

Song Variations: A case study using Three Ravens / Twa Corbies

Revised for

Boarshead: Danze del Verro (Dance of the Boar) (Northshield) December 2, 2023, AS LVIII
and Friday Night Bardic's Sunday Night Class (Meridies/Ethereal) August 20, 2023, AS LVIII
from a 'Bardic Drift' class taught at Bardic Madness (Ethereal), July 2020, AS LV

By Lady Dorothea de Beckham / Dee Becker

dorothea@redspears.org

Canton of Hrothgeirsfjodr, Barony of Red Spears, Midrealm

For this class we will use the song "*The Three Ravens*" to explore

❖ Variations and Companion Songs

❖ "Bardic" Drift

❖ Folk Song Research

Reworking older stories and songs for a current audience is nothing new, but 'standardizing' song lyrics through publication is a fairly recent development. Starting with the song 'The Three Ravens', this class will explore companion songs, derivations, and points to watch for unintentional or intentional changes.

Note: All source links were accessed June 2020 unless otherwise noted.

Video of the 2023 Friday Night Bardic Class: <https://fb.watch/ndwfl9ot4V/>

Variations and Companion Songs:

A comparison of lyrics

In the following three songs, find the similarities in the stories. Note the differences in the language, forms, tunes, and ages. P is pronounced TH as in THE, THAT and THERE.

Corpus Christi (15th century; 1504)

And yn þat bed þer lythe a knyght,
His wowndis bledyng day & nyght;
Lully, lulley, lully, lulley!
þe fawcon hath born my mak away.

By þat bedis side þer kneleth a may,
& she wepeth both nyght & day;
Lully, lulley, lully, lulley!
þe fawcon hath born my mak away.

Corpus Christi Carol (15th Century; 1504): For a short discussion of the documentation and related songs, a starting point is the link

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corpus_Christi_Carol.

Modern recordings include the Benjamin Britten arrangement with vocals and harp:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxtwyvZhHDM>

and one sung by Janet Baker (Mizzo Soprano) with Gerald Moore (piano):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pCETr4mO_fc

Three Ravens (T. Ravenscroft, Melismata, 1611)

Down in yonder green field,
Downe a downe, hey downe, hey downe,
There lies a Knight slain under his shield,
With a downe
His hounds they lie down at his feet,
So well do they their Master keep,
With a downe, derrie, derrie, downe,
downe.

His hawks they fly so eagerly,
Downe a downe, hey downe, hey downe,
No other fowl dare him come nigh
With a downe
Down there comes a fallow Doe,
As heavy with young as she might go,

With a downe, derrie, derrie, downe,
downe.

Thomas Ravenscroft: Melismata. Mvsicall Phansies. Fitting the Covrt, Citie, and Covntrey Hvmovrs. To 3, 4, and 5. Voyces. (1611).

Facsimile:

<http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/ravenscroft/melismata/mel35small.html>

Note: Published with music.

Twa Corbies (W. Scott, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, 1802/03)

In behind yon auld fail dyke,
I wot there lies a new slain knight;
And naebody kens that he lies there,
But his hawk, his hound, and his lady fair.

His hound is to the hunting gane,
His hawk, to fetch the wild-fowl hame,
His lady's ta'en another mate
So we may mak our dinner sweet.

Sir Water Scott: *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, 1812 and later editions.

Sir Water Scott, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, 4 vols rev. and ed. by T.F.Henderson (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1932). *Three Ravens and Twa Corbies: Vol. II*, pp. 415-418.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minstrelsy_of_the_Scottish_Border

<http://www.walterscott.lib.ed.ac.uk/works/poetry/minstrelsy.html> (1802)

<https://archive.org/details/minstrelsyofscot02scot> (1849 ed. Vol. 2, p. 357)

http://www.mustrad.org.uk/articles/three_ravens.htm

Note: Printed without music.

COVNTRY PASTIMES.

M E D I V S. 4. V O C.



Downe a downe, hey downe, with a downe
with a downe, hey derrie derrie, downe, downe, downe.

T E N O R. 4. V O C.



Downe hey downe, hey downe, hey downe. with a
downe, with a downe derrie, derrie downe a downe.

B A S S V S. 4. V O C.



Downe hey downe, hey downe, with a downe,
with hey downe downe, derrie downe downe.

with a downe.
She lift up his bloody bed,
And kist his wounds that were so red
with a downe.
8 *She got him up upon her backe,*
downe adowne.
She got him up upon her backe,
with adowne.
She got him up upon her backe,
And carried him to e arthen lake,
with adowne downe.
9 *She buried him before the prime,*

downe adowne.
She buried him before the prime,
with adowne.
She buried him before the prime,
She was dead her selfe ere euen-song time
with adowne.
10 *God send euery gentleman*
downe adowne.
God send euery gentleman
with adowne.
God send euery gentleman (man,
Such haukes, such hounds, and such a Le-
wish adowne. F

Historical Context

What was happening in England between the time Corpus Christie and Ravenscroft were published?

- Gutenberg's Printing Press – Commercial use by 1450
- Catholic-Anglican-Catholic-Anglican – The Tudors from 1509 to 1603

Language

Do you understand all the words in the Three Ravens song? Go back and look at the language and story elements in the Corpus Christie Carol and Twa Corbies. Discuss.

- **Prime and Even-song**
<https://sites.google.com/site/dilucinum/home/divisions-of-day-and-night-in-ancient-rome> and
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canonical_hours
- **Leman**
<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/leman>
- **Twa**
<https://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/twa>
- **Corbie**
https://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/corbie_n

Picking an existing song to perform:

Will the audience enjoy the song without understanding all the words?

Which elements of the song/story/music are important?

Does it have a tune to go with the lyrics?

So does this sound familiar?

❖ Johnny Comes Marching Home

On setting his lyrics to music for 'Johnny Comes Marching Home': Gilmore later acknowledged that the music was not original but was, as he put it in an 1883 article in the Musical Herald, "a musical waif which I happened to hear somebody humming in the early days of the rebellion, and taking a fancy to it, wrote it down, dressed it up, gave it a name, and rhymed it into usefulness for a special purpose suited to the times."

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/When_Johnny_Comes_Marching_Home citing: Lighter, Jonathan. "The Best Antiwar Song Ever Written," Occasional Papers in Folklore No. 1. CAMSCO Music and Loomis House Press, 2012. [ISBN 978-1-935243-89-2](#) p.17

Fitting the SCA context

- ❖ Fitting your persona, or not
- ❖ SCA or Historical Time: Classical, Pop, or Folk
- ❖ Originals or Retellings
- ❖ A continuum of languages
- ❖ Music, Chant, or Story
- ❖ Filk and Filk-Filk

Cariadoc's Miscellany article on sources for story telling:

http://www.pbm.com/%7Elindah/cariadoc/period_sources_for_story_telling.html

Stefan's Florilegium Archive: <http://www.florilegium.org/files/STORIES/idxstories.html>

Retelling example: Orpheus and Eurydice and the Lai of Sir Orfeo

Thinking about the story: <https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/european-breton-lai/tag/sir-orfeo/>

In modern language: <http://www.eleusinianm.co.uk/middle-english-literature-retold-in-modern-english/breton-lais/sir-orfeo>

Folk Song Research

Down the research rabbit hole ...

READ THE COMMENTARIES. The footnotes might have the best part!

There is a melodic resemblance of the tune to that of "John Anderson, My Jo" (to which [Robert Burns](#) wrote lyrics to fit a pre-existing tune dating from about 1630 or earlier), and Jonathan Lighter has suggested a connection to the seventeenth-century ballad "[The Three Ravens](#)".

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/When_Johnny_Comes_Marching_Home citing: Lighter, Jonathan. "The Best Antiwar Song Ever Written," Occasional Papers in Folklore No. 1. CAMSCO Music and Loomis House Press, 2012. [ISBN 978-1-935243-89-2](#) p.21-28

An example of "John Anderson, My Jo" as sung by Christy-Lyn:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ef93XIIIMtv4> (Accessed July 2020)

With orchestra as sung by Eddi Reader:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vLuKGirgqls> (Accessed July 2020)

The Tune: Twa Corbies to The Tune of An Alarc'h

1961 by Scots poet [Thurso Berwick, alias R. Morris Blythman](#) (1914-1981)

Learned the tune from folk singer [Zaig Montjarret](#), the wife of the Breton musician [Paul \(Pollig\) Montjarret](#) (1920-2003)

She helped him adapt Villemarqué's lyrics

The 1961 album "Far over the Forth" by Ray and Archie Fisher was the first recording of the new ballad.

<http://bluegrassmessengers.com/recordings--info-26-the-three-ravens.aspx>

<http://chrsouchon.free.fr/alarchf.htm>

The Witch of the Westmorlands / West-Mer-Land: Barbara Dickson sang *Witch of the Westmorlands* in 1971 on her album **From the Beggar's Mantle**, with Archie Fisher playing guitar and concertina on the album. Archie Fisher sang his own ballad *The Witch of the West-Mer-Lands* in 1976 on his Folk-Legacy album **The Man With a Rhyme**, and commented in his liner notes that "I have borrowed, for this song, the form of the narrative ballad. The ingredients are a mixture of legend, superstition, and ballad themes brought into focus by the Lakeland painter, Joni Turner. As far as I know, the female centaur is not a creature of mythology, and this role of witch disguise was suggested by the tales of antlered women with bodies of deer seen wading in the shallows of the lakes in the moonlight. There are many pleasant and hospitable inns in the Lake District."

<https://mainlynorfolk.info/folk/songs/thewitchofthewestmorlands.html>

If you want to explore the water lady or horse mythology of Western Europe: [kelpie](#), [water-horse](#), [hippocamp](#), [Nessie](#), [Ogopogo](#), Morvarc'h, Ceffyl Dŵr, Bäckahästen, Glashtyn, Cabbyl-ushtey, Nuckelavee, Nuggle, Ech-Ushkya, Each-uisge, Demherst, neck, nicor, nokk, nix, nixie, nixy, or nokken, [Sirens](#), [Jenny Greenteeth](#), the [Shellycoat](#), the river-hag [Peg Powler](#), the *Bäckahäst*-like [Brag](#), and the [Grindylow](#).

Translations

A Partial Timeline for Three Ravens and Twa Corbies Translations:

- ❖ "Dva Vorona" or "Шотландская песня" (Scottish Song) (partial poem, 1828 - Aleksandr Sergeyevich Pushkin) <http://bluegrassmessengers.com/the-anglo-scottish-raven-ballad--tardel-1914.aspx> citing <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b3113869;view=1up;seq=25>
- ❖ "Skotsk ballad" / "De to Ravne" in the opera "vapors fra Lammermoor" (music J. Bredals, May 5, 1832 Copenhagen performance) <http://bluegrassmessengers.com/the-anglo-scottish-raven-ballad--tardel-1914.aspx> citing <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b3113869;view=1up;seq=25>
- ❖ De tre Ravne (Danish, 1842) <http://bluegrassmessengers.com/the-anglo-scottish-raven-ballad--tardel-1914.aspx> citing <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b3113869;view=1up;seq=25>
- ❖ Die Zwei Raven (1855 – Theodor Fontane) http://www.handmann.phantasus.de/g_zweiraben.html

Companion Songs (lyrics are included after this section)

- ❖ Corpus Christi Carol https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corpus_Christi_Carol
- ❖ The Three Ravens
- ❖ Twa Corbies
- ❖ Crow Song / Billy Magee Magar (America, c. 1860) <http://bluegrassmessengers.com/crow-song--wilcox-ny-io-c1860-stout-a.aspx>
- ❖ Blow the Man Down (1951) http://www.mustrad.org.uk/articles/three_ravens.htm
- ❖ Witch of the Westemere Land (1971) <https://mainlynorfolk.info/folk/songs/thewitchofthewestmorlands.html>

Check a site's references for additional interpretations or discography.

Additional titles are from <https://www.fresnostate.edu/folklore/ballads/C026.html>

For example, New leads on related songs:

CROSS-REFERENCES:

"Blow the Man Down" (lyrics)
"Lover's Farewell (I)" (lyrics)
"The Crow Song (I)" (lyrics, theme)
"Three Blackbirds" (lyrics, theme)

ALTERNATE TITLES:

Billie Magee Magaw
Willie McGee McGaw
Two Old Crows
Three Black Crows

Let's Sing

CORPUS CHRISTI CAROL / Falcon Carol

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corpus_Christi_Carol

(Lyrics below, Accessed June 2020) , Choral setting:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AdMXVJNpotE>

He bore him up, he bore him down,
He bore him into an orchard brown.
Lully, lullay, lully, lullay!
The falcon has borne my mate away.

In that orchard there was a hall
That was hanged with purple and pall;
Lully, lullay, lully, lullay!
The falcon has borne my mate away.

And in that hall there was a bed:
It was hanged all with gold so red;
Lully, lullay, lully, lullay!
The falcon has borne my mate away.

And in that bed there lies a knight,
His wounds bleeding day and night;
Lully, lullay, lully, lullay!
The falcon has borne my mate away.

By that bed's side there kneels a maid,
And she weeps both night and day;
Lully, lullay, lully, lullay!
The falcon has borne my mate away.

And by that bed's side there stands a stone,
"Corpus Christi" written thereon.
Lully, lullay, lully, lullay!
The falcon has borne my mate away

THE THREE RAVENS
A variation on the Ravenscroft version

There were three ravens sat on a tree,
Downe a downe, hey downe, hey downe,
They were as black as black might be.
With a downe
Then one of them said to his mate,
Where shall we our breakfast take?
With a downe, derrie, derrie, downe, downe.

Down in yonder green field,
Downe a downe, hey downe, hey downe,
There lies a Knight slain under his shield,
With a downe
His hounds they lie down at his feet,
So well do they their Master keep,
With a downe, derrie, derrie, downe, downe.

His hawks they fly so eagerly,
Downe a downe, hey downe, hey downe,
No other fowl dare him come nigh
With a downe
Down there comes a fallow Doe,
As heavy with young as she might go,
With a downe, derrie, derrie, downe, downe.

She lifted up his bloody head,
Downe a downe, hey downe, hey downe,
And kissed his wounds that were so red,
With a downe
She got him up upon her back,
And carried him to earthen lake,
With a downe, derrie, derrie, downe, downe.

She buried him before the Prime,
Downe a downe, hey downe, hey downe,
She was dead herself ere Even-song time.
With a downe
God send every gentleman,
Such hawks, such hounds, and such Leman
With a downe, derrie, derrie, downe, downe.

TWA CORBIES

Lyrics from: Arthur Knevett, Thomas Ravenscroft and The Three Ravens:
http://www.mustrad.org.uk/articles/three_ravens.htm (Accessed June 2020)

As I was walking all alane,
I heard twa corbies making a mane;
The tane unto the t'other say,
Where shall we gang and dine to-day?

In behind yon auld fail dyke,
I wot there lies a new slain knight;
And naebody kens that he lies there,
But his hawk, his hound, and his lady fair.

His hound is to the hunting gane,
His hawk, to fetch the wild-fowl hame,
His lady's ta'en another mate
So we may mak our dinner sweet.

Ye'll sit on his white hause-bane,
And I'll pick out his bonny blue een.
Wi' ae lock o' his gowden hair,
We'll theek our nest when it grows bare.

Mony a one for him makes mane,
But none sall ken whare he is gane:
O'er his white banes, when they are bare,
The wind sall blaw for evermair.

CROW SONG / BILLY MAGEE MAGAR

To the Tune of 'Johnny Comes Marching Home / Johnny Fill Up the Bowl'

<http://bluegrassmessengers.com/crow-song--wilcox-ny-io-c1860-stout-a.aspx> (Acc. June 2020)

There were **three crows** sat on a tree,
 Oh Billy Magee Magar!
 There were three crows sat on a tree,
 Oh Billy Magee Magar!
 There were three crows sat on a tree,
 And they were black as crows could be,

And they all flapped their wings and cried
 Caw, caw, caw, Billy Magee Magar!
 And they all flapped their wings and cried
 Oh Billy Magee Magar!

"There lies a **horse** on yander plain,
 Oh Billy Magee Magar!
 There lies a horse on yander plain,
 Oh Billy Magee Magar!
 There lies a **horse** on yander plain,
 Who's by some cruel butcher slain,"

And they all flapped their wings and cried
 Caw, caw, caw, Billy Magee Magar!
 And they all flapped their wings and cried
 Oh Billy Magee Magar!

Said one old crow unto his mate,
 Oh Billy Magee Magar!
 Said one old crow unto his mate,
 Oh Billy Magee Magar!
 Said one old crow unto his mate,
 "What shall we do for grub to ate?"

And they all flapped their wings and cried
 Caw, caw, caw, Billy Magee Magar!
 And they all flapped their wings and cried
 Oh Billy Magee Magar!

"We'll perch ourselves on his backbone,
 Oh Billy Magee Magar!
 "We'll perch ourselves on his backbone,
 Oh Billy Magee Magar!
 "We'll perch ourselves on his backbone,
 And pluck his eyes out one by one,"

And they all flapped their wings and cried
 Caw, caw, caw, Billy Magee Magar!
 And they all flapped their wings and cried
 Oh Billy Magee Magar!

BLOW THE MAN DOWN

Three Ravens variation Lyrics from: Arthur Knevett, *Thomas Ravenscroft and The Three Ravens*: http://www.mustrad.org.uk/articles/three_ravens.htm (Accessed June 2020)

There were three crows sat on a tree,
Way, hay, blow the man down,
And they was as black as black could be,
Gimme some time to blow the man down!

Says one old crow unto his mate,
"Where shall we go for something to ate?"

"There is an old horse on yonder hill,
And there we can go and eat our fill."

"There is an old horse on yonder mound,
We'll light upon to his jaw-bone."

Says one old crow unto the other,
"We'll pick his eyes out one by one."

Source:

William Main Doerflinger, Shantymen and Shantyboys: Songs of the Sailor and Lumberman (New York: Macmillan, 1951) p.21

Open to debate: Is the next song a derivation of Three Ravens?

WITCH OF THE WESTEMERE LAND (1971)

Music and Lyrics: Archie Fisher (Witch of the West-mer Land / Witch of the Westmoreland). This arrangement is based on Baldwin of Erbores and others.

Pale was the **wounded knight**, that bore the rowan shield
Loud and cruel were the **raven's** cries that feasted on the field
Saying "**Beck** water cold and clear will never clean your wound
There's none but the Maid of the Winding Mere can make thee hale and soond"

So, course well my brindle **hounds**, and fetch me the mountain hare
whose coat is a grey as the **Wastwater** or as white as the lily fair.
He said "Green moss and heather bends will never staunch the flood
there's none but the Witch of the Westmere Land can save thy dear life's blood.

So turn, turn your **stallion's** head 'til his red mane flies in the wind
And the rider of the moon goes by and the bright star falls behind
And clear was the pale moon when his shadow passed him by
Below the hills were the brightest stars when he heard the owl cry

Saying "Why do you ride this way, and wherefore came you here?"
"I seek the Witch of the Westmorland that dwells by the winding mere"
Then fly free your good grey **hawk** to gather the golden rod
and face your horse into the clouds above yon gay green wood.

And it's weary by the **Ullswater** and the misty brake fern way
Til through the cleft in the **Kirkstone** Pass the winding water lay.
He said "Lie down, by brindled hound and rest ye, my good grey hawk
And thee, my steed may graze thy fill for I must dismount and walk,

But come when you hear my horn and answer swift the call
For I fear ere the sun will rise this morn ye will serve me best of all."
And it's down to the water's brim he's born the rowan shield
And the goldenrod he has cast in to see what the lake might yield

And wet she rose from the lake, and fast and fleet went she
One half the form of a maiden fair with a jet black mare's body
And loud, long and shrill he blew til his steed was by his side
High overhead the grey hawk flew and swiftly did he ride

Saying "Course well, my brindled hound, and fetch me the jet-black mare
Stoop and strike, my good grey hawk, and bring me the maiden fair"
She said "Pray, sheathe thy silvery sword. Lay down thy rowan shield
For I see by the briny blood that flows you've been wounded in the field"

And she stood in a gown of the velvet blue, bound round with a silver chain
And she's kissed his pale lips once and twice and three times round again
And she's bound his wounds with the goldenrod, full fast in her arms he lay
And he has risen hale and sound with the sun high in the day.

She said "Ride with your brindled hound at heel, and your good grey hawk in hand
There's none can harm the knight who's lain with the Witch of the Westmereland."

Folk Song Research: Anthologies

Child Ballads

- 305 traditional ballads
- England, Scotland, and their American variants
- Anthologized by **Francis James Child (1825-1896)**
- Originally published in ten volumes between 1882 and 1898 as *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child_Ballads has links to digitized editions
F.J. Child: The English and Scottish Popular Ballads (1882-98)

<https://archive.org/details/englishandscotti01chiluoft> (Vol. 1, p. 253)

A searchable Child Ballad anthology:

<https://www.fresnostate.edu/folklore/ballads/C026.html>

Barzaz Breiz

- Modern Breton spelling: Barzhaz *Breizh*
- Meaning: "Ballads of Brittany" - a collection of Breton popular songs
- Collected by **Théodore Hersart de la Villemarqué (1815-1895)**
- First published in 1839
- Expanded editions published in 1845 and 1867, and it has many reprintings.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barzaz_Breiz has links to digitized editions

Théodore Hersart de la Villemarqué: *Barzaz Breiz* (modern spelling *Barzhaz Breizh* (*Ballads of Brittany*)) (1839/1845). *An Alarc'h / Le Cygne (The Swan)*, pp 228-23, song XXXI, music XVII (French with Breton lyrics) https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Barzaz_Breiz/1846

A partial translation in English by T. Taylor (1865):

<https://archive.org/stream/balladssongsofbr00lavi?ref=ol>

Many Others...

Not everything is on the internet, but it is easier to find things than it was even 20 years ago.

Another starting point: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_folk_song_collections

University held collections such as the International Music Score Library Project (IMSLP) / Petrucci Music Library: https://imslp.org/wiki/Main_Page

https://imslp.org/wiki/Category:Folk_Songs,_American_Collections

Does it matter if it is from the time it purports to be? Hoaxes and Misattributions:

❖ Macpherson's "*Ossian's Poems*"

Ossian is the narrator and purported author of an internationally popular and influential cycle of epic poems published by the Scottish poet James Macpherson beginning in 1760. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ossian>

The authenticity of Macpherson's work was soon called into question by various authorities such as: William Shaw, *An Enquiry into the Authenticity of the Poems Ascribed to Ossian*, Jan 1781, J. Murray/London.

<https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=NIVKAQAAMAAJ&hl>

Due to this and other cases of dubious scholarship, the authenticity of Villamarque's *Barzaz Breiz* was in doubt up until his notebooks were discovered in 1964 by Donatien Laurent (1935–2020), studied in the 1970s with new scholarship published in the 1980s-2000s. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barzaz_Breiz, and

https://www.persee.fr/doc/abpo_0399-0826_1989_num_96_3_3334_t1_0355_0000_1

❖ Donald MacGillivray

On the authorship of Donald MacGillivray:

<https://reasonableconversation.wordpress.com/2012/08/09/donald-macgillivray-the-genius-hoax/>