Studies in language change in Bishop Percy’s Reliques of ancient English poetry


Abstract

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Abstract of Master’s Thesis, Submitted September 2013

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The aim of this thesis is to show the linguistic progression of selected Scottish ballads collected in Bishop Percy’s Reliques of Ancient English Poetry. The study primarily involved close reading of Percy’s source materials, including his Folio Manuscript (British Library Additional MS. 27879), his letters, and early print versions of the ballads, mostly provided by his correspondents. This involved the handling of manuscripts and rare books. Close reading of these documents, compared with Percy’s first edition, shows that he made significant philological modifications to the ballads in the interest of preserving certain words he deemed to be more authentic.

Furthermore, the thesis hypothesises the reasons for Percy’s editing methodologies, and suggests that Percy edited ballads for the motivation of personal ambition, and that his editing philosophy was to synthesise a British identity from ballads which predate Britain. Here, the thesis draws on biographical information on Percy, and contemporary Enlightenment writers and their national identity politics.

Ultimately, the thesis hopes to open academic dialogue on Percy as a precursor to the Romantic movement. The author’s recommendation is that further study is required, particularly on aspects of nation-building in Percy’s oeuvre.

Item Type: Thesis (MPhil(R))
Qualification Level: Masters
Keywords: thomas percy, reliques of ancient english poetry, ballads, ulster scots, bishop percy's folio manuscript, the enlightenment, romantic poetry, national building
Subjects: D History General and Old World > DA Great Britain > DAW Central Europe
P Language and Literature > PE English
College of Arts > School of Critical Studies > English Language and Linguistics

Supervisor's Name: Smith, Professor Jeremy and van Heijnsbergen, Dr Theo
Date of Award: 2014
Depositing User: Miss Danni Glover
Unique ID: glathesis:2014-5145
Percy Bysshe Shelley is one of the most popular English Romantic poets, and is regarded as a great lyrical poet in English language. Shelley was a famous English romantic poet whose poetry reflects passion, beauty, imagination, love, creativity, political liberty and nature. Being very sensitive and possessing distinctive qualities of hope, love, joy and imagination, Shelley strongly believed in realization of human happiness.


In ballad: Literary ballads. ...of Thomas Percy's ballad compilation Reliques of Ancient English Poetry in 1765, ballad imitation enjoyed a considerable vogue, which properly belongs in the history of poetry rather than balladry. Read More. In ballad: Literary ballads. ...of Thomas Percy's ballad compilation Reliques of Ancient English Poetry in 1765, ballad imitation enjoyed a considerable vogue, which properly belongs in the history of poetry rather than balladry. Read More.