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## THE RETURN OF THE DEAD IN BALLAD LITERATURE

Had the folk of the ballad world been so minded, they might have denied all reason in Macbeth's impatient, despairing protest,—

“The times have been  
That when the brains were out, the man would die,  
And there were an end.”—

For the ballad folk belonged to the ancient of days, reaching far back into dim, undiscoverable beginnings, and in their long lease of life they had seen the trammels of the grave broken too often to warrant any reasonable expectation that the corpse they were bearing to its interment would lie quietly in its grave until the judgment day. This return of the dead to the upper world, however, is not to be confused with the resurrection to life of which Lazarus bears witness; nor is it to be considered identical with the visitations of those airy shapes called ghosts, such as Laodamia strove in vain to clasp, and such as revisiting “the glimpses of the moon” made night a hideous joy to our boyhood imaginations. Rather in the “gross and scope of the phrase” lives the notion of a temporary sojourn among the living of the body itself, moving to all appearances in the likeness of its owner before he “entered the famous nations of the dead and slept with princes and counsellors.”

But it was not an arbitrary whim which led the dead to forsake their graves and break the diuturnity of their repose to mingle again with their earthly associates. Both their reappearance and the nature of their manifestations were subject to inexorable laws. Among the current beliefs affecting the conduct of the dead, the one which appealed most widely to the primitive mind is that once having “shuffled off this mortal coil” the dead wholly decline to reappear on earth of their own accord. In other words, they crave above all things to be allowed to rest undisturbed. Hence the Hungarian proverb, “good souls do not wish to come back, the bad ones are not permitted to,” should be modified to neither good nor bad wish to return. So

strong is their desire to sleep "after life's fitful fever" that they resent any action on the part of those left behind which necessitates their reappearance among the living, in some instances to the extent that they seek to be revenged on such, however dear may have been the former ties between them, who were so inconsiderate as to vex their repose. But this eternal rest follows only upon complete severance of all bonds with human beings or upon a satisfaction of all obligations.

They are bound to respond to appeals for aid from friends in embarrassment or in danger; they must see to it that evil conduct on the part of relatives has been exposed and reproved; that plighted troths have been revoked; that all atonements or restitutions have been made; that all claims for vengeance have been satisfied; and above all, that inordinate, unreasoning grief be restrained.

The belief held by the ballad folk concerning the abode of the dead is not that of a common herding-ground, nor that of an apportionment of celestial joys or of infernal pains. In place of being dispatched to the Elysian fields or to Tartarus or to Sheol, the dead remained in the mound where they were placed; and there they were to be sought for if wanted. Hence theirs was not a "bourne from which no traveller returns," a region into which an Odysseus, an Æneas, or a Dante gained access through divine favor. Accordingly St. Gertrude, in the Danish ballad of that name,<sup>1</sup> when in need of assistance from her dead foster-father to regain her lost lands, repairs to his burial mound and there by means of "staff and book" (which are probably Christian substitutes for the stick carved with runes) invokes his aid:—

10. The dead man stretched his long leg-bone,  
And rent the walls and marble stone.
11. 'Twas far to go, the pathway straight,  
And slow and shambling the dead man's gait.
12. In through the door the dead man stepped;  
The living all to corners crept.

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<sup>1</sup>Grundtvig, *Danmarks gamle Folkeviser*, No 93. Translated by Prior, *Ancient Danish Ballads*, Vol. II.

13. All but the guilty count had fled,  
But he stood up and fought the dead.

14. In two the dead man broke his back,  
In three he made his leg-bone crack.

Young Swendal,<sup>2</sup> like Kilhwch in the *Mabinogion*, has the wierd laid on him of being forever divorced from slumber until he has met and freed a certain maiden lying under enchantment. His unrest draws him to his mother's tomb, upon which he showers down blows until she cries out:—

8. "Who is it here disturbs my sleep?  
Who deals these heavy blows?  
And may I not in peaceful sleep  
E'en in the grave repose?"

When she learns of the spells that bind him, she bestows on him three gifts which enable him to win to his heart's desire.

The same recourse for aid is had in *Child Orm and the Berm Giant*,<sup>3</sup> which relates how Orm, desiring to get possession of the sword "Birthing," which lies buried with his father Sigfred, goes to the tomb of the dead man and there pounds the walls until they shake. Its occupant demands to know the cause of the uproar, whereupon Orm makes request for "Birthing," which is essential to his winning a lovely maiden. Upon his father's refusal to render it up, Orm threatens to crush both the tomb and him that lies within it, and thereby compels the dead man to hand out the weapon.

This release from difficulty which the dead alone are able to effect is the theme of many a passage in the Old Norse lays. In the *Sjúrtharkvæthi*,<sup>4</sup> Virgar Valintsson, the standard-bearer of Thidreck, finds it necessary to disturb the sleep of his foster-father. From within the tomb comes the sound of gnashing of teeth; then a voice cries out: "Who has come to my tomb to awaken the dead?" "Are you awake in the tomb, foster-father? It is I, Virgar Valintsson, your foster-son." "Although you are my foster-son, and I your dear father, yet mountains and valleys

<sup>2</sup> Grundtvig, l.c., No. 70; Prior, l.c., Vol. II.

<sup>3</sup> Grundtvig, No. 11; Prior, Vol. I.

<sup>4</sup> Hammershaimb, Copenh., 1851.

would stand agape rather than that I should depart this autumn." The son then asks for his sword and threatens to set fire to the tomb. Valint, partly from fear and partly from gratification at seeing his son so courageous, passes out the famous sword.

Even Odin, the All-High One, the Father of Gods, is not exempt from similar measures when in difficulty. Alarmed at the omens portending the death of Balder, he rides down to Hel, where he seeks out the grave of a Vala. By chanting magic songs and applying potent runes he forces the aged prophetess to unveil for him the future. It is with great reluctance, however, that she suffers herself to be evoked. "Who is this unknown," she calls out, "that dares disturb my repose and drag me from the grave, where I have lain so long, all covered with snow and damp with rain?"<sup>5</sup>

The most awe-inspiring of all such passages is found in the *Hervorar Saga*—*The Awakening of Angantyr*—a poem replete with mystery and terror. Hervor, who is burning with desire to avenge her father's death, journeys to the dreaded isle where he lies buried, surrounded by deathfires and the restless dead, to procure that most renowned of all Northern weapons, the sword Tyrning, which was forged by the dwarves and invested with the curse that, although it would never fail to claim a victim when drawn, yet it would prove to be the bane of its possessor. Arrived at the tomb she calls out: "Awake, Angantyr! It is Hervor that bids thee awake. Give me the sword of the dwarves. Hervard, Hiörvard, Rani, Angantyr! I bid you all awake." Her father makes reply from the grave, denying first that the sword lies in his barrow, and then refusing to surrender the weapon because of the curse that falls upon all who bear it. Finally, however, to prevent her from rushing into the flame-enveloped howe, he yields to her prayers.

Interesting in this connection on account of its far remove from the style and matter of the ballad is the twenty-eighth chapter of *First Samuel*, which tells of Saul's resort to necromancy in order to discover the future. Full of inquietude over the impending

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<sup>5</sup> *Vegtamskvitha*, Simrock, *Die Edda*; paraphrased by Gray in *Descent of Odin*.

battle at Gilboa, he searches out a woman "who hath a familiar spirit," the witch of Endor: "'Whom shall I bring up to thee?' And he said, 'Bring me up Samuel.' And when the woman saw Samuel she cried with a loud voice. . . . And the King said unto her, 'Be not afraid; for what sawest thou?' And the woman said unto Saul, 'I saw a god ascending out of the earth.' And he said unto her, 'What form is he of?' And she said: 'An old man cometh up and he is covered with a mantle.' And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed himself. And Samuel said to Saul: 'Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up?'" In common with his fellow dead, Samuel's first words voice his resentment at being disturbed, and his object in replying to the queries put to him is probably identical with that of the other dead, namely, a desire to remove all obstacles to unconditional repose. Be it noted, however, that, as far as we can judge, he appears as an apparition, unsubstantial as any fantasy, and that he must be invoked through an intermediary. According to the Hebrew conception the realms of the living and of the dead lay far apart, the supernatural beings are not of so concrete a character as are those of the ballads and the Edda, and they seem to stand outside of the causal relations obtaining on earth.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> In certain respects the Hebrew of the Old Testament is not wholly a stranger to the beliefs touching the affinity of body and soul after death observable in the ballads. For him there was not a complete divorce of the two; for him the soul was not a prisoner in the body; in fact, it constituted the material basis of the body. As it runs in *Leviticus*, xvii. 11: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood;" verse 14: "For it is the life of all flesh; the blood of it is for the life thereof." Hence arises the injunction against eating blood. The Hebrew thought of resurrection as a revivifying of the blood, a resuscitation of the flesh, a resurrection of the body. To the Homeric Greek the body was all in all, the soul but a faint shadow. That the popular religion of ancient Greece did not regard death as holding the body and soul irrevocably apart may be gathered from a number of passages in the dramatists. Electra, after bidding her sister lay a lock of hair on Agamemnon's tomb, urges: "And falling at his tomb beseech him to come from out the earth in his own strength a kindly helper unto us against his foes." (*Soph. Electra*, 453-4.) Again Orestes exclaims: "O Earth, send up, I pray thee, my father to watch over my fight;" and Electra adds: "O Persephone, grant thou him still his body's strength unmarred." (*Aesch. Choeph.*, 480-1.)

The form of the story in which the living seek out the dead at their tomb finds no expression in the English ballads. Not so, however, with the type which would appear to materialize a guilty conscience by bringing the dead back to earth in order to expose murder and to rescue from evil conduct. Proud Lady Margaret,<sup>7</sup> while walking on her castle wall, spies a knight come riding over the lea. When he announces to her that he has come to seek her love, she poses him, according to her practice, with riddling questions. These he answers and, upon her confession of defeat, he informs her that he is her brother Willy who has come back from the grave to humble her proud heart, which "has gard sae mony die." Her proposal to share with him his grave is refused because of her "unwashen hands and her unwashen feet." In the *Cruel Mother*<sup>8</sup> two pretty babes playing at the ba' awaken the mother love of a maid who is just returning from the labor of howking out a grave for her own illegitimate children, and she exclaims:—

"O bonnie babes, gin you were mine,  
I would dress you up in satin fine."

The children reply:—

"O cruel mother, we were thine,  
And thou hast made us wear the twine."

The revelation of murder is accomplished in the ballad of *Sir Hugh, or the Jew's Daughter*,<sup>9</sup> the tale immortalized by Chaucer as the *Prioress's Tale*, by the voice of Hugh speaking from the bottom of a well, into which he has been thrown. In the *Two Sisters*<sup>10</sup> the evil deed is exposed by means of metempsychosis. Out of jealousy, exaggerated by taunts, an elder sister has pushed the younger into the sea, and remains deaf to all promises and entreaties of the drowning girl. Later a strolling harper finds the body and takes three strands of her yellow hair with which he strings his harp. At the wedding of the elder sister with the betrothed of the younger, the harp strings one by one reveal the guilt.

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<sup>7</sup> Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, No. 47.

<sup>8</sup> Child, No. 20.

<sup>9</sup> Child, No. 155.

<sup>10</sup> Child, No. 10.

The most beautiful and affecting ballad of this class is the *Buried Mother*.<sup>11</sup> Unable to lie quietly in her grave because of the cries of her children, whom her successor maltreats, the dead mother craves permission from God to return to "middle-earth." When she reaches the scene of her former activities, she resumes her maternal duties and ministers to the wants of her offspring, combing their hair and giving suck to the youngest. She sends for her husband and, when he comes into her presence, she chides him angrily for his neglect, warning him that if it be necessary for her to repeat her visit, it will fare the worse with him.

The hindrance of a plighted troth to complete severance from the upper world will be recalled by readers of the story Scott tells in his advertisement to the *Pirate* of a young girl who travelled from the North down to London in order that, by touching the body of her dead lover, she might be assured of freedom from nocturnal visits. In the ballad of *Sweet William's Ghost*,<sup>12</sup> it is the dead lover who seeks out his true love to get back his troth. Margaret, hearing some one "tirling at the pin," calls out to know who is there, and, when she learns that it is Willy "from Scotland new come home," she welcomes him in. His first words are a prayer that she return him the troth plighted between them, and, upon her refusal, he informs her that he is no earthly man, but that his bones lie buried "in yonder kirkyard." She then stretches forth her hand and restores to him his faith and troth and wishes his good soul rest. Like Lenore, she follows him "the livelong winter night" to his grave, where, unlike Lenore, who sought to escape, she begs that she might come in and lie at his feet or at his side. But his coffin "is made so meet" that there is no room for her. At the crowing of the cock, he fades away into the grave, and Margaret, true to good ballad convention, yields up her spirit soon after.

The recollection of an injustice committed during lifetime and remaining unatoned drives Sir Morten of Fogelsong<sup>13</sup> out of

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<sup>11</sup> Grundtvig, No. 89.

<sup>12</sup> Child, No. 77.

<sup>13</sup> Grundtvig, No. 92; Prior, Vol. I.

his tomb, and, though he had given his gold to the church and his horse to the cloister and he himself has been buried with all the funeral rites, forces him at midnight to be up and riding. Meeting with Sir Folmer Skjot, he unbosoms himself of the wrong he has done in withholding a plot of ground from two orphans. Agreeable to his request, Sir Folmer promises to tell Lady Metelille that she is to restore the field to the rightful owners, and thus allows Sir Morten's soul to obtain the rest it has yearned for. Then—

All in black Sir Morten went  
Down to his dark abode,  
And black were both his hawk and hound,  
And troop that with him rode.

—*Dead Rides Sir Morten of Fogelsong.*

The desire for vengeance was no more imperative to the "majesty of buried Denmark" than it was to Hedeby.<sup>14</sup> Appearing to one of his kin, while the latter lay asleep with his head resting on a mound (presumably the barrow of the murdered Hedeby), he charges him to set to rights his case, and reveals how his wife encompassed his death by stifling him upon his silken bed, how they rolled him in haybands and cast him out on the wold, how his trusty squire now rides his horse, carves with his knife, sleeps with his wife, mocks at his children, and chases his deer. If the sleeper refuses to enter upon this duty, then he himself will undertake vengeance, and it be all the more terrible.

Desire for vengeance, necromancy, and the might of runes combined are scarcely more effectual in drawing back to earthly scenes the sleeping dead than is obstinate grief, and nothing else arouses their resentment so particularly. Usually it means that the luckless wight finds his coffin untenable, that he must pull himself together, climb out of his grave, and trudge many weary miles, sometimes with his coffin upon his back, for no other purpose than to rebuke the selfish mourner. Whether or not the three dead sons of the Wife of Usher's Well<sup>15</sup> return home because of the mother's curse upon the sea that drowned

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<sup>14</sup>Grundtvig, No. 91; Prior, Vol. III.

<sup>15</sup>Child, No. 79.

them, or in response to the call of grief, or in answer to prayer, cannot be definitely answered. In this instance motivation would add nothing to the simple dignity of the story. Once they are home, maternal love, secure in the possession of its objects, and blind to the inexorable laws of the grave, leaves nothing undone that will minister to their bodily comfort. But at the crowing of the cock, they are up and away, their last words, not a reproof, but a blessing. Such constancy of love, however, as leads the young man in the lyrical ballad of *The Unquiet Grave*<sup>16</sup> to sit and mourn at his true-love's tomb for a "twelvemonth and a day" meets with the disapproval of the dead. At the expiration of that time she calls out:—

"Oh who sits weeping on my grave,  
And will not let me sleep?"

She then rebukes his importunity and, in accordance with the notion that contact with the dead is fatal, warns him that one kiss of her "cold-clay lips" would shorten his days.

In the ballads just discussed the impediment which tears place in the way of eternal rest is moral in nature, suggesting that the spirit is lying dormant in the body, but still *en rapport* with states of mind animating the surviving kindred, and responsive to ties binding human beings together. Inasmuch as balladists are ever wont to portray emotion under the guise of objective symbolism, as if they saw abstractions "through a glass darkly," and were able to project perceptions into general consciousness only through the medium of attendant circumstances, may not the more primitive concept be that of a gross, material force which affected the body disagreeably, causing it to be astir in order to shake off the annoyance? An illustration of the physical effect of grief lies to hand in the common belief that tears wet the shroud or grave-clothes. One of Grimm's tales relates how a dead boy appears to his mother begging her to cease crying, for all her tears fall on his shirt, making it so wet that he is unable to sleep. A pretty variant of this story occurs in the German ballad of *Die Macht der Thränen*.<sup>17</sup> A bereaved mother, who like Rachel would not be comforted, has sight of a proces-

<sup>16</sup> Child, No. 78.

<sup>17</sup> Mittler, *Deutsche Volkslieder*, No. 557.

sion of children going by all dressed in white, with Christ at their head and her own son lagging far behind. Full of grief at the sight she rushes over to him and cries:—

“Was machts du hier, mein liebes Kind,  
Das du nicht bist bei Haufen?”

“Ach Mutter, liebste Mutter mein,  
Die Freud' muss ich entbehren,  
Hier hab' ich ein sehr grossen Krug  
Muss sammeln eure Thränen.”

This belief in the “Macht der Thränen” is not peculiar to European peoples. In an East Indian story a wise man tells the king that “the incessant tears of kinsfolk harm the dead.” Another belief is that the dead are obliged to swallow the rheum and tears of their weeping relatives.

Peculiarly northern, so it seems, is the portrayal of the might of tears in the Danish ballad of *Sir Aage and Else*,<sup>18</sup> a ballad which is introduced by Öhlenschläger in the final scene of his drama *Axel and Walborg* to heighten the pathos of Walborg's death. Like Sweet William of the English ballad, like Wilhelm of *Lenore*, Sir Aage died before the wedding took place. The insistent grief of Else raises him out of his grave, and, with his coffin on his back, he staggers forth to the home of his betrothed, where he raps on the door, using as a knocker the press he bears, and calling to Else to let him in. She, doubting at first whether it be Sir Aage, admits him on condition that he prove himself to be a spirit of health by naming the name of Jesus.

Then spoke up little Elselille  
With tearful mien:  
“An you can name the name of Jesus,  
You may come in.”

“Get up, get up, proud Elselille,  
And ope the door!  
I can name the name of Jesus as well  
As I could before.”

Thereupon she welcomes him in. Weeping all the while, she combs his hair and questions him concerning his dark abode.

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<sup>18</sup>Grundtvig, No. 90.

And in verses which have an inherent healing power of wonderful strength, he answers:—

“As often as you do weep for me,  
And sad your mood,  
Then stands my narrow coffin filled  
With clotted blood.

“As often as you sing,  
And glad your mind,  
Then is my narrow grave within  
With rose-leaves lined.”

The “herald of the morn” forces him to plod back to his grave, followed by Else. Here he enjoins on her to cease lamenting, and then he vanishes from her sight. Ere the month is over she herself is dead.

The superstition of tears turning to blood is repeated in the second *Lay of Helgi Hundingsbani*,<sup>19</sup> in a passage remarkable for its intensity of imagination. Helgi, the betrothed of Sigrun, has met his death at the hands of Dag, the brother of Sigrun, and, after having been duly laid away in his barrow, has gone to Valhalla. One evening Sigrun, who has bewailed her lover incessantly, is informed by her maid that Helgi with a troop of horsemen was seen by her riding toward his mound, which stood wide open. Sigrun seeks Helgi at his tomb, and greets him with kisses, saying: “Thy hair, Helgi, is tumid with sweat of death, my prince is all bathed in slaughter-dew, cold and clammy are the hands of Högni’s son. How shall I, prince, for this make thee amends?” Helgi replies: “Thou alone art the cause . . . . Thou weepest cruel tears . . . . ere to sleep thou goest, each one falls bloody on the prince’s breast, wet, cold, and piercing, with sorrow big.” Sigrun then spends the night in Helgi’s arms; and the next night Sigrun went again to the barrow, but Helgi came not. Soon after she died of sorrow and longing.

The French ballad of *Le Retour du Cavalier*<sup>20</sup> brings us nearer to the Lenore type. A knight, who on the day of his wedding was called away to war, returns at the end of seven years’ time

<sup>19</sup> Thorp, *Edda of Seamund*, Part II, pp. 126 ff.

<sup>20</sup> Tarbé, *Romancero de Champagne*, II.

to find his betrothed celebrating her espousals with another man. In the character of a stranger he is admitted to the wedding feast, where he astounds all present with a proposal to determine by the cards and dice who shall possess the bride for the night. This leads to his recognition, though his eyes are hollow and flaming. He goes with the bride to her chamber to look at the jewels he gave her seven years ago, but neither ever reappears to the waiting guests. All that is found is a cold shroud lying on the chamber-floor. Still closer to the Lenore ballad, though set off from all others by its Celtic termination, is the Breton ballad known in French as *Le Frere du Lait*.<sup>21</sup> Gwen-nola, who has pledged her faith to the Frere du Lait six years before, is to be married against her will to a stable-boy, and to escape such a fate, she steals away to a neighboring village, where she sits alone overwhelmed with grief. One night the Frere du Lait appears at her door with a horse to convey her to his home. The nocturnal ride that follows is quite as impressive in its unearthly suggestions as that of any similar ballad. Finally the horse gives a shiver and a neigh, and the riders find themselves on an island, which proves to be the Island of the Blessed, the Celtic paradise.

Ballads of the type of *Der Todte Freier*,<sup>22</sup> which want both the beginning and the ending of the Lenore ballads, I pass over to take up the Lenore ballads proper.

It would be out of place to discuss here in detail the popular impulse leading to the composition of the deservedly famous ballad of Lenore.<sup>23</sup> Bürger, in his correspondence, acknowledged his indebtedness for the germ of the poem to a Low-German story of a phantom knight who returns to carry off his mourning true-love. The tale had lost its metrical form, preserving in verse only the lines—

Wo lise, wo lose  
Rege hei den Ring,—

and the refrain —

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<sup>21</sup> Villemarqué, *Barzaz-Breiz*, I, p. 279.

<sup>22</sup> Mittler, Nos. 543, 544, 545.

<sup>23</sup> See Bonet-Maury, *Bürger et les origines anglaises de la ballade littéraire en Allemagne*; Schmidt, Erich, *Characteristiken Bürger's Lenore*.

Der Mond shynt so helle,  
 De Dot de ritt so schnelle,  
 Mye Gretjen, gruet Dy nit?

Bürger had little idea, however, that the roots of this legend extended into every European country; that it is to be found in all the German provinces, in the Dutch, Austrian, Magyar, Slavish, and Balkan lands, and in Greece, and that, with the exception of the Balkan and Greek versions, which substitute another feature, in all occur the lines which had such an irresistible charm for him —

“Der Mond scheint hell,  
 Der Todte reit't schnell,  
 Feinsliebchen, grauets dir?”  
 “Und warum sollt mirs grauen?  
 Ist doch Feinslieb mit mir?”

The basic idea of the Lenore *märchen* is that the lover, who, as a rule, has met his death in battle, is freed from his grave by the unceasing laments of his betrothed, or as in the Magyar form, by magic, to ride back to his true-love's door, where he is joyfully received by the maiden, who is all unwitting of his death. He commands her to mount quickly behind him, for they must ride a hundred miles or more to his home. During the ride the infernal nature of her lover gradually dawns upon her, being completely revealed at the grave to which he, in a spirit of revenge, wishes to consign her. Here the Germanic and Slavish versions part company. Bürger, following one of the traditions of his fatherland, makes Lenore suffer the penalty of her obstinate grief by entombing her with her wrathful lover; but he veneers his conclusion with the unpopular sentiment of her fate being a judgment rendered by God for blasphemy.<sup>24</sup>

For realism, savage energy, and grewsome detail, all versions of the legend fall short of the Slavish. As a specimen of a popular conception of the story unfamiliar to the majority of readers I shall give in detail a translation from the German of a version found in Little Russia:<sup>25</sup>—

<sup>24</sup> Liebrecht, *Zur Volkskunde*, p. 197, thinks that the return of a dead man to fetch his true-love may have originated in the old custom of burying the living wife with the dead husband.

<sup>25</sup> Wollner, W., *Der Lenorenstoff in der slavischen Volkspoesie*, Arch. f. slav. Phil., VI, 239 ff.

A young man loved a girl. He had to make a journey, and on the way he died. She grew so fearful for him—O God—and yearned after him and grieved from early morning till night. One midnight there came the Cossack himself upon a gray horse. She thought he was still living, out she sprang and embraced him and kissed and kissed him—and is so glad! “I thought,” said she, “that you were no longer alive, you never came to see me!” But he said: “I have come after you, come with me, and let us fare to another place.” They made themselves ready, carried everything out to a wagon,—box, clothes, chest—in short all they had, got upon the wagon and drove away. They drive and drive, then said he: “Der Mond scheint, die Geister tanzen, der Todte fährt das schöne Mädchen. Mädchen, Mädchen, fürchtest du dich denn nicht?” he asked. But she said: “What mean you?” “Ah,” he answered, “I say that we have far enough to go, it is yet dark and the way is unfamiliar.” And again he said: “Der Mond scheint, die Geister tanzen, der Todte fährt das schöne Mädchen. Mädchen, Mädchen, fürchtest du dich denn nicht?” The maiden understood it well enough, a cold shiver ran over her, but she merely asked: “Is it yet far to the village, Cossack?” But he said: “You see already the chimneys” “But those are not chimneys, those are crosses!” And the maiden sees indeed a churchyard with its crosses ahead of her. She becomes terrified, the poor worm, and sits in the wagon more dead than alive. They arrive at the churchyard and he said to her: “Well,” said he, “now just creep into this little hole, the grave, since you have wept so much. Creep in now, since you have wept for me so much.” “You creep in first,” said she, “you have been here before but I have never been here yet—I have had no experience with such a place, I will then hand you the stuff.” He crept in, she handed him the clothes, and as she was reaching him the box, she shoved it down upon him with all her might, and then she ran away as fast as she could out of the cemetery. She ran and ran, on and on, and as she ran—there stood a little house. Into the little house she went. As she stumbled in—there lay a dead man there too—she shoved the bolt fast. The dead lover, however, when he looked around the churchyard and perceived that she was gone, ran in pursuit after her. He ran up to the little house, but she had crept into the oven and concealed herself. He reached the house, knocked on the door and said: “Hey, comrade! open the door and give me my wife. I

have just travelled with her 700 versts." Then the other one said: "I smell something? There's something in the house that smells like a living soul." He got up and opened the door: "Well," said he, "now comrade! let us divide her, since she is in my house!" They crept into the oven, found her, and said: "Now will you still weep!" But she, poor thing, had no dying words to utter. Then they took her—the one by one leg, the other by the other leg, and tore her in two.

It may be noted here that this, the most savage of all versions, finds few parallels to its conclusions. But it well illustrates the ferocity which animated the dead against those who will not let them sleep in peace. In many forms of the story the opportune crowing of the cock forestalls the diabolic intentions of the furious dead. As a rule, however, the maiden does not long survive the night's experience.

A remarkable variation of the legend differentiates the Slavish and the Germanic versions from those of Greece and the Balkan states. Remarkable, too, is the great number of variations:—seven Albanian, nine Serb, eleven Roumanian, seventy-two Bulgarian, and forty-one Greek. The distinguishing feature of this group is the assigning of the title rôle to a brother and sister in place of to a lover and mistress. The general trend of the story is exposed to view in the following version, which deserves to be read also for its intrinsic beauty:—

Mother with children richly blest, nine sons and one dear daughter,  
 The darling of thy heart' was she, and fondly did'st thou tend her;  
 For full twelve years thou guardedst her, and the sun looked not on her,  
 But in the dusk thou bathedst her, by moonlight trimdst her tresses,  
 By evening star and morning star her curls in order settest.  
 And lo! a message brought to thee, from Babylon a message;  
 Bidding thee wed thy child afar, afar in a strange country;  
 Eight of her brethren will it not, but Constantine doth hearken:  
 —'Nay, mother, send thine Areté, send her to that strange country,  
 That country whither I too fare, that land wherein I wander,  
 That I may find me comfort there, that I may find me lodging.'  
 —'Prudent art thou, my Constantine, yet ill conceived thy counsel:  
 If there o'ertake me death, my son, if there o'ertake me sickness,  
 If there hap bitterness or joy, who shall bring her to me?'  
 He made the Saints his witnesses, he gave her God for surety,  
 If peradventure there come death, if haply there come sickness,  
 If there hap bitterness or joy, himself would go and bring her.

Now when they had sent Areté to wed in the strange country,  
There came a year of heaviness, a month of God's displeasure,  
And there befell the pestilence, that the nine brethren perished ;  
Lone as a willow in the plain, lone, desolate their mother.  
Over eight graves she beats her breast, o'er eight makes lamentation,  
But from the tomb of Constantine she tears the very gravestones :  
—' Rise, I adjure thee, Constantine, 'tis Areté I long for!  
Thou madest the Saints thy witnesses, thou gavest me God for surety,  
If there hap bitterness of joy, thyself wouldst go and bring her.'  
Forth from the mound that covered him the stern adjuring drave him ;  
He takes the clouds to be his steed, the stars to be his bridle,  
The moon for escort on the road, and goes his way to bring her.  
He leaves the mountains in his wake, he gains the heights before him,  
He finds her 'neath the moonlight fair combing her golden tresses.  
E'en from afar he bids her hail, cries from afar his message :  
—' Up Aretoúla, up and come, for lo ! our mother needs thee.'  
—' Alack. Alack, dear brother mine, what chance hath then befallen ?  
If haply 'tis an hour of joy, let me go don my jewels,  
If bitterness, speak, I will come, and tarry not for robing.'  
—' Up, Aretoúla, up and come, and tarry not for robing.'  
Beside the way whereon they passed, beside the road they travelled,  
They heard the singing of the birds, they heard the birds a-saying :  
—' Who hath ever seen a maiden fair by a dead man escorted ?'  
—' Didst hear, my brother Constantine, what things the birds are, saying ?  
" Who hath ever seen a maiden fair by a dead man escorted ? "'  
—' Nay, foolish birds, let them sing on, nor heed their idle chatter.'  
Anon as they went faring on, yet other birds were calling :  
—' What woeful sight is this we see, so piteous and so plaintive,  
' That lo ! as comrades on the way, the dead escort the living.'  
—' Didst hear, my brother Constantine, what things the birds are saying ?  
" That lo ! as comrades on the way, the dead escort the living. "'  
—' Nay, what are birds ? let them sing on, nor heed their idle chatter.'  
—' Ah, but I fear thee, brother mine, thou savourest of censuring.'  
—' Nay, at the chapel of St. John we gathered yester even.  
And the good father hallowed us with incense beyond measure.'  
And yet again as they fared on, yet other birds were crying :  
—' O God, great God omnipotent, great wonders art thou working ;  
So gracious and so fair a maid with a dead man consorting.'  
—' Didst hear, my brother Constantine, what thing the birds are saying ?  
Tell me, where are those locks of thine, thy trimly set mustachio ?'  
—' 'Twas a sore sickness fell on me, nigh unto death it brought me,  
And spoiled me of my golden locks, my trimly set mustachio.'  
Lo ! they are come ; but locked their home, the door fast barred aud bolted,  
And all the windows of their home in spider-webs enshrouded.  
—' Op'n, prithee, open, mother mine, 'tis Areté thy daughter.'  
—' An thou art Charon, go thy way, for I have no more children ;  
My one, my little Areté, bides far in the strange country.'  
—' Op'n, prithee, open, mother mine, 'tis Constantine that calls thee ;  
I made the Saints my witnesses, I gave thee God for surety,

If there hap bitterness or joy, myself would go and bring her.'  
Scarce had she passed to ope the door, and lo! her soul passed from her.<sup>26</sup>

In many versions of the ballad, the mother and daughter enjoy a blissful moment of reunion in each other's arms before Charon calls for them; and the brother, who, on some pretext or other, has vanished from sight, returns to his tomb, where, released by his mother from the curse she pronounced on him, his body attains to corruptibility and his good soul to rest.

This division of the story falls into two groups,—one in which the mother plays the chief part, and one in which the daughter, with a corresponding difference in the causes which oblige Constantine to be up and carrying out his promise. Though the Greeks represent the dead as being universally sensitive to both moral and material disturbances, yet in their folk-songs they lay greater stress upon the former, which finds its highest potency in the curse of a mother; whereas, among the Slavish and Germanic races, that which proves most frequently to be an antidote to the opium of death is the temporal matter of tears. In the first group mentioned above, which includes the Greek, the power exercised by the mother over her dead son lies, with few departures, in the curses she uttered at his grave. In the second group,<sup>27</sup> the moving force is bound up in the tears of the daughter, who thus leads God in His pity to arouse Constantine and send him forth in quest of his sister. In some of the Greek forms the curse acts directly upon the ground, causing it to open up and eject its occupant; in others it operates upon the mound, the cross, and the coffin, which change to horse, saddle, and bridle, and, upon completion of the journey, resolve themselves into the visible reminders of mortality.

Every example cited in the above discussion adds its testimony to the universal, primitive belief that death meant anything but a final separation of body and soul, and that the

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<sup>26</sup> J. C. Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion*, 1910, pp. 391 ff.

<sup>27</sup> For ample discussion of this second main division see Dr. L. Schischmanov, *Der Lenorenstoff in der Bulgarischen Volkspoesie*, Indoger. Forschungen, IV; J. Psichari, *La Ballade de Lonore en Grèce*, Rev. de l'histoire des religions, IX.

worlds of the living and of the dead lay in reality within hailing distance of each other, and that the revenants were looked upon as being absolutely corporeal, to all intents and purposes, able for the time being to carry on their former activities. The fact that the borderline between these two realms was so dimly marked may account for the absence of any special effort, by means of appropriate settings of time and place, circumstance and mood, to make the ghostly visitation appear credible, and for the lack of that spirit of mystery and terror whose infusion in a well-told ghost story is as the savor of salt to the modern palate. To realize most forcibly the vast stretch of evolution that lies between the modern and the primitive conceptions, one needs but to recall the preparation for the appearance of Hamlet's ghost, or to note the skillful leading up to the apparition of Cæsar in the tent of Brutus. Brutus had spent a sad day,—the news of the death of his wife, his quarrel with Cassius, his discontent, his inquiet over the future, his doubts of the utility of the assassination of Cæsar, having rendered his soul peculiarly susceptible. After retiring to his tent, he tries to compose his mind by reading a book, and he calls for music, which after a few melancholy strains subsides as drowsiness overcomes the performer. Then it is that Cæsar appears to him, turning his blood to ice and making his hair stand on end. After the apparition has vanished, Brutus is not quite sure whether or not he has been under the dominion of an hallucination. What a far cry to the simplicity and baldness of the ballad:—

There came a ghost to Margaret's door  
With many a grievous groan ;  
And ay it tirlèd at the pin,  
But answer made she none.

Furthermore, the manifestation of the dead to the personages of the ballad world never harrowed the feelings nor froze the blood ; it did not as much as elicit a cry of surprise, much less of terror. Like their more sophisticated brethren of a later day, the ghosts of the ballads chose the night as a fitting time for revisiting this world. In the *Wife of Usher's Well*, "the night was lang and mirk ;" in *Sweet William's Ghost*, "when a'

men were asleep" the ghost came to Margaret's door, and "a' the live-lang winter night the dead corp followed she."

Nevertheless, the revenants themselves recognize that they are no longer vital forces in the upper world, and that their earthy habitation has its distinctive marks which impress themselves upon the dwellers of the underworld. The dead brother rejects the proposal of Proud Margaret to share with him his grave,—

"For the wee worms are my bedfellows,  
And cauld clay is my sheets,  
And when the stormy winds do blow,  
My body lies and sleeps."

Sweet William warns Margaret that—

"And I should kiss thy rosy lips,  
Thy days will not be long."

The three sons of the Wife of Usher's Well adduce as a reason for haste in obeying the summons of the cock-crow that—

"The cock doth craw, the day doth daw,  
The channerin worm doth chide;  
Gin we be mist out o' our p'lace,  
A sore pain maun we bide."

The Buried Mother replies to the daughter's remark upon the pallor of her cheeks:—

"And how should I be fine and fair,  
When death has bleached the cheeks I bear?"

Similarly the Dead Suitor<sup>28</sup> responds to the wondering comment of his betrothed:—

"Methinks you reek so mouldy."  
"Tis Death with whom you speak.  
And long as I've been buried,  
Of mould should I not reek?"

In like manner a source of unrest to Areté is the odor of mould or of incense which clings to the person of Constantine, and the loss of his once luxuriant moustache and hair.

Other tangible signs marking the presence of death are the black hawk and hound and the black troop that rode with Sir Morten of Fogelsong. A far more subtle use of the association

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<sup>28</sup> Prior, III, appendix F.

of the hound with death and an indication of the finer sensitiveness of the animal world to the presence of spectres are felt in the verses from the *Buried Mother*:—

Whenever hound was heard to whine,  
They gave the children bread and wine.

Whenever hound was heard to bark,  
They thought the dead walked in the dark.

Whenever hound was heard to howl,  
They thought they saw a corpse's cowl.

This universal belief in the hound's perception of the unearthly bears an undoubted relation to the practice of the Romans in clothing the "lares" of their ancestors in a dog's skin, thereby intimating a form of totemism. As a classical example of the hound's ability to detect the supernatural, one will recall the scene in the *Odyssey* where the dogs, aware of the presence of Athene, who is invisible to Telemachus, run growling to the other side of the room.

It is in the Lenore ballads, however, that the objective, symbolical accompaniments of death find most artistic expression. The wild ride of the Frere du Lait and his betrothed to the Isle of the Blessed startles the owls and forces the wild beasts to leap out of their way. The maiden feels that her lover's heart is cold and that his hair is all wet, and she asks if he is not freezing. Bürger, by his marvellous combination of conscious art with the unconscious art of the folk literature, makes the night-ride of Wilhelm and Lenore palpitate with horrors. All sorts of sepulchral signs manifest themselves: flapping ravens, funeral trains, the infernal dance of the rabble dead in the graveyard, the vanishing of the horse in a flash, and the melting of the flesh off of the bones of Wilhelm, all heightened by a skilful use of imitative words. And not least effective is the refrain-like utterance, suggestive of fiendish joy over having stolen a soul from among the living:—

"Der Mond scheint hell,  
Der Todte reit't schnell,  
Feinsliebchen, grauets dir?"

In place of this exclamation, the Greek and most of the Balkan versions employ the comment of birds, which, like the hounds,

are keener than men in the discovery of otherworld visitants. The rare spectacle that greets their sight causes them to chirrup out:—

“O who has ever seen a maiden fair by a dead man escorted?”

Farther on other birds sing:—

“What woeful sight is this we see, so piteous and so plaintive,  
That lo! as comrades on their way the dead escort the living.”

And a third time Areté hears them calling:—

“O God! great God omnipotent! great wonders art thou working,  
So gracious and so fair a maid with a dead man consorting.”

To Areté's question what mean the birds, Constantine merely replies:—

“Foolish birds, let them sing on, nor heed their idle chatter.”

That characteristic of the dead which sets off the Slavish versions from all others is the ferocity of the revenant, who partakes largely of the nature of the vampyre,—a frightful being that seems to be an especial creation of the Slavonic peoples,—and which,<sup>29</sup> as far I know, enters into the make-up of all their revenants. The state of vampyrism emphasizes most forcibly the folk belief of communication between the body and the soul after death. It implies an inability of the body to entertain corruption, and, until final dissolution takes place, it admits the possibility of the soul's entering the body at any time and urging it to a renewal of worldly activities. Herein lies the fearful significance of the Greek curse—“May your body never see corruption,”—whether in the mouth of the peasant or as an utterance in the ancient drama.<sup>30</sup> The body of a man who has

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<sup>29</sup> For an Icelandic conception of a revenant that falls not a whit behind the most untameable vampyre of the Slaves the curious reader is referred to that passage in the *Saga of Grettir the Strong* (trans. by Magnussen and Morris, 1900) which relates the story of Grettir's ill-fated wrestling match with the evil wight Glam.

<sup>30</sup> See the curse pronounced by Ædipus upon his undutiful son: “Begone, abhorred and renounced of me, thy father, thou basest villain, that thou win not with the spear that land of thine own kin, nor yet return ever again to the vale of Argos. . . . Such is my curse; yea, and I call upon Tartarus, in whose hateful gloom my father lies to drive thee forth from his home.”—(Soph.,

become a vampyre, when exhumed, exhibits an abnormal condition: not only absence of decay, but also a swelling and distending of the skin until it assumes the tension of a drum-head, giving out when struck a hollow sound. So long as the body remains in this state, it is debarred from that eternal repose craved by the dead, and it is incited by its evil spirit to seek out the living that it may destroy them. It runs about with lightning-like rapidity, biting the throats of those it meets, or, by sitting upon the chest of its victims, produces a horrible feeling of oppression and suffocation. Among those who suffer first from its ravages are its nearest of kin and those who were dearest to it. Those people become vampyres after death who were werewolves in life; those who have not received the full rites of burial; those who have met with sudden and violent death; those whose deaths remain unavenged; those who die under a curse; those who have been excommunicated; and those who have led an evil, immoral life. It will be evident that the revenants in the Slavic forms of Lenore are as ferocious as the vampyre; but they restrict their blood-thirstiness to abducting and, if possible, entombing the weeping maiden.<sup>31</sup> The Greek revenant of Constantine, on the other hand, far from being savage, is well-disposed. Had the Greeks believed that all revenants were vampyres, to evoke the body from the grave would have been the last thing in the world the mother would have dared to attempt, for it would have attacked her first of all and then have sought the destruction of Areté. Another illustration of the purely Greek notion of a revenant as being kindly and human in disposition, and of a remarkably primitive belief in the confusion of life and death, is the folk-story which tells of a shoemaker who after death turned vampyre and in se-

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(*Æd. Col.*, 1383 ff.) Again, Hippolytus, in swearing that he never violated the marriage-bed of his father, invokes on himself this curse: "May I verily perish without glory and without name, cityless and homeless, an outcast and a wanderer upon the earth; yea, and in death may neither sea nor earth receive my flesh, if I have proved false."—(Eurip., *Hipp.*, 1038 ff.) Here both readings seem to refer to the doom of remaining indissoluble and debarred from Hades. Hence at any time their souls may enter their bodies and drive them forth over the earth.

<sup>31</sup> See J. C. Lawson, l.c., chap. iv.

cret spent the evenings, with the exception of Saturday, at home in the company of his widow, until her pregnancy forced her to reveal to the curious neighbors the identity of her visitant. The Greeks also conceived of a revenant that resembled in its savage character the vampyre of the Slavs, which, in the course of time, came to occupy the mind so exclusively that it was regarded as the predominant class of revenants, expelling from popular life the milder sort and serving as the equivalent for revenant itself. Such evidence leads to the conclusion that the Greek ballad of *Constantine and Areté* must early have been pretty well fixed in popular tradition to resist the intrusion of the Slavic vampyre into its make-up, for as early as the tenth century Slavic influences began to work upon Greek life and thought.<sup>32</sup>

The question well-nigh asks itself: Has the Lenore legend a traceable itinerary, or is its wide diffusion to be accounted the result of an independent, spontaneous growth—from a subsoil of beliefs common to the Aryan race? With respect to the Balkan and Greek versions, transmission from one people to another is a view acceptable enough. Disagreement arises over the birth-place of the ballad and the direction of its travels. According to Psichari,<sup>33</sup> it originated in Servia, thence spread to Bulgaria, to Albania, and to Greece. According to Wollner,<sup>34</sup> its course ran from Servia to Bulgaria, to Greece, to Albania. But Dr. L. D. Schischmánov,<sup>35</sup> who has the double advantage of being the last one to write upon the subject, and of having a wider acquaintance with the Balkan versions, believes that the ballad was diffused as follows: Greece—Albania—Bulgaria—Macedonia. As an offshoot from Bulgaria, the ballad split in two: (a) the Servian form, in which the mother is the principal actor; (b) the Roumanian, in which it is the daughter. The relationship between the group dominated by the dead brother and that dominated by the dead lover is equally perplexing. When one recalls the keener sensitiveness of animal life, such as birds and hounds, to the presence of the

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<sup>32</sup> J. C. Lawson, l.c., p. 395.

<sup>34</sup> Wollner, W., l.c.

<sup>33</sup> J. Psichari, l.c.

<sup>35</sup> Schischmánov, l.c.

supernatural, it seems difficult to arrive at any other decision than that the wondering cry of the birds at the sight of a maid riding with a dead man is a more primitive feature than the shout of the dead lover :—

“Der Mond scheint hell,  
Der Todte reit't schnell,  
Feinsliebchen, grauet's dir?”

Hence the conclusion seems inevitable that from the Balkan states the ballad made its way northward into the Slavish and Germanic lands, where under the pressure exerted by a different moral concept, native to the race, it assumed the peculiar variations noted above.

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NOTE.—For an historical study of the werwolf in literature, one should read the interesting article by Professor Kirby F. Smith, published in the *Publications of Modern Language Society*, New Series II, 1. 1894.