

## KARL HEINZ GÖLLER

### Sir Hugh of Lincoln — From History to Nursery Rhyme

#### 1 Historical Background

##### 1.1 The Myth of the Jewish Ritual Murder

All ascertainable historical facts concerning the alleged murder of Hugh of Lincoln are connected, in one way or another, with the myth of the Jewish ritual murder, which was widespread in England during the Middle Ages. It had been given new momentum through the murder of a young boy named William of Norwich in the year 1144.<sup>1</sup> In this connection the Jewish apostate

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<sup>1</sup> The child martyr Hugh of Lincoln is often confused with the famous Bishop Hugh of Lincoln. On his *vita*, see *Life of Hugh of Lincoln*, ed. James Francis Dimock, R. S. (London, 1864); on the murder of William of Norwich, see M. D. Anderson, *A Saint at Stake: The Strange Death of William of Norwich, 1144* (London, 1964), which also contains much background information pertinent to the Hugh of Lincoln story; on Copin and John of Lexington, see 106—108. On the alleged “Jewish blood ritual”, cf. Hermann L. Strack, *Das Blut im Glauben und Aberglauben der Menschheit: Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der “Volksmedizin” und des “jüdischen Blutritus”* (München, 8th ed. 1900), esp. Chap. 18: “Das angebliche Zeugnis der Geschichte für jüdische Ritualmorde”, 121 ff. On the modern view of the facts behind the story, see “Hugh of Lincoln”, *DNB*, XXVIII, 169—171. The traditional medieval view is still predominant in Thomas Fuller, *The History of the Worthies of England*, 3 vols. (London, 1840; rpt. New York, 1965); here II, 271. On the origins, cf. Montagu F. Moddern *The Jew in the Literature of England to the End of the 19th Century* (Philadelphia, 1944), 11 ff. On the history of Judaism in Europe see also *Katalog für die Ausstellung “Judentum im Mittelalter”*, ed. Kulturabteilung des Amtes der Bgld. Landesregierung (Eisenstadt, 1978), esp. 91—108 and 112—147.

As late as 1780 “blood crimes” were brought before the court and dealt with. Cf. an entry in the Chronicle of Gumpolzhaimer:

A local Jew, in May of this year, provided the best proof of how little he wanted to be blamed by the view that the Jews bought Christian children and killed them for their blood. A slovenly prostitute from Salzburg had lured a little boy of nine years from there, in order to sell him to the Jews, since she had heard that they occasionally had a need for Christian blood. She approached the good Jew Lemmle with this offer and led the child to him. Lemmle, however, brought her to his superiors, from where she was turned over to the magistrate for punishment. On June 3rd she was fined an entire Stadtschilling, then placed in the mad house for one hour and expelled from the town after a solemn oath to keep the peace in the future. (Record of the town council of 2 June 1790 containing the sentence, and Maemminger's Chronicle for 1780, which names the Jew who was offered the child Lemmle; he is not named in the town council record), *Regensburg's Geschichte, Sagen und Merkwürdigkeiten von den ältesten bis auf die neuesten Zeiten, in einem Abriß aus den besten Chroniken, Geschichtsbüchern, und Urkundensammlungen, dargestellt von Christian Gottlieb Gumpolzhaimer, großherzoglich Mecklenburg-Schwerinschen geheimen Legationsrath.*



Theobald had claimed before the court that all the Jews of the world were accomplices to the crime — one of the first versions of the idea of a Jewish world conspiracy which was to gain such a fatal hold during the twentieth century. We would be making it too easy for ourselves if we took statements such as those of Theobald for mere fables or fantasies. They may have been invented under torture, by psychopaths or simply by liars and calumniators. But they have made history; they have changed the world. They even affect contemporary conditions. That is why this kind of literature must be taken seriously. It is not only a mimetic representation of reality — as postulated by Aristotle's famous critical theory. Far more, it shapes reality, influences it, makes it what it is. This is particularly true of popular literature.

The story of Hugh of Lincoln is a prime example of the way in which the myth of the ritual murder can become the *movens* and the catalyst for both the chain of political events triggered off by the murder, and for the literary development of the material. The first to tell the people of Lincoln about the alleged deeply ingrained criminal inclinations of the Jews was John of Lexington, who is characterized as a wise man in the chronicles. The citizens of Lincoln were only too willing to believe him. There was a good deal of anti-Semitism in Lincoln, as in all other English cities with Jewish ghettos and rich Jewish merchants. Moreover, anti-Semitism was encouraged and exploited by both Church and State authorities. Even the documents I have analyzed make it clear that King Henry III made a large financial profit from the events in Lincoln. Everything confiscated from the Jews became royal property. Thus from the very beginning myths and down-to-earth political and economic interests went hand in hand in the development of the Hugh of Lincoln story.

## 1.2 *The Historical Facts According to the Close Rolls*

What exactly happened to Hugh of Lincoln on the 27th of July 1255 is as mysterious today as it was then. He may have fallen into a well or could have suffered an accident while playing. The body may then have been hidden by people, either innocent or guilty of his death. But Hugh may also have been the victim of murder. Only one fact is certain — that he did not fall prey to a ritual murder; and it is nearly as certain that the Jews of Lincoln had nothing to do with the affair.

The historical facts and dates concerning the tragic event are relatively well known. Even a listing of the statements in the written records furnishes conclusive evidence as to the historical situation of the Jews of England and particularly in Lincoln. They were a suppressed, exploited and despised minority. Fifteen months before the alleged murder of Hugh, the Jewish archpriest Elyas had asked the King for permission to let all the English Jews emigrate. They wanted to seek the patronage of a prince who would show them a little more humanity and pity than the English.<sup>2</sup> In February of 1255 Elyas repeated this

<sup>2</sup> Matthaeus Parisiensis, *Chronica maiora*, ed. Henry Richards Luard, Rolls Series, 57, (London, 1880), V, 441.



request in a more urgent form. The King declined, and instead sold all his rights towards the Jewish population of the country to his brother, Richard of Cornwall, for the sum of 5,000 Marks.

Hardly had the suspicion been voiced that the Jews of Lincoln had committed a ritual murder, when Copin, the Jew in whose courtyard the body had been found, was imprisoned and threatened with torture and death, should he not tell the truth. With his statement we are already in the realm of fiction. Copin, namely, declared for the record that the Jews had tried to bury the murdered boy's body, but that he had always reappeared — a feature which was to become part of popular ballads. Moreover, Copin, much like Theobald in Norwich, maintained that all the Jews of England had participated in the crime.

The annals of the abbey Burton-on-Trent make it clear that King Henry himself came to Lincoln in order to conduct the investigation.<sup>3</sup> This is confirmed by the *Close Rolls* of the same year.

Quia Gilbertus de Cheyle fuit in partibus Linc' per preceptum regis in adventu regis ad partes illas, et de speciali precepto regis remansit in partibus illis ad custodiendum Judeos Linc' et alios qui . . . quodam horribili facinore nuper perpetrato apud Linc' sunt rettati etc.<sup>4</sup>

The files of the law suit are no longer extant. If it took place at all, then in London. At any rate 18 Jews were hanged in London because they refused to testify in front of a purely Christian jury. They had demanded that Jewish members be included.<sup>5</sup> 72 further Jews were pardoned through the intervention of Richard of Cornwall and released from the Tower on the first of May, 1256.

Their way to London can be followed through the entries in the *Close Rolls*. The King had commanded the Constable of Lincoln Castle to bring the accused Jews to London. The sheriffs of Huntingdon and Hereford were to assist him:

14th October 1255

Mandatum est constabulario castri regis Linc' quod omnes Judeos captos et detentos in prisiona regis Linc' pro infante nuper crucifixo apud Linc' sine dilacione liberari faciat vicecomiti regis Linc' ducendos ad regem usque Westmonasterium sub salva et sufficienti custodia ad custum eorundem Judeorum [. . .]

Et mandatum est eidem vicecomiti Lincoln' quod predictos Judeos ad custum eorunden sine dilacione adducat ad regem usque Westmonasterium ad regem [sic], ita quod de corporibus eorum regi respondeat in propria persona sua [. . .]

<sup>3</sup> *Annales Monastici*, ed. Henry Richards Luard, Rolls Series, 36/I (London, 1864), 340 ff.; cf. *Annales monasterii Waverleia*, Rolls Series, 36/II (London, 1865), 346.

<sup>4</sup> *Close Rolls of the Reign of Henry III: Preserved in the Public Record Office AD 1254—56* (London, 1931), 142—143.

<sup>5</sup> Malcolm Pittock (ed.), *The Prioress's Tale: The Wife of Bath's Tale* (Oxford, 1973), 31: “. . . one of the popes decreed that the testimony of Christians against Jews was not to be valid unless it could be corroborated by a Jew.” For literature on the papal bulls, see “Päpste”, in Strack, 177—184.



Et mandatum est vicecomiti Huntendon' quod, cum predicits vicecomes Linc' una cum predictis Judeis transitum fecerint [sic] per comitatum Huntendon', eidem ad salvo conducendum eos per ballivam suam consilium et auxilium efficax impendat (p. 145)

There are many documents in the *Close Rolls* concerning the confiscation of Jewish goods and estates. King Henry gave detailed instructions on how to deal with their property. Everything which the hanged or imprisoned Jews possessed had to be delivered to the King. The command applied to all:

... qui suspensi aut capti sunt vel eciam fugerunt pro morte pueri nuper crucifixi apud Linc' ... 1255, p. 241

The booty was also distributed to courtiers:

Rex de assensu R. comitis Cornubie, fratris sui, cui rex dimisit omnes domos Judeorum Lincolnie suspensorum pro puero crucifixo, pro debitis in quibus rex ei tenebatur, concessit Heremanno, vatletto suo, unam de melioribus domibus predictis etc. 1256, p. 285

Many Jews had apparently tried to leave the country. The King therefore commanded that all attempts at flight be prevented and the fugitives imprisoned.

Mandatum est ballivis regis Quinque Portuum quod, sicut se ipsos et libertates suas diligunt, nullo modo permittant aliquem Judeum vel Judeam exire regnum regis; set [...] ipsum [...] capiant et salvo custodiri faciant ... 4th October 1255, p. 227

Mandatum est vicecomiti Norf' et Suff' quod cautius faciat provideri per omnes portus in balliva sua quod nullus Judeus vel Judea veniens ad aliquem portum in balliva sua et volens transfretare permittatur exire regnum regis; set [...] statim capiatur ...

Beginning of October 1255, p. 227

At the end of May 1256 the King ordered an estimate of the houses of the Jews who had been hanged because of the alleged crucifixion of Hugh. At the same time he demanded the surrender of the accounts of the cyrographer, probably with the intention of collecting the debts still owed to Jewish creditors. The King had his officials determine who was enrolled in the school of one Peitevin, apparently a rabbi who had conducted a college for adults. "Peitevin the Great" is also mentioned in the Patent Rolls; here he is called the teacher of the Jewish *scola*. Peitevin fled before he was arrested, probably abroad. Jacobs assumes that the King's only intention was to find out who was responsible for the murder of Hugh.<sup>6</sup> Several sources, such as the Anglo-Norman ballad, identify Peitevin as the murderer.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> J. Jacobs, *Little St. Hugh of Lincoln: Researches in History, Archaeology and Legend* (London, 1894), 8.

<sup>7</sup> Francisque Michel, *Hughes de Lincoln: Recueil de ballades anglo-normandes et écossaises relatives au meurtre de cet enfant commis par les Juifs en MCCLV* (Paris, 1834), 1—16.



Thus we can only gather from the historical sources that a boy lost his life on August 1, 1255 in Lincoln and that the Jews were held responsible for the mysterious incident. Hugh was interred in the Minster of Lincoln. In 1791 the sarcophagus was opened. An artist named Grimm made drawings of the grave and the skeleton. The then Bishop Kaye willed the drawings to the British Museum.

## 2 *The Literary Versions*

### 2.1 *The Chronicles and the Anglo-Norman Ballad*

Popular ballads do not originate *ex nihilo*. They often spring from a certain historical event, or at least a historical person also documented in other sources, which therefore invite comparison. In the case of the ballads on Hugh of Lincoln, it has never been questioned that they refer to the tragic event which took place in Lincoln in 1255. It is also taken for granted that the historical nucleus was gradually abandoned in the course of oral and literary tradition. Woodall says<sup>8</sup>, however, that the ballad remained popular not because it deals with Jewish ritual murder, but because it is made up of sex and crime. It must be admitted that Woodall had a very good intuition as for the features and characteristics of the ballad of St. Hugh, but he based his analysis exclusively on ballad versions of the material and thus reached one-sided results. What is necessary is a comparison of the ballad versions with historical facts and their reflection in historiography. But even more important is the comparison with preceding literary traditions, as for instance, those of the fairy tales.

The chronicles present us with the first literary version of the legend. The relatively large number of chronicles (over 30) already indicates that great importance was attached to the matter. As far as the attitude toward reality or history is concerned, there are only differences of degree between the chronicles and the ballads. Even the reports of the chronicles contain supernatural elements or things that would today be regarded as legendary and fictitious. It is just this mixture of fact and fiction that makes a reading of the chronicle material a depressing task. On the one hand, we need not doubt for a second that what the chroniclers tell us about the imprisonment, punishment and plundering of the Jews is historical fact. On the other hand, no modern reader would be willing to take at face value the stories about the miracles connected with Hugh of Lincoln's body. This amalgam of tangible reality and crudest superstition is characteristic of the Hugh story even in the chronicles. There is scarcely ever a critical attitude towards improbable factors. Matthew Paris uses the word *deliramenta* for Copin's statements, and thus betrays doubts concerning the remarks of the main witness. We may therefore assume that Matthew Paris was not totally convinced of the validity of the accusations. But this attitude was by no means the rule.

<sup>8</sup> James Woodall, "'Sir Hugh': A Study in Balladry", *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, 19 (1955), 77—84.



More often than not, the chroniclers combine the crudest paradox with an unreflected matter-of-factness.

Matthew Paris' *Chronica Majora*<sup>9</sup> is contemporary and therefore generally regarded as authentic — Matthew died in 1259. The *Annals of Waverly*<sup>10</sup> also contain a contemporary report. The entries for the years 1219 to 1266 were made in the year of each item. The *Annals of Burton*<sup>11</sup> is particularly rich in detail. The manuscript is of the 14th century, but derives from a 13th century source. There are about 30 later chronicles with passages on Hugh's crucifixion, which, however, do not contribute new facts.

All the chronicle reports share the same basic facts. The victim of the murder is a schoolboy and the son of a poor woman. On the evening of the murder the mother searches for the lost child, but is only told that it was last seen entering the house of a Jew. She therefore turns to the King for help. Henry sets a date for a court inquiry. A Jew named Jopin is found guilty and hanged. 91 other Jews are arrested and brought to London. 18 of them are later dragged through the city streets and hanged.

As to its content, the Anglo-Norman ballad<sup>12</sup> belongs in the realm of the chronicles. It must have originated shortly after the event. By and large it conforms to the account of Matthew Paris, but adds details on the topography of Lincoln as well as personal names. From this it has been concluded that the author was an inhabitant of Lincoln. He names the Jew Peitevin as the murderer, and further relates that the Jews cut out Hugh's heart and ate it. He knows the name of the house of Hugh's parents (Desternal), and he reports with *gusto* the miracles which happened in connection with Hugh's death. The chronicle structure of the story is still recognizable, but it is already greatly embroidered with fictional elements.

## 2.2 Chaucer's Prioress's Tale

Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale*<sup>13</sup> represents a form of the legend different from that of the popular ballads; it neither derives from the Lincoln events nor from the chronicles or the popular ballads on Hugh. Chaucer's tale is rather a Miracle of St. Mary and thus belongs to a literary type which was extremely popular in Europe.<sup>14</sup> The legend tells about a boy who had a deep veneration for the Virgin Mary and very often sang a hymn in her praise. The Jews took offense

<sup>9</sup> *Chronica maiora*, 516—519.

<sup>10</sup> *Annales Monastici*, II, 346—348.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 340—348.

<sup>12</sup> Michel, *Hughes de Lincoln*, 1—16.

<sup>13</sup> Edition cited: F. W. Robinson, *Chaucer: The Prioress's Tale* (London, 1953); Malcolm Pittock (ed.), *The Prioress's Tale: The Wife of Bath's Tale* (Oxford, 1973). Cf. Sumner Ferris, "Chaucer at Lincoln (1394): The Prioress's Tale as a Political Poem", *Chaucer Review*, 15 (1981), 295—321. Ferris presents a theory largely based on speculation: the tale may have been composed and even publicly presented by Chaucer on the occasion of a visit to Lincoln by King Richard II and Queen Anne (March 26, 1387).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Carleton Brown, *A Study of the Miracle of Our Lady Told by Chaucer's Prioress* (London, 1910).



and resolved to kill him. They hired a murderer who cut the boy's throat. Then they hid the body. Mary brought the boy back to life and asked him to sing. This leads to the discovery of the crime, and the guilty are caught. The Jews are either converted or condemned to death.

This short summary of the plot proves that the *Prioress's Tale* belongs to a literary type distinct from the ballads. Details of the Lincoln tragedy were integrated into the story during the late 13th century. Chaucer's English version is therefore a contamination of the miracle story with the legend of Hugh of Lincoln. It is only marginally connected with the Hugh ballads, and can thus be passed over here.

### 2.3 The Popular Ballads

Ballad research is always in danger of resorting to evolutionary patterns of thinking, as for instance, the development of a given ballad from a reconstructed or postulated ideal type towards a debased form, such as the nursery rhyme. It has often been presumed that the development conforms to certain laws. But if there are such laws, they are contradictory and lead to completely different results. The main problem is, of course, that the variants of a ballad can rarely, if ever, be listed chronologically. Very often the oldest extant version is already a contamination, while recent re-creations of popular ballads are closer to the exemplary type, according to all criteria of what we call "balladness". Moreover, popular ballads always exist in a wide range of forms which can only rarely be traced genetically.<sup>15</sup>

In the case of the ballad of Hugh of Lincoln it can be shown that "continuity" and "insistence of type" are more decisive factors than variation. The texts belonging to this group can easily be recognized as such, while in the case of other popular ballads extremely different versions have nothing more to do with each other and can only be recognized as members of a certain group by means of interconnecting links.

Even in the case of Hugh of Lincoln there are many variants — scarcely two versions are identical in essential details. But in spite of alienation through new locales, names and motifs, there are always typical set pieces which remind us of the original story. Often they appear in a new context and without a logical or causal connection. There is evidently a specific logic of the ballad which is not compatible with that of everyday life. Thus the boy Hugh is often killed, and then he asks for mercy (Kyle, Davis, F. H.). Sometimes we read that Hugh is thrown into a well, and then he is killed with a pen-knife (Campbell-Sharp, No. 26).<sup>16</sup> Often a Bible is laid at his head, and a prayer-book at his feet, and then he is thrown into the well (Hudson, p. 116). Inconsistencies of this kind

<sup>15</sup> Cecil J. Sharp, *English Folk Song. Some Conclusions* (London, 1965), 40: "The individual, then, invents; the community selects."

<sup>16</sup> The throwing of Hugh into the well is a common ballad strophe that also occurs elsewhere; cf. "Love Henry", Stanza 8: "One took him by his long yellow hair, / Another by his feet. / They threw him into the cold well-water/which was both cold and deep" In: G. L. Kittredge, "Ballads and Songs", *JAF*, 30 (1917), 300.



are not due to a contamination of various versions, but must rather be explained by the symbolic meaning of the basic structures involved.

Nearly all the many versions of the ballad of Sir Hugh (most of all the American ones) take the ball game of the boys as their point of departure.<sup>17</sup> This is a typical ballad element and does not belong to the historical source material and the chronicle tradition. Matthew Paris says in the first sentence of his chapter on the events in Lincoln that the Jews had stolen an eight-year old boy and hidden him in a secret place.<sup>18</sup> All other chronicles, as well as the Anglo-Norman ballad, contain no mention of the ball game. In Chaucer's version the Jews hate the boy for singing hymns in praise of Mary.

However, the ball game does occur in numerous other ballads, as for instance "The Cruel Brother", "The Three Brothers", "Tam Lin", "Queen Eleanour's Confession", "Child Waters", "Bonny Baby Livingston", "The Bitter Withy", "Glenlogie", etc.<sup>19</sup> But the motif is not necessarily taken from another ballad. It appears in other very early popular narratives. Halliwell has preserved a tale of *Child Roland and the King of Elfland*.<sup>20</sup> Roland is a son of King Arthur. With his sisters and brothers he plays at ball in the merry town of Carlisle. Child Roland tosses the ball so mightily that "o'er the kirk he gar'd it flee" (p. 78). Roland's sister Burd Ellen searches for the ball, but does not return; she has been abducted by the King of Elfland. The two brothers go off in search of her. The elder one fails. Roland follows Merlin's instructions and frees his brother and sister.

It is very difficult to say how old the story is. But there is a clue as to the relative chronology. Roland finds his abducted sister Ellen in the castle of the Elfland King after having walked through a dark passage "which was dimly but pleasantly lighted by crystallized rock" (p. 71). In the banqueting hall Roland finds his frightened sister. But at once the King of Elfland storms into the room and shouts:

Fe, fi, fo, fum,  
I smell the blood of a Christian man. (p. 72)

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<sup>17</sup> The ball game represents a kind of homoerotic point of departure for a love involvement in several ballads; cf. Child 11, Version D, for one example:

There were three ladies playing at ball, [. . .]

There came a white knight, and he wooed them all.

In version E we even find the wall which plays such a great role in the folk ballad of Hugh of Lincoln:

There were three sisters plain at the ba, [. . .]

There cam a knicht and lookt over the wa' (Child I, 147).

<sup>18</sup> *Chronica maiora*, 516.

<sup>19</sup> Woodall, "Sir Hugh".

<sup>20</sup> James Orchard Halliwell, *Popular Rhymes and Nursery Tales of England* (London, 1849; rpt. 1970), 78 ff. On the text, see also: Katherine M. Briggs, *A Dictionary of British Folk-Tales in the English Language* (London, 1970), Part A, I: Folk Narratives, "Child Roland", 180—184, as well as "The Giant Killer", 266 ff.; H. W. Weber and R. Jamieson, *Illustrations of Northern Antiquities* (Edinburgh, 1814), 398. On the motifs, see Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (Copenhagen, 1957), V, 471, No. V 361: "Christian child killed to furnish blood for Jewish rite [Hugh of Lincoln]"; lists five titles.



This is, in my opinion, the source of Edgar's irrational quotation in *King Lear* III. 4. 186—88:

Child Roland to the dark tower came  
His word was still: Fie, foh, and fum,  
I smell the blood of a British man<sup>21</sup>

The point of departure in the Roland tale is very similar to that of the ballad. Children are playing ball in a town. The ball flies so far that it must be looked for. The searching child is led onto enchanted ground. In the case of the ballad this is the jewry. In contrast to the fairy tale the quest of the mother fails: Hugh has already been murdered. Thus it is likely, if not self-evident, that the point of departure of the ballad is not a Jewish ritual murder, but a fairy-tale situation. If you think of the "Frog Prince"<sup>22</sup>, the parallel of the ball game will immediately strike you. In this case it is a male prince tempting a girl, while in the Hugh ballad, a younger woman is the tempter. This is closer to the archetypal pattern of the initiation or seduction story, for since *Genesis* III, 6 it has been the woman who tries to seduce man. On the basis of this assumption all motifs so far generally connected with a Jewish murder can be explained as sexual symbols thinly disguised, or not at all.

Thus the ballad of Hugh of Lincoln is a symbolic story in Derek Brewer's<sup>23</sup> sense of this term. In the version<sup>24</sup> passed on to us by James Joyce this is made particularly clear. It says that the Jewish girl chops off Hugh's head:

She took a penknife out of her pocket  
And cut off his little head.<sup>25</sup>

The very same thing is done by the girl in the tale of the Frog Prince. Apparently the juxtaposition of sexual intercourse and decapitation is a very old folklore motif. Derek Brewer comments: "Sexual intercourse for a man is like having his head chopped off."<sup>26</sup> But there may also be unconscious associations with circumcision as well.

In most versions the children play a kind of football, in others handball, tennis, catchball or just ball. It is surprising that neither the season nor the weather seem suitable for such a pastime. In all the versions there is snow, rain, or mist — invariably in those localized in Scotland — not exactly the weather to play ball.

<sup>21</sup> Ed. Kenneth Muir, Arden Edition (London, 1972), III, iv. ll. 186—188, p. 120. Usually the two quotes are assumed to be of different origin. The lines on Roland are associated with the *Song of Roland* or related French songs, but even with Danish ballads (Cf. Halliwell); the couplet beginning with "fie, foh" is generally thought to refer to Jack the Giant-Killer. That the verse is spoken by Roland is an unintentional incongruity, 77.

<sup>22</sup> On the Frog Prince, see Mary Huse Eastman, *Index to Fairy Tales, Myths and Legends* (Boston, 2nd. ed. 1926), 164; supplementary volume (Boston, 1937), 139.

<sup>23</sup> Derek Brewer, *Symbolic Stories. Traditional Narratives of the Family Drama in English Literature* (Cambridge, 1980).

<sup>24</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses*, 810.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 810.

<sup>26</sup> Brewer, *Symbolic Stories*, 38.



But the weather conditions are not only part of the background, they have an important literary function, through their indication of the supernatural, of something threatening like the numinous or witchcraft. Thus rain and fog are sometimes omens of what is to come. Over Lincoln, Scotland, Mirrylandtown (= merry Lincoln) and London there is a threatening cloudy sky, and in the same way there is a kind of premonition of doom hanging over the ballad, expressed through symbols and objective correlatives.

The temptation scene has remained surprisingly constant in view of the complicated symbols involved. This is proof of the fact that the temptation scene has stood the test of community selection particularly well. The girl — in most cases the Jew's daughter — is in several versions clad in green, the colour of the fairy world and of magic.<sup>27</sup> The girl invites the reluctant boy into her house with nearly always the same allurements: an apple, golden ring and cherry: ("an apple as round as a ball", "a gay gold ring", "a cherry as red as blood", Hudson, p. 116). As these three things remain constant, we must assume that they were connected with certain associations. The apple has been the classic symbol of temptation since *Genesis*. The ring means the promise of love and marriage; the cherry, which is always compared with the colour of blood, stands for the threat of death, should the boy refuse to comply.

One would expect that individual versions — not too many though — would introduce variations into the system of allurements. (a fig, a finer thing, a cherry as red as blood; *Scarborough Ballad*: a red rose, apple, diamond ring, watch and chain, Davis C; golden watch, a chain, a diamond ring, Davis G; apple, peach, gold ring, Davis F; apple, gold ring, something so cherry red, Belden A; cherry red, gay gold ring (twice!) Belden C; apples (only) Sharp, B, D, E). In several versions the temptress knows the boy by name, in others she calls him her dear, pretty, sweet, her play-fellow, little lambkin or her sweet saluter. This is further evidence of the fact that the ballad does not deal with Jewish ritual murder. The central focus is temptation, initiation, love. The fact that the temptress is Jewish becomes more and more irrelevant.

This can be demonstrated particularly well by means of the younger American versions, whose singers did not understand hints connected with the murder in Lincoln, or with anti-Semitism. In Florida the Jewish girl became the jeweler's daughter (Morrison, 302), in the Ozarks the king's daughter (Randolph B). Newell heard a version near Central Park in New York which changed the Jew's daughter into the Duke's daughter (Newell, *Games*, No. 18, Brewster A). In the southern Highlands the girl becomes a gipsy (Henry, A, B), in Virginia a queen (Davis I) or simply a lady (Davis J). In the end the Jew's daughter is reduced to the personal pronoun "she" (Davis E).

The replacement of the Jewess by other persons, most of noble origin, has consequences for the plot and details. Thus everyone knows that you must not throw your ball into the garden of a queen. If you do, they will catch you by your collar and throw you out:

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Richard M. Dorson, *The British Folklorists* (London, 1968); on the colour green as characteristic of the fairies, see 146n.



And some they took him by the hair of his head  
And others by his feet . . . (Davis I)

In the ballad the consequences are more drastic: the boy is thrown into a ten-thousand-foot-deep well.

In the case of the royal garden it is evident that ball games are not allowed. As readers we practically visualize the NO TRESPASSING sign. In other versions it is not so easy to recognize why access to the place where the ball has fallen should be prohibited. In most cases it is the garden of the Jew, and this reflects the hatred of the Jewish minority or at least a prejudice against them. On a par with the Jews are the gipsies (Davis B), who were also despised and avoided as a fringe group. According to a ballad from Virginia the ball falls "in a general bound, where they were n't [sic] allowed to go" (Davis H). In a further version from Virginia the ball falls into the "union's yard, where no one was 'lowed to go" (Davis F). These are all rationalizations of passages which were no longer understood, and which, at the same time, teach us American *Landeskunde*.

Changes in tenor and atmosphere are even more pronounced when the boy meets an old acquaintance in the house where the murder is to take place. In Davis D it is "his own dear nurse", who is just in the kitchen plucking a hen. The boy begs for mercy, but she is adamant: "for I have minded you but when a babe." This is an indication that the attitude of the nurse towards her charge has changed — in the meantime she has another 'bone to pick with him'. Evidently in remembrance of his babyhood she feeds him with sugar and sweet, and then she sticks him like a sheep. Apparently from nowhere people appear and throw him into a deep well, though only a dry one, "where weary travellers sleep."

In addition to the nurse, the evil aunt often shows sadistic inclinations. In a version from Utah, the victim is no longer called Sir Hugh, but Little Saloo. Temptation, murder and collection of the blood in a silver bowl have disappeared. The murderess is the boy's aunt, "who held him in spite" — which is apparently a sufficient motive for murder. The aunt lives in Castle Hall, and promises him a ball, which leads the boy to enter. She then brings him into a cold, dark room where no one can hear him scream. There she places the pen-knife on his breast and the boy pleads that his (final) rest may not be disturbed. The aunt cuts through "thick and thin", until she reaches the heart. Then she wraps the boy in lead foil and throws him into a well (Hubbard-Robertson, p. 47).

An even more gruesome version was written down in Kentucky in 1955. Here the temptress is called "Lady Gay" and tempts him at first with apples. The boy declines with the words, "You'll make my red blood fly" (Stanza 3). Already in the next stanza she leads him into the hall, stabs him and collects the blood in a silver basin. Then she throws him into the well. It is only at this point that she gives herself away by calling out: "Farewell, my son Hewie! I only hope that you cannot swim, for then my shame would be exposed". In the evening all children come home punctually. Only Hewie's mother waits in vain. She picks up a birchen rod in order to punish him with it. At the well she asks, "Are you down there, my son?" And he answers: "Yes, dear Mother, with a knife in my heart".



He asks all his school comrades to beware of the water birch. His home, he says, is heaven, and that of his mother, hell.

This version is a re-creation of the old popular ballad (Child 155) and contains numerous traditional motifs. And yet the singer has composed a completely new, original ballad dealing with the murder of an illegitimate child by the unmarried mother, who thus tries to hide her shame and only pretends to search for her son.

But even this motif is far from altogether new. The version Sharp D can already be regarded as a predecessor. In this ballad a Jewish woman kills her son Hugh and looks for him in the well on the next day. Her little son "come swimming around" and begs to be taken out and buried decently. But his mother asks him to sink down, as he should, for "you are an injury to me and my kin."<sup>28</sup>

Of course, this could simply be explained as the attempt of the mother to conceal the murder. But this does not explain why the mother killed her own child. The Kentucky version offers a more coherent explanation, namely the freeing of the mother from the stigma of an illegitimate child.

Thus the modern motifs and conception of what is otherwise a traditional ballad can throw light on passages in very old versions of the same story which have presented difficulties. This is also true of a stanza in Motherwell's version:

O the broom, the bonny bonny broom  
The broom that makes full sore  
A woman's mercy is very little  
But a man's mercy is more<sup>29</sup>

The editor did not understand what "the broom that makes full sore" really meant. But already F. M. could tell him: "Let the editor ask any schoolboy, . . . and he will learn that the broom has been used for the purpose of flogging idle boys." According to this the word "broom" means something like rod. In some versions of the ballad the irate mother hides a rod under her apron in order to beat the tardy boy home (Sharp, B, C, F, Kentucky).

But such an interpretation makes the meaning of the ballad even more inexplicable. "The broom", namely, has nothing at all to do with a "rod". In ballad tradition, the groves of broom were familiar as a clandestine meeting place for lovers. In a completely different context, David Johnson remarks: ". . . the broom was a traditional place for illicit love-making in Scots folk songs."<sup>30</sup> Thus "the broom that makes full sore" refers to illicit love and its consequences. In the ballad of "The Broom of Cowdenknows",<sup>31</sup> which Child views as a further development, a nobleman comes upon a shepherdess milking her sheep. They make love and he leaves, after giving her three guineas. Later, when she becomes

<sup>28</sup> Francis C. Stamper and William Hugh Jansen, "'Water Birch': An American Variant of 'Hugh of Lincoln'", *JAF*, 71 (1958), 16—22.

<sup>29</sup> Michel, *Hughes de Lincoln*, 42—46.

<sup>30</sup> *Music and Society in Lowland Scotland in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1972), p. 135; cf. Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 5 vols (Boston, New York, London, 1882—1898; rpt. New York, 1965), IV, 198 ff.

<sup>31</sup> Child, *Ballads*, 217.



pregnant, he returns to marry her. Thus he shows far more mercy than the unwed mother of the later ballad of Sir Hugh, who murders her illegitimate child. In this way the younger Kentucky ballad provides a clue to the solution of interpretational puzzles in the far older version.

## 2.4 *Nursery Rhymes*

As compared to the chronicles, even the ballads are on their way towards a new target audience — or have already reached it.<sup>32</sup> Among them were also children who had not yet been addressed by the historiographers. There is much documentary evidence for the fact that children have known, appreciated, recited and transmitted ballads on Hugh of Lincoln.<sup>33</sup> Why such a subject matter as this should have held a special appeal for children has not yet been explained. This is part of the problem of the suitability of nursery rhymes for children, dealing as they do with murder and manslaughter, incest, adultery and so on.

The nursery rhymes centred on Hugh of Lincoln cannot be separated from the ballad versions. If 155 B ("The rain rins down through Mirry-Land toune") is legitimately called a children's version by its editor,<sup>34</sup> then a good number of the other versions must be so called. Many informants regard the texts they have collected as nursery rhymes. A student from Montgomery, Alabama, told the ballad collector, Alphonso C. Smith, that he had heard the song of the "Jew Lady" from his "negro mammy" on a plantation near Montgomery. Black people have often been mentioned as transmitters and performers of the ballad, for example by Newell. Black English has been traced in a number of versions. One example out of many is the "cooling board" as a resting place for corpses shortly before the funeral. Some melodies of the Hugh of Lincoln ballad have a rag-time syncopation, a technique typical of Black Music.

That Hugh of Lincoln was popular with school children, as collectors have testified (Newell, 18), is also evidenced by the mention of school utensils in several versions. According to Brewster C, Hugh wants to be buried with his school-books at his feet, according to Brydges (Michel, 47) with the addition of his catechism. In almost all the versions containing his last wishes, he asks for Bible and Prayer-book.

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<sup>32</sup> On the disseminators of the ballad of Sir Hugh, see Martha W. Beckwith, "The Jew's Garden", *JAF*, 64 (1951), 224—225.

<sup>33</sup> On alterations of the ballad when transmitted through children, see Foster B. Gresham, "The Jew's Daughter: An Example of Ballad Variation", *JAF*, 47 (1934), 358—361. Gresham investigates two versions of Sir Hugh, the one of a seven year-old child and the other of the child's aunt. There was only one further person involved in the transmission from aunt to child. All alterations in the ballad were traceable to the child; furthermore variations from the adult version were not ad hoc improvisations. They were stable and were repeated exactly in later recitations. Evidently two diametrically opposed types of variations are typical of children's versions: rationalisation of incomprehensible words or content-matter, on the one hand, and addition of nonsense verse lines to complete metrical patterns, on the other ("taught" instead of "tossed"; "they taught him the low high first"), 361.

<sup>34</sup> Child, *Ballads*, III, 244 ff.



In general the shorter versions can be regarded as nursery rhymes, above all those consisting of two stanzas. Halliwell maintains (P. R. 8 NT. 185) that they were very popular in the country nursery. They are good evidence that only those elements were preserved which were regarded as suitable for children by the performers. In particular the nurses had a special relationship to the Hugh ballad. This can be concluded from three versions in which a nurse or nurse's maid kills the child. In one version she says explicitly that she cared for Hugh only as long as he was a baby (Davis D). In Davis E temptress and murderess are not identical. To my ears the ballad sounds like the threat of a desperate nurse whose charge obstinately refuses to sleep. Today one would not recommend it as a song for children; but during the 19th century, threatening tales of the type "behave and sleep or the goblin will fetch you" were quite popular. The last two lines make good sense if read under these premises:

She threw him into a dusky well  
Were many have fallen asleep.

Only very seldom do we hear about conscious changes of the texts with the intention of making them acceptable for the nursery.

This is true of the Mississippi text (Hudson, 19). The informant classified the text as a nursery rhyme. Similar to the longer versions, the boy is tempted into the house of the Jew by the offer of an apple, golden ring and cherry. But the speaker is not named, and the typical reluctance of the boy to comply is also dropped. Instead with no transition we have the last words of the boy and the execution of his will. The Bible is laid at his head, and the Prayer-book at his feet. Then, however, even he is thrown into the deep well. The informant was asked by the collector whether something was missing here, and she answered indignantly, "Of course, there's something missing!" Her mother, she said, had always used the poem as a lullaby and therefore omitted the "bloody part". We can only agree with the editor when he says, "Still, it's a rather gruesome lullaby yet" (p. 116).

### 3 *Results: Tradition and Function of the Hugh Legend*

To sum up and conclude: What we know about the tragic death of Hugh of Lincoln from contemporary historical documents excludes the probability of a ritual murder. It is likely that the Jews of Lincoln had nothing to do with the accident or murder case. The stubborn persistence of the motif of the ritual murder over the centuries and over the national borders must have reasons other than historical facts. James Joyce, who presents us with an Irish version of Sir Hugh of Lincoln, has listed a set of criteria.<sup>35</sup> Stephen regards the ballad as a parable of human fate. Hugh challenges his fate once through carelessness, twice through premeditation. Fate appears in the person of the Jewish girl, who,

<sup>35</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses*, 808—810.



as an incarnation of Hope and Youth, allures him into a secret chamber, and kills him like a sacrificial animal. The host, however, ("secret infidel") meditates on evidence for and against ritual murder: "the incitation of the hierarchy, the superstition of the populace, the propagation of rumour in continued fraction of veridicity, the envy of opulence, the influence of retaliation, the sporadic reappearance of atavistic delinquency, the mitigating circumstances of fanaticism, hypnotic suggestion and somnambulism."<sup>36</sup>

The list of criteria is impressive and may well be verified by historical facts. My own conclusion is that all these incentives have played a role, but that there are opposing forces. Already the first chronicler calls Copin's statements *deliramenta*, thus casting doubt on the veracity of the crown witness. In the process of oral transmission nearly all anti-Semitic motifs disappear, most of all in America. Whether or not they belong to the original popular ballad will remain controversial. There are good reasons to assume that the first versions had nothing to do with ritual murder or with the opposition of Christians and Jews, but that they basically dealt with an initiation story. It must have been similar to the Frog Prince tale in respect to love and the introduction to its mysteries. Sexuality is expressed symbolically by means of aggression, cruelty, injury, murder and death, but always in a way that does not disguise the basic reference to the sexual act.

The introduction of details from the Hugh of Lincoln story is thus in all probability a secondary phenomenon. It is very difficult to say when the amalgamation took place. Events such as the discovery of the bones of the murdered little boy in Lincoln Minster could have been a catalyst. But it is more likely that the anti-Semitism of a part of the ballads and the localization in Lincoln is a kind of *euhemerist* contamination similar to the *Prioress's Tale*, which gave rise to associations with the Hugh of Lincoln story through the similarity of its subject matter. Most of these anti-Semitic details have disappeared in the course of oral tradition, because they were no longer understood.

More important, however, is the realization that literature, and in particular popular literature, is not merely a reflection of reality, but itself a maker of reality and a key to its interpretation. Literature has a forming influence on human hopes, wishes and fears. It shapes our spiritual and mental attitudes, as well as our concept of the world, but not least, our attitude towards our fellow-men.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 811.