opened the correspondence between the two men to send some comments on the *Minstrelsy*, but his initial letter has not survived. In answer to Scott's reply, written in 1806, Surtees wasted no time by sending Scott the text of "The Death of Featherstonhaugh," along with many notes and amplificatory materials on the ballad, as well as the following account of its origin:

19. For a concise analysis of the manner in which a traditional ballad increasingly focuses on an "emotional core" or "impact," see Tristram P. Coffin, *The British Traditional Ballad in North America* (Philadelphia, 1963), pp. 164-172.

20. George Taylor, *A Memoir of Robert Surtees, Esq.*, ed. The Rev. James Raine (London, 1852), pp. 86-87n.



Chance has lately thrown in my way a strange wild ballad relative to the Tyndale District wh it may perhaps be not unamusing to you to compare with some of the Scottish productions in yr vols I had it from a person who travels into Alston Moor as an agent for the lead mines—who informs me he took it down by recitation from an old woman mother to one of his workmen—whose modesty wd hardly however permit her to give the last stanza.<sup>21</sup>

This was the first of the forgeries, and Scott was very pleased to receive it, for he wrote back that "your notes upon the parties concerned give it all the interest of authenticity." Scott did observe that the ballad was "of a different stanza, character, and . . . music from those on the Northern Border,"<sup>22</sup> but he readily accepted it as genuine, largely on account of the elaborate contextual and historical information that Surtees had supplied. Subsequently, Scott placed the ballad in the notes to *Marmion* (1808) and later, in the fourth edition of the *Minstrelsy* (1810), accompanied by Surtees' notes and explanatory matter.

Apparently emboldened by his success, on February 28, 1807, Surtees send Scott a second forgery called "Lord Eurie":

I add a ballad of Lord Eurie apparently a song of gratulation on his elevation to the Peerage wh I took by recitation from a very aged person Rose Smith of Bishop Middleham aet. 91 whose husband father & 2 brothers were killed in the rebellion 15. I was interrogating her for Jacobite songs and instead acquired Lord Eurie.<sup>23</sup>

Once again, Surtees carefully identified his sources, stressed the element of chance which led to the discovery of the ballad, and added considerable explanatory matter. Actually, Surtees' choice of Lord Eurie as the hero appears to have been a deliberate and well-chosen one, for in an earlier letter Scott had frankly admitted to Surtees that "I cannot say anything with certainty on the subject of Ralph Eure."<sup>24</sup> In light of the seemingly realistic and carefully selected details that Surtees provided, there should be little wonder that Scott was completely taken in.

The third and final forgery, "Barthram's Dirge," was sent to Scott on November 9, 1809, with the explanation that:

The following romantic fragment (wh I have no further meddled with than to fill up a hemistich & complete rhyme & metre) I have from the imperfect recitation of Ann Douglas a withered crone who weeded in my garden.<sup>25</sup>

21. Letter from Surtees to Scott, dated December 8, 1806, The National Library of Scotland, MS. 870, ff. 6-7.

22. *Letters*, I, 342.

23. The National Library of Scotland, MS. 807, ff. 11-12.

24. *Letters*, I, 297.

25. The National Library of Scotland, MS. 807, ff. 29-30.

Surtees' frank admission of his own additions to the ballad must have further impressed Scott with his honesty, and of course such improvements were exactly the type that Scott himself always felt compelled to make. As for the ballad itself, it relates the death of Barthram at the Nine-Stone Rig, and his subsequent burial under a headless cross:

They shot him dead at the Nine-Stone Rig,  
Beside the Headless Cross,  
And they left him lying in his blood,  
Upon the moor and moss.

\* \* \* \* \*

They made a bier of the broken bough,  
The sauch and the aspin gray,  
And they bore him to the Lady Chapel,  
And waked him there all day.

A lady came to that lonely bower,  
And threw her robes aside,  
She tore her ling [long] yellow hair,  
And knelt at Barthram's side.

She bathed him in the Lady-Well,  
His wounds so deep and sair,  
And she plaited a garland for his breast,  
And a garland for his hair.

They rowed him in a lily-sheet,  
And bare him to his earth,  
[And the Gray Friars sung the dead man's mass,  
As they pass'd the Chapel Garth.]

They buried him at [the mirk] midnight,  
[When the dew fell cold and still,  
When the aspen gray forgot to play,  
And the mist clung to the hill.]

They dug his grave but a bare foot deep,  
By the edge of the Ninestone Burn,  
And they covered him [o'er with the heather flower,]  
The moss and the [Lady] fern.

A Gray Friar staid upon the grave,  
And sang till the morning tide,  
And a friar shall sing for Barthram's soul,  
While the headless Cross shall bide.<sup>26</sup>

In thanking Surtees for this additional contribution, Scott wrote that "the story of Barthram put me in mind of a little incident I met with many years ago, riding out of Liddesdale into Teviotdale." Scott went on to relate the details of his journey, which was probably with

26. *Minstrelsy*, p. 85.

his friend and guide Robert Shortreed during the years 1792-1799, and added that "we found a small stone cross lying among the grass and heather." After describing the cross, Scott concluded that:

we could hear no tradition about the place, probably because we did not light upon those who could have answered our inquiries. As the spot is not two miles distant from the Chapel of Hermitage Castle, it seems probable that the place of sepulture was chosen for some reason similar to that which occurs in the ballad of Barthram.<sup>27</sup>

Scott's attempt to relate the ballad to his own experience and observations is by no means unusual, for this is exactly what he did with other songs such as "The Douglas Tragedy" and "The Dowie Dens of Yarrow." Predictably, when he inserted "Barthram's Dirge" into the *Minstrelsy*, he recounted the above discovery of the cross in his preface and asserted that the ballad "seems to refer to those places in the vicinity of Hermitage Castle."<sup>28</sup> In his usual manner, then, Scott was endeavoring to localize a ballad by relating it to local traditions and landmarks on the Border. It is ironic that in this particular case, his attempt to localize the ballad was not only erroneous but was a major factor in inducing him to accept a total forgery. Surtees, of course, did everything he could to further the deception, for in reply to Scott's letter he wrote that:

It is curious enough if Sir Barthram should have travelled from the Ninestoneburn nr Hermitage. . . . The old chauntress is dead—she was an Englishwoman.<sup>29</sup>

The external evidence which Surtees provided with his ballads reveals how thoroughly he understood Scott's requirements and special likes. By naming and describing his "informants," he gave his ballads such an air of authenticity that Scott apparently did not feel it was necessary to check for variants. In addition, Surtees ensured that his efforts were all *Border* ballads, and provided just enough detail to associate them with the history, landscape, and traditions of that region.

As if this were not enough to deceive Scott, he wrote the ballads in such a manner as to avoid all the common characteristics of forgeries that were recognized by Scott. As is evident from the text of "Barthram's Dirge," Surtees carefully avoided antique orthography, and com-

27. *Letters*, II, 299-300. An early trip to the Nine-Stone Rig is mentioned by Shortreed, "The Making of the 'Minstrelsy.' Scott and Shortreed in Liddesdale," ed. W. E. Wilson, *The Cornhill Magazine* LXXIII (1932), 278.

28. *Minstrelsy*, p. 85. Scott's special interest in Hermitage Castle is by no means surprising, for this Border stronghold had been one of the major seats of the Scott clan since as early as 1471.

29. The National Library of Scotland, MS. 865, ff. 151-152.

posed the stanza in a melodious but somewhat irregular meter. Further, he refrained from using either archaic words or anything resembling contemporary poetic diction and employed a very crude and simple rhyme scheme. As further evidence of genuineness, he asserted that the ballad was a "fragment," and allowed that he had made up for the defects of his reciter's memory by supplying the phrases and lines within brackets. In "The Death of Featherstonhaugh," Surtees did use an unusual stanzaic form, but Scott accepted it because it resembled the "irregular stanza and wild chorus" of "the Fray of Suport," the ballad that Scott and Shortreed had collected during their researches in Liddesdale.<sup>30</sup> In view of the clever manner in which Surtees analyzed and used the *Minstrelsy* as the basis for his forgeries, it is even likely that he had this particular ballad before him when he composed "The Death of Featherstonhaugh."

Altogether, the internal and external evidence that Surtees supplied was extremely convincing and well-chosen, and his forgeries deceived not only Scott but later collectors, such as William Motherwell.<sup>31</sup> Scott might have taken the trouble to check for variants as he did for other ballads, but in view of Surtees' skill in providing apparently authentic textual and contextual information, it is not surprising that he did not do so. Finally, the three forgeries were a welcome addition to Scott's famed Border ballads, and it is likely that their special regional appeal and interest outweighed any uncertainties Scott might have had about their origins. Scott died without ever realizing that his friend Surtees had deliberately deceived him, but it is interesting to speculate what his reaction might have been had he ever discovered the forgeries. Certainly he would have removed them from the *Minstrelsy*—or just possibly, he might have placed them among the ballad imitations in the third section of the collection. Further, in view of Scott's strong feelings about the immorality of forging, it is most unlikely that the relationship between the two antiquaries would have remained such a warm one.

In the Introduction to J. A. Farrer's *Literary Forgeries*, published in 1907, Andrew Lang produced a very humorous summary of Surtees' technique by concocting a "Recipe to forge a Border Ballad":

Take *The Border Papers*, edited by Joseph Bain (1890). Select a good rousing incident, say the slaying of Ridley, at the Newcastle football match (May, 1599). Write it with as many rhymes in *e* as possible. Avoid profusion of obsolete words. Carefully abstain from dropping into poetry. Add a few anachronisms, and distort historical facts to taste; employ regular ballad formulae sparingly

30. *Minstrelsy*, p. 81.

31. *Minstrelsy, Ancient and Modern* (Boston, 1846), pp. 105-106.

and with caution, strain off, dish, and serve up with historical notes, adding to taste fables about your source *a la* Surtees.<sup>32</sup>

Lang's particular choice of subject for his *Recipe* was not chosen at random, for it was a feud between the Riddleys and Featherstones that Surtees used for his initial effort, "The Death of Featherstonhaugh." Perhaps the most interesting feature of Lang's analysis is his advice to the would-be forger to "carefully abstain from dropping into poetry." More than anything, it may have been Surtees' careful abstinence from conscious poetic expression in all three of his forgeries that deceived Scott. This is suggested by a letter of 1806 to Malcolm Laing, in which Scott flatly denied that he had forged any of the ballads in the *Minstrelsy*. Specifically, Scott wrote that "had I meant to put a trick on the Public I would have taken care it should have been attended with more interest from its poetical merit than these dull songs."<sup>33</sup> In other words, Scott felt that if anyone was going to take the trouble to forge a ballad, he would ensure that it possessed a high degree of poetic appeal. While this was probably true for most ballad forgers, who were more concerned with poetic than antiquarian details, it did not apply to Surtees, who was primarily an antiquary.

Surtees' success in deceiving Scott was thus largely based on the fact that Scott was a poet as well as an antiquary. As such, Scott believed that the desire to forge, as immoral as it was, came primarily from a poetic or creative impulse. More simply, Scott could not understand why anyone would even *want* to forge, and thereby lose the opportunity of placing his name before the public. As Scott informed Malcolm Laing, "I utterly disclaim the idea of writing anything that I am not ready to own to the whole world."<sup>34</sup> Actually, this remark is something of an understatement, for from his earliest ballad translations in 1796, Scott had been thoroughly proud of his few original works. Accordingly, whenever possible, he willingly thrust them before the public not as the anonymous products of oral tradition, but as his own original poetry. Instead of forging fraudulent folk ballads for the first two sections of the *Minstrelsy*, Scott wrote a series of ballad imitations which he proudly acknowledged as his own in the third section of his collection. In fact, in the second edition (1803) of the *Minstrelsy*, Scott increased the number of his own original poems from three to seven,

32. (London, 1907), p. xxvi.

33. *Letters*, I, 294.

34. *Letters*, I, 294. Admittedly, in later years Scott anonymously published both long narrative poems and novels. However, this was only after he had become a well-established artist, and his purpose was to test the critics as well as hear objective criticism on his own work.

a change which clearly suggests that he regarded the *Minstrelsy*, in part at least, as a vehicle for getting his own works before the public. Ironically, then, Scott's ever-increasing creative impulse may very well have played a major part in blinding him to Surtees' true motives. At the same time, this creative impulse kept Scott from practicing that all too Scottish art of ballad forgery, and led him to willingly acknowledge his own creations "to the whole world." Altogether, Scott was temperamentally as well as morally unfit to be a ballad forger, and so, soon after the initial appearance of the *Minstrelsy*, he channeled his creative energies away from the narrow practice of imitating ballads, and into the new fields of the poetic narrative and eventually, the novel.

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