

The “Edward” Ballade

Johannes Brahms, Op. 10#1

In 1773, the German thinker and theologian Johann Gottfried Herder compiled and published a collection of folk songs under the title “*Stimmen der Völker in ihren Liedern*” (Voices of the People in their Songs). At a time when democracy was still a rather novel concept, Herder felt there was value in the thoughts and feelings of ordinary people, and he hoped to share something of that with the world.

The composer Johannes Brahms, an avid reader who also maintained an interest in folk music, came upon a Scottish ballad in Herder’s collection. The ballad, simply titled “Edward,” had previously been published in Thomas Percy’s 1765 collection “*Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*.”

Those interested in Brahms’s first ballade will note that the piece follows the structure of the Scottish ballad fairly closely. The falling fifths, always repeated, signal the words “Edward, Edward,” and the changes of mode from major to minor suggest the dialogue between Edward and his mother.

On the following pages you’ll find three versions of the ballad side-by-side. First, Herder’s German translation as Brahms would’ve known it, a contemporary English translation, and the original Scottish as found in Percy’s *Reliques*.

Herder's German Translation

Dein Schwert, wie ist's von Blut so rot?
Edward, Edward!
Dein Schwert, wie ist's von Blut so rot?
Und gehst so traurig da? O!

Ich hab geschlagen meinen Geier tot,
Mutter, Mutter!
Ich hab geschlagen meinen Geier tot,
Und das, das geht mir nah. O!

Deines Geiers Blut ist nicht so rot,
Edward, Edward!
Deines Geiers Blut ist nicht so rot,
Mein Sohn, bekenn mir frei. O!

Ich hab geschlagen mein Rotroß tot,
Mutter, Mutter!
Ich hab geschlagen mein Rotroß tot,
Und's war so stolz und treu. O!

English Translation

“Why does your brand so drop with blood,
Edward, Edward?
Why does your brand so drop with blood,
And why so sad go ye, O?”

“O I have killed my hawk so good,
Mother, mother;
O I have killed my hawk so good,
And I have no more but he, O.”

Your hawk's blood was never so red,
Edward, Edward;
Your hawk's blood was never so red,
My dear son, I tell thee, O.”

“O I have killed my red-roan steed,
Mother, mother;
O I have killed my red-roan steed,
That went so fair and free, O.”

Original Scottish

“Quhy dois your brand sae drop wi' blud,
Edward, Edward?
Quhy dois your brand sae drop wi' blud?
And quhy wae sad gang yee, O?”

“O, I hae killed my hauke sae guid,
Mither, Mither:
O, I hae killed my hauke sae guid:
And I had nae mair bot hee, O!”

“Your haukis bluid was nevir sae reid,
Edward, Edward.
Your haukis bluid was nevir sae reid,
My deir son I tell thee, O.”

“O, I hae killed my reid-roan steid,
Mither, Mither:
O, I hae kiled my reid-roan steid,
That erst was sae fair and free, O.”

Dein Roß war alt und hast's nicht not,
Edward, Edward!

Dein Roß war alt und hast's nicht not,
Dich drückt ein andrer Schmerz. O!

Ich hab geschlagen meinen Vater tot!
Mutter, Mutter!

Ich hab geschlagen meinen Vater tot,
Und das, das quält mein Herz! O!

Und was wirst du nun an dir tun,
Edward, Edward?

Und was wirst du nun an dir tun,
Mein Sohn, das sage mir! O!

Auf Erden soll mein Fuß nicht ruhn!
Mutter, Mutter!

Auf Erden soll mein Fuß nicht ruhn!
Will wandern übers Meer! O!

Und was soll werden dein Hof und Hall,

Edward, Edward?

Und was soll werden dein Hof und Hall,
So herrlich sonst, so schön? O!

“Your steed was old, and ye have more,
Edward, Edward;

Your steed was old, and ye have more,
Some other dole ye dree, O.”

“O I have killed my father dear,
Mother, mother;

O I have killed my father dear,
Alas, and woe is me, O!”

“And what penance will ye dree for that,
Edward, Edward?

What penance will ye dree for that,
My dear son, now tell me, O.”

“I’ll set my foot in yonder boat,
Mother, mother,

I’ll set my foot in yonder boat,
And I’ll fare o’er the sea, O.”

“And what will ye do with your towers and your
hall,
Edward, Edward?”

And what will ye do with your towers and your hall,
That were so fair to see, O?”

“Your steid was auld, and ye hae gat mair,
Edward, Edward:

Your steid was auld, and ye hae gat mair,
Sum other dule ye drie, O.”

“O, I hae killed my fadir deir,
Mither, Mither:

O, I hae killed my fadir deir,
Alas! and wae is me, O!”

“And quhatten penance wul ye drie for that,
Edward, Edward?

And quhatten penance wul ye drie for that?
My deir son, now tell me, O.”

“Ile set my feit in yonder boat,
Mither, Mither:

Ile set my feit in yonder boat,
And Ile far ovir the sea, O.”

“And quhat wul ye doe wi’ your towirs and your
ha’,
Edward, Edward?

And quhat wul ye doe wi’ your towirs and your ha’,
That were sae fair to see, O?”

Ach immer steh's und sink und fall!
Mutter, Mutter!
Ach immer steh's und sink und fall,
Ich werd es nimmer sehn! O!

Und was soll werden aus Weib und Kind,

Edward, Edward?
Und was soll werden aus Weib und Kind,

Wann du gehst übers Meer? O!

Die Welt ist groß, laß sie betteln drin,
Mutter, Mutter!
Die Welt ist groß, laß sie betteln drin,
Ich seh sie nimmermehr! O!

Und was soll deine Mutter tun,
Edward, Edward?
Und was soll deine Mutter tun,
Mein Sohn, das sage mir? O!

Der Fluch der Hölle soll auf euch ruhn,
Mutter, Mutter!
Der Fluch der Hölle soll auf euch ruhn,
Denn ihr, ihr rietet's mir! O!

“I'll let them stand till down they fall,
Mother, mother;
I'll let them stand till down they fall,
For here never more must I be, O.”

“And what will ye leave to your bairns and your
wife,
Edward, Edward?
And what will ye leave to your bairns and your
wife,
When ye go o'er the sea, O?”

“The world's room: let them beg through life,
Mother, mother;
The world's room: let them beg through life,
For them never more will I see, O.”

“And what will you leave to your own mother dear,
Edward, Edward?
And what will you leave to your own mother dear,
My dear son, now tell me, O?”

“The curse of hell from me shall ye bear,
Mother, mother;
The curse of hell from me shall ye bear,
Such counsels ye gave to me, O!”

“Ile let them stand til they doun fa',
Mither, Mither:
Ile let them stand til they doun fa'
For here nevir mair maun I be, O.”

“And quhat wul ye leive to your bairns and your
wife,
Edward, Edward?
And quhat wul ye leive to your bairns and your
wife,
Quhan ye gang ovir the sea, O?”

“The walrd is room, let thame beg throw life,
Mither, Mither:
The walrd is room, let thame beg throw life,
For thame nevir mair wul I see, O.”

“And quhat wul ye leive to your ain mither deir,
Edward, Edward?
And quhat wul ye leive to your ain mither dier,
my deir son, now tell me, O.”

“The curse of hell frae me sall ye beir,
Mither, Mither:
The curse of hell frae me sall ye beir,
Sic counseils ye gave to me, O.”