

6 | Balladry and the meanings of melody

Early modern balladeers of all sorts knew the importance of an ear-tickling melody. In 1637, William Collingwood, a Cambridgeshire victualler, allegedly wrote the words for a promising ditty about 'all the noted Cuckoldes in Ickleton', but he was painfully aware that a mere text would not of itself guarantee success. Collingwood was heard to say 'that he could not say his prayers for thinking of it & that it grieved him he had not a good tune for it'. In Jacobean Nottingham, a group of libellers had enjoyed better creative fortunes, and the positive impact of their endeavours was revealed in the enthusiastic reaction of a local apothecary to a performance of one of their scurrilous masterpieces. Thomas Aldred laughed heartily 'in regard of the straungeness and concyted tune sett to it'. It was the melody, as much as the words, that amused him. Aldred's response would have pleased the editor of *The Rump*, a celebrated royalist song collection of 1660. He warned potential customers, 'If thou read these ballads (and not sing them), the poor ballads are undone.' This was strong language. Lazy or ignorant consumers had to be dissuaded from the negligent practice of overlooking the tunes. A song's melody, the editor insisted, was one of its integral features, and a tuneless ballad was scarcely a ballad at all.¹

The role of melody in shaping contemporary interpretations of ballads has often been neglected and sometimes purposefully denied by scholars. Ballad tunes, we have been told, were largely irrelevant because they bore 'no definite functional interrelation' with the all-important texts. Melody, it has been said, was 'merely a vehicle' for the words.² Several recent scholars, admittedly, have sounded rather more constructive, but even in their works we have not progressed far beyond a basic awareness of the musical identity of ballads and a partially developed sense of the ways in which a song's tune may have contributed to its impact.³ This chapter will argue that texts and tunes were connected in a constantly shifting

¹ EDR K/17/94, CUL; Sisson, *Lost Plays of Shakespeare's Age*, p. 199; *The Rump, or a Collection of Songs and Ballads* (London, 1660), preface.

² Würzbach, *The Rise of the English Street Ballad*, pp. 9, 16; Luckett, 'The Collection', p. xv.

³ Watt, *Cheap Print*, pp. 23, 329; Smith, *Acoustic World*, pp. 188, 191; Palmer, *Sound of History*; Dugaw, *Warrior Women*, pp. 48, 56; Collinson, *Birthpangs of Protestant England*, pp. 108–12;

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relationships, and that they should properly be understood together. Of course, the words were of fundamental importance, but melodies were capable of reinforcing, altering and destabilising textual messages in a compelling manner. A flexible system of thematic associations evolved as balladry developed, and, on occasion, the reputation of a tune was strong enough to convey a message even without the presence of words. In many more cases the essential mood of a tune refined or revised the probable impact of its accompanying words. Of course, the sparsity of source materials dealing with the actual reception of specific songs means that the exercise must be somewhat conjectural, but it seems to be worth the whistle. We have, I think, been missing something: melody made meaning.⁴

The associational thought-world of early modern people is of obvious importance here. We have already encountered evidence of the role played by 'resemblance' and 'correspondence' in the construction of knowledge during the period. Of course, this is a point that has been developed in more general terms by other scholars. The perception of resemblance, it has been argued, operated in such a way that a new cultural representation might 'reanimate a former one, and juxtapose itself to it'. Two different representations might appear even as 'quasi-likenesses', brought together by 'the insistent murmur of resemblance' and 'the perpetual possibility of imaginative recall'. Written texts, it has been noted, regularly presupposed an awareness of previous material, so that reading was as much about recognition as about discovery. Intertextuality was instinctive. Correspondence was a guiding principle within the cosmological interpretation of music, and there is little doubt that the imaginative worlds of many popular writers – John Taylor, for example – were made meaningful by conspicuously connective thought processes.⁵ In all these respects, we can hear clear links with balladry: in its constant recycling of tunes; in its many verbal and thematic formulae; and in the frequent interconnecting of different ballads through explicit and implicit cross-references. The role of resemblance began with the simplicity of rhyme, which, at its most basic level, has always operated by inviting listeners or readers to associate one word – and thus one object or concept – with

⁴ *From Oral and Literate Culture*, pp. 318–20. See also Bertrand Harris Bronson, *The Ballad as Story* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 37–8, 215.

⁵ Excellent comparisons can be made with the role of music in film, where it often serves to articulate emotions in the viewer-listener. Similarly, our behaviour in supermarkets can be influenced to a remarkable degree by the music that is played. On this, see North et al., 'In-store Music', 122.

⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970), pp. 67–71;

⁷ Jacques Chastrier, *The Order of Books*, trans. L. G. Cochrane (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994),

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another. Within early modern balladry, however, resemblance also performed on a grander stage, constantly connecting current tunes, themes, phrases and pictures with their previous incarnations. In this cultural environment, it seems inherently unlikely that the tune of a ballad was 'merely a vehicle' for its words. We should at least consider the possibility that there was, in the popular melodies of the period, a code of meanings and associations to which scholars have not so far devoted much attention.⁶

Of course, in seeking to explore the possibilities there is a danger of presenting them as clumsy, mechanical or implausible. Nothing sucks the humour from a joke or allusion so effectively as the effort of explaining it. On the other hand, some things come less easily to us than they did to our ancestors. We are, for one thing, saturated by musical sound, and it is arguable that this condition may tend to dull the intensity of our relationship with melody. In an age when music plays at the flick of a switch, in lifts and through telephones, people can even become consciously resistant. 'Greensleeves', hugely popular for nearly 500 years, has recently been voted the most irritating telephone 'hold tune' in England, and one listener – the editor of a website devoted to the management of stress – has reported an urge to 'smash the phone with a pick-axe' whenever he hears it.⁷ Furthermore, we no longer tend to think of pop tunes as mobile creatures that migrate constantly between different texts and carry meanings with them as they go. Nowadays, most tunes stick to their original texts, even if the songs that they form together are frequently replayed or reworked as 'cover versions'. Melodic migrations are not extinct, however, for they survive in several contexts, most notably within the raucous musical culture of the football crowd. English soccer fans frequently write new words to old tunes, and they feel the humour and excitement that are generated by the potentially unstable combination.⁸

Melody and mood

If we can indeed speak of a chain of associations between melodic and verbal themes in early modern balladry, then we should probably seek its

⁶ The courtly composers of the age also recycled one another's musical material with some regularity, and one wonders whether the significance of the practice has yet been fully understood. The subject is tackled in Ian Payne, 'Musical Borrowing in the Madrigals of John Ward and John Wilbye', *Consort* 64 (2008), 37–63.

⁷ *The Guardian* (2 July 2001).

⁸ During the 1990s, for example, Manchester City fans sang a song to the tune of an Oasis track, replacing the line 'You're my wonderwall' with the topical observation 'We've got Alan Ball' (referring to the club's new manager). Comparable examples can be heard every Saturday afternoon at all major football grounds.

origins in the ancient and enduring perception that different scale patterns (or modes) and the melodies based upon them expressed and stimulated different emotional moods. Consumers of modern mass culture in the west tend to perceive brisk tunes in major keys as cheerful, bright and lively, while slower melodies in minor keys are understood as sad or serious, though composers also enjoy plenty of scope for mixing and unsettling these perceptions through the skilful use of the various elements that make up melody: a slow song in a major key can, for example, sound to us like a poignant reminder of happiness lost. Early modern ears and brains clearly worked according to an evolving version of this essential interpretative scheme, though our understanding of past listening practices – particularly among the population at large – is complicated by several factors. In the first place, almost all early modern commentary on this subject came from the pens of highly educated and musically sophisticated authors whose opinions may not be a reliable guide to the operation of what Puttenham called ‘the popular ear.’⁹ Similarly, written versions of ballad tunes can be treated as only a rough (or perhaps smooth) guide to the melodies in their alehouse or marketplace forms. In particular, it is likely that courtly composers sometimes altered certain notes of the underlying scales in order to render the tunes more pleasing and flattering to aristocratic patrons (though they did not invariably do so). The early modern period witnessed a steady transition from modal music (in which tunes are organised around any one of several scale patterns) to predominantly tonal music (in which most melodies conform to one of only two scales, major and minor). This transition affected music-making on all levels, but the rate and extent of change must have varied with social status, geographical location and musical taste (in the early twentieth century, Cecil Sharp was pleased to find that modal melodic patterns survived in many of the tunes used by rural folk-singers). Unfortunately, it is impossible to be much more precise than this, but we must be aware that the altering of notes (especially the seventh of the scale) by early modern composers may have had a significant impact on both the sound and the mood of common melodies. Finally, we are limited by the extreme paucity of information concerning the tempo at which any particular tune was played. The same melody can, of course, generate subtly different moods at different speeds. This is a vital aspect of the subject, but we are almost invariably left guessing.

⁹ Puttenham, *Arte of English Poesie*, p. 84.

Having sounded these notes of caution, it is nevertheless possible to deduce certain underlying principles from contemporary writings and surviving melodies. Evidence of the slow march towards modern major-minor tonality is suggested by the apparent predominance among ballad tunes of two old modes in particular: the Dorian (similar, though by no means identical, to the now familiar minor scale) and the Ionian (the originator of our major scale).¹⁰ According to Charles Butler, 'the infinite multitude of Balads' was set to tunes in the Dorian mode, and his opinion is confirmed by the fact that the four most frequently cited melodies – 'Fortune my foe', 'Packington's pound', 'Chevy Chase' and 'O man in desperation' – all seem to have been in this mode. Butler described music in the Dorian mode as sober and slow, arguing that it moved hearers 'to sobriety, prudence, modesty, and godlines'. The ballad-writers evidently agreed, for few of them wrote light and jocular ballads to any of the tunes listed above (though there were exceptions). And when, in 1630, William Slatyer selected a group of 'common, but solemn tunes' for his experimental metrical psalms, he included several that were unquestionably Dorian. In contrast, Butler considered the Ionian mode more appropriate for songs that were delicate, romantic and effeminate. This mode stimulated 'honest mirth and delight, chiefly in feasting and other merriments'.¹¹ Again, the balladeers broadly concurred, and tunes such as 'Hey boys up go we' and 'The spinning wheel' were chosen most frequently for bouncy songs involving some combination of humour, love and sex. The link was an old one, for the Ionian scale had been styled *modus lascivicus* by medieval commentators as a result of its popularity among the continental troubadours. When ballad-writers of the seventeenth century sought to boost their sales by attaching adjectives to the titles of their chosen tunes, they tended to label Ionian or major melodies as 'pleasant', 'dainty', 'delightful' or even 'lofty'. These were melodies with the capacity to induce feelings of happiness.

Musical writers also identified other melodic characteristics that could be valuable in the expression and stimulation of emotion. Of course, they were rarely thinking of balladry, though one or two sophisticated analysts did make reference to broadside tunes within their general discussions of music. Butler admired such tunes, and there is therefore a case for considering balladry in relation to what he wrote about music and

¹⁰ On the modes, see above, p. 52 n. 51.

¹¹ Butler, *Principles of Musik*, pp. 1–2; William Slatyer, *Psalms, or Songs of Sion, Turned into the Language, and Set to the Tunes of a Strange Land* (London, 1630), subtitle. See below pp. 420–1.

emotion more broadly. Gravity and sadness, Butler advised, demanded music that was slow and plain, while harsh, short notes could be combined to suggest manliness and anger. Such qualities also required that the main notes of the chosen scale should remain unaltered, for tampering with these notes implied effeminacy and sorrow. Alexander Molleson, a later admirer of ballad music, further argued that each note of a scale was associated with a different spirit or quality: the keynote was bold and commanding (as was the fifth); the second and the sixth were plaintive; the third and the seventh were supplicative (and well known to the more musical of beggars); and the fourth was grave and solemn. Others suggested that particular combinations of notes (rising, falling, in sequence, out of sequence, chromatic and diatonic) could be useful in enhancing the sense of the words and in bringing out the appropriate emotions. Such complexities were, according to Molleson, 'easier to be felt than expressed', and simple ballad tunes, informed not by sophisticated analysis but by 'natural genius', were often far more potent in the conveyance of emotion than were the efforts of celebrated composers. He agreed with Butler that the emotional language of melody had always been 'understood by rich and poor alike, despite their radically different lifestyles.'¹²

Not all commentators felt so inclusive, and it is therefore difficult to know how energetically we should seek evidence of this complex musical vocabulary in the fast-moving commercial world of the broadside ballad. Many tunes, after all, were used over and over again, and they were not, therefore, carefully constructed in order to suit each specific text (if anything, the relationship was often the other way round). Nevertheless, it is at least worth considering Molleson's implied argument that balladeers understood by instinct the ways in which certain melodic characteristics could be deployed in order to bring new life to their texts and to produce appropriate emotional responses. 'Welladay', for example, was the tune named in 1601 on a ballad entitled *A Lamentable Dittie Composed upon the Death of Robert Lord Devereux Late Earle of Essex, who was beheaded in the Tower of London, upon Ashwednesday in the morning* (CD track 16 and Appendix). The subject matter was politically controversial, and the tune – known only from a later keyboard version – played its part in expressing the popular mood of regret at the execution of Elizabeth I's former favourite. In its later written version, some of the

¹² Butler, *Principles of Musik*, pp. 96–7; Molleson, *Melody, the Soul of Music*, pp. 5, 30–1. For a stimulating discussion of Renaissance 'word-painting' (the use of various musical devices to mirror and thus to enhance the emotional effect of poetic lines), see McColley, *Poetry and Music*, pp. 16–29.

leading notes have been sharpened, thus creating a more tonal feel, but it seems likely that the tune as commonly sung was in the Mixolydian mode (like the modern major scale, but with a flattened seventh). This mode was associated variously by theorists with angelical qualities, youth and the combination of joy and sadness. According to Agrippa, it was 'meete for Tragedies, and sorrowful things, and hath force to stirre up, to drawe backe, and to put awaie forever'. The Mixolydian mode was thus perfectly suited to a song that both celebrated the exemplary attributes of a hero whose life had been cut short and bemoaned his passing.¹³

The mood of the tune suggests that it must have been performed slowly, and the running quaver motifs would certainly have been difficult to sing at pace. The most striking of these motifs falls on the second line of each verse, accompanying the double repetition of the woeful expression 'welladay' (this seems to amount to a refrain, albeit one that is set within the stanza, rather than at its close):

Sweet England's pride is gone,
welladay, welladay,
Which makes her sigh and groan,
evermore still;
He did her fame advance,
In Ireland, Spain and France,
And by a sad mischance,
is from us tane.¹⁴

The second 'welladay' is sung to a descending run of quavers, strongly suggestive of a mournful sigh, and the three-note downward motif that accompanies the word 'groan' is similarly expressive. In this opening verse, the celebratory fifth and sixth lines are marked by an upward octave leap and a rather more optimistic musical phrase, before the last two lines carry us downward once more to rest on the final keynote. We do not know who composed this song, but it is clear that tune and text were carefully integrated. Moreover, the evident success of the ballad suggests that the composer's efforts were appreciated by the ballad audience. This was probably the song that, according to a German visitor, was being 'sung and played on musical instruments all over the country' in 1602. The song was performed 'even at the royal court', despite the fact

¹³ *Euing Collection of English Broadside Ballads*, no. 199 (a later copy); Agrippa, *Henric Cornelius Agrippa*, fo. 28r.

¹⁴ *Euing Collection of English Broadside Ballads*, no. 199.

that Essex's memory was officially 'condemned as that of a man having committed high treason'.¹⁵

'Fortune my foe' was a serious tune in the Dorian mode, and its capacity to reinforce and colour the words to which it was set can be clearly heard in *An Excellent Song wherein you shall Finde Great Consolation for a Troubled Mind* (CD track 17 and Appendix). This was an exceedingly successful composition, and the first four words of its opening verse swiftly became established as an alternative name for the tune:

Ayme not too hie in things above thy reach,
 Be not too foolish in thine own conceit,
 As thou hast wit and worldly wealth at will,
 So give him thanks that shall encrease it still.

The opening line of the melody, whether by coincidence or contrivance, provides its own commentary upon the words. 'Ayme not too hie' is sung to a sombre rising motif, while the phrase 'above thy reach' is set to a step-by-step descending figure, as if the contours of the tune are part of the advice. The second musical line repeats the first, and the words of both convey a stern warning to the listener. The mood of the tune lifts somewhat in its third and fourth lines, a subtle shift that is echoed in the more optimistic (and crudely economic) words. This is a pattern that is repeated in several other verses. Overall, however, a text that continuously juxtaposes sober injunctions and reassuring promises is tilted towards its darker side by this famously sombre melody. Few listeners can have emerged from an encounter with *An Excellent Song* in cheery and light-hearted mood. Its ABC format reinforces the impression that we are here receiving a sober moral lesson.¹⁶

Heavy tunes in the Dorian mode did not, however, enjoy a monopoly over godly balladry, and the regular use of Ionian (or major) tunes for religious songs is equally ear-catching. Popular theology and morality were not necessarily doomful and dreary in musical mood, and the potent influence of melody over the essential character of individual songs is once again apparent. Slatyer's 'common, but solemne tunes' included several that danced along quite happily in the Ionian mode. 'The lady's fall' is a particularly interesting example. Originally known as 'In peascod time', this tune was selected in 1603 for *A Lamentable Ballad Called The Ladye's*

¹⁵ Simpson, *British Broadside Ballad*, pp. 747–8; Fredric Gerschow, quoted by Smith, *Acoustic World*, p. 193.

¹⁶ Roxburghe ballads, C20F7–F10, vol. I, p. 326, BL.

Fall: Declaring how a young gentlewoman, through her too much trust, came to her end; and how her lover slew himself. It is not a happy story. The song was nevertheless reprinted many times, and its title rapidly displaced 'In peascod time' as an identifier of the tune. The instruction 'to the tune of The lady's fall' appeared on numerous ballads, typically woeful tales in which sinners receive their comeuppance at the hands of a harsh but fair God. To our ears, tune and text often seem curiously at odds, yet this was a combination that obviously worked well during the seventeenth century.¹⁷

The twinning of heavy texts and light notes is an intriguing indicator of popular tastes, and it suggests the existence of considerable modal flexibility in the deployment of tunes. A typical example is the ballad entitled *Miraculous Newes from the Cittie of Holdt in Germany, where there were three dead bodyes seene to rise out of their graves upon the twentieth day of September last 1616, with other strange things that hapned* (CD track 18 and Appendix). Its opening words are far from cheerful: 'The dreadfull day of doome drawes neere: / oh mortal man, repent.' Hereafter, the listener is treated to a detailed account of the many woes recently visited upon the sinful people of Holdt: wondrous thunder and lightning; 'dreadfull clamours' with no obvious source; 'ghostly shapes' rising from their graves to urge repentance; and a plague far worse than any the world has ever known. And through all this, the apparently jolly tune lilt easily along.

The effect is nowadays peculiar, and it seems possible that the key to understanding the juxtaposition of terrifying text and merry melody lies in commonplace theology. Sinners will be punished but the faithful and virtuous will enjoy eternal bliss. Arguably, the less than doomful tune serves as an optimistic reminder of God's love to his chosen people. The precise theological mechanics of God's choice were rarely spelled out in ballads, yet the prospect of joy for the just helps to explain why a sizeable minority of 'solemn tunes' were in the Ionian mode and characterised by rhythmic and melodic vitality. Such tunes suggest the hope amid the horror, and the perpetual promise of divine intervention and ultimate justice. Ballads like *Miraculous Newes*, when sounded to their tunes, were arguably more optimistic than a modern 'reading' of the bare text might reveal. Only in the closing verses of this song is the underlying tone of reassurance made more explicit:

¹⁷ *Shirburn Ballads*, p. 208; Simpson, *British Broadside Ballad*, pp. 368–71. There are thirteen ballads to this tune in the Pepys collection.

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To which most kinde and gracious god
 Let us our prayers make
 That all such threatning woes he may
 from this our countrey take,
 That we may never feele the wrath
 which hee on other layes,
 But still to walke, like christians true,
 uprightly in his wayes.

If English people repent and live well, then they will not suffer as the Germans have done. Verbally, this message is rather tacked on at the end of the song; musically, however, it has perhaps been present throughout. If the Ionian mode was associated with lightness and lewdness, then there were also songs that hijacked it in order to make the point that morality and misery were not inseparable bedfellows.¹⁸

On occasion, this complicated relationship between tune and text was inverted, and melodies in minor modes were attached to seemingly light-hearted words. In the 1620s, *A Merry New Catch of All Trades* was set ‘To the tune of The cleane Contrary way’ (CD track 19 and Appendix). The very title of the melody hints at its potentially transformative influence over the words. Previous scholars – working with their eyes rather than their ears – have found in this song a somewhat perplexing list of mainly urban occupations (see Figure 6.1). It opens with the line ‘All Trades are not alike in show’, and proceeds to name over fifty well-known jobs and social types. *A Merry New Catch*, we have been told, was perhaps the kind of song that was designed for children to sing in the nursery.¹⁹ This seemed a reasonable suggestion, given the apparently trite nature of the silent verse:

The Bricklayer high doth rise to flye,
 The Plummer oft doth melt,
 The Carpenter doth love his rule,
 And the Hatmaker loves his felt.

When the tune is called into play, however, the entire song takes on a rather different aspect. ‘The clean contrary way’, though in a minor mode, seems to invite a brisk and lively rendition. The melody is infectiously repetitive, and its solid grounding in the minor triad suggests a darker layer of secret signification that no bright and breezy tune could have

¹⁸ *Shirburn Ballads*, p. 76. The tunes ‘Rogerio’ and ‘Light of love’ appear to have sometimes operated in a similar manner.

¹⁹ Würzbach, *The Rise of the English Street Ballad*, pp. 207–8.

A merry newv catch of all I trades.
 219 To the tune of The cleane Contrary way.



ALL Trades are not alike in this,
 All Arts doe not agree;
 All Occupations gains are small,
 As here they all shall see.
 As here they all shall see.

The Courtier loves his servant bees,
 For hee more than he can answer,
 The Barber weighs with false scales,
 The Cuckold's turn'd a Spouster. The Cook, &c.

The Lawyer serves the Smith by clothes,
 The Barber beates his pen;
 The Water-carrier runs, cries tinks a tinks tinks,
 The Apothecary runs tan tan. The Smith: &c.

The Bricklayer high both side to side,
 The Plummer all both melt,
 The Carpenter both low his rule,
 And the Parliament loves his self. And the, &c.

The Weaver thumps his old wife mumps,
 The Barber goes (up) (up),
 The Barber pitches the Lawyer riches,
 The Farmer hops & y. The Farmer, &c.

The Carrier toyles, and deales in spiles,
 The Cocker liars by his part;
 The Chamberlaine cheates with musty meates,
 And both the Country flacc. And both, &c.

The Carter whips the Beggar ships,
 The Beadle liars by his nose,
 Yet whipses will be whipses at honest mens noses
 Displeas't a'th Beadles nose. Displeas't a'th, &c.

The Whore-man cries, myd servants buyes,
 And hangs with him for mares,
 The Country all both to the Coast,
 Sell Dickers full of p'cars. Sell, &c.

Some School maisters teach beyond their reach,
 The Whaler deales with his square,
 The Fletcher both neck, and woyles by the deck,
 The Weaver liars by his Beare. The, &c.

The Crookers pat's 'bout things of weight,
 He often troubles so,
 The Layes part is seldom made,
 Tho't measure many a scape,
 Tho't measure many a scape.

Figure 6.1. Ballad texts often contained meaningful possibilities that are difficult to detect today. In this case, the picture is perhaps a clue to the bawdy undertones that many early modern listeners would have detected. The Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge, Pepys Ballads, *A Merry New Catch of All Trades* (London, c. 1620), first part.

conveyed. The ballad, when sung as a round, also communicates the clamour of urban life, with its constantly competitive jostling for space and attention. It is an intensely masculine ballad, featuring only three female types (maidservants, whores and scolds). In performance,

moreover, it becomes ever more clear that the song is a semi-coded assemblage of bawdy innuendo. The carpenter's rule is not what it seems, and 'felt' is suddenly a verb rather than a noun when sung in association with the hatmaker (who 'loves his felt'). Other seemingly innocuous announcements also take on new meaning: the tinker 'beats his pan'; 'The Butcher prickes'; 'The Farmer stops a gap'; 'The Cobler lives by his peece'; and 'The Taylors yard is seldome marde, / Tho it measure many a score.' The tune title now emerges as a signal to us that we are to hear the first line, as it were, backwards, in 'the clean contrary way'. Indeed, this phrase was commonly deployed by seventeenth-century speakers in order to reverse the import of a preceding statement. 'All Trades are not alike' because we all have different jobs and equipment, yet at a deeper level the chief occupation of each and every one of us, from the courtier to the collier, is sexual gratification. One tool is much like another, and fornication makes the world go round. Is this really one for the nursery? The tune, moreover, had previously been attached to a well-known bawdy song about the cuckolding of an old man by his young wife. It therefore had something of a reputation before the publication of *A Merry New Catch*, and it is to the general operation of melodic associations that we shall now turn.²⁰

Meaning by association

In many cases, the moods of melodies led them to develop meaningful connections with successive texts of corresponding temper. Tunes gathered distinctive associations, thereby acquiring an enhanced capacity to amplify the messages conveyed by the words. In such cases, tunes and texts existed in mutually fulfilling relationships that frequently endured for decades. The melody, often chosen again and again for songs on similar subjects, added new momentum and depth to the meanings of a text and linked it with all the ballads for which it had previously been appointed. The human brain is particularly adept at processing music that it recognises, and we can assume that the sound of a familiar tune drifting across a seventeenth-century marketplace must have activated what modern psychologists call 'superordinate knowledge structures' among those who heard it.²¹ Prior associations would have found their way uninvited into

²⁰ *Pepys Ballads*, vol. I, pp. 164–5; Simpson, *British Broadside Ballad*, p. 109. The tune was also used to subvert the tone of a text in a politically controversial court case of the 1620s. This is analysed in Alastair Bellany's fascinating essay 'Singing Libel in Early Stuart England: The Case of the Staines Fiddlers, 1627', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly* 69.1 (2006), 177–93.

²¹ North et al., 'In-store Music', 132.

the mind, and the listener's attitude to the song would have been conditioned by his or her previous knowledge of the tune. Different listeners would thus have heard different things, depending on the nature and depth of their acquaintance with the melody in question. From the composer's perspective, the melody was also a marketing device that attracted potential customers with a preference for songs on that particular theme. Indeed, it must frequently have been the tune rather than the text that first caught the attention of potential buyers. At a distance, a well-known melody could be identified well before the precise words of a song became audible, and tunes were thus vital indicators of probable content. In some cases, however, composers seem to have worked against the associations of a chosen tune, thus setting up complex interpretative possibilities that existed beyond the text. It is generally impossible to determine whether such possibilities were generated by accident or design, and any judgements we make on this thorny issue are necessarily tentative.²²

Ballads in which the chosen melody worked by association to identify and amplify the primary theme of a text are extremely numerous. 'Fortune my foe' (or 'Aim not too high') once again provides an impressive example. It first attracted significant attention in the Elizabethan period as the tune for a rather sober love song, but its strongest connections in the next 200 years were with weighty moralising and sensational warnings. One typical example was a ballad with the following catchy title:

*A Wonderfull Wonder, being a most strange and true relation of the resolute life, and miserable death of Thomas Miles, who did forswear himselfe, and wished that God might shew some heavie example upon him, and so it came to passe for as hee sate at his meate hee choked himselfe, and died in short space after . . . , and being ript up by the chirurgions of S. Bartholomews Hospitall, was found to have a gub of meate sticking fast in his throat, which was the cause of his death. Written to warne all rash swearers to forsake their evill wayes, which God grant we may*²³

'Fortune' also forged a particular connection with execution ballads and the 'last dying speeches' of the condemned, songs in which listeners were urged repeatedly and relentlessly to learn vital lessons from the lips of the doomed. Take, for example, *The Godly End, and Wofull Lamentation of one John Stevens* (CD track 20 and Appendix). In this song, the condemned

²² There is a stimulating theoretical discussion of some of these possibilities in the introduction to Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh (eds.), *Western Music and its Others: Difference, Representation and Appropriation in Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 1–46.

²³ Roxburghe ballads, C20F7–F10, vol. I, pp. 482–3, BL.

man addresses members of the audience directly, urging them all to fear God and live well (particularly in the matter of 'governing their tongues'). The message is made memorable by graphic details of this repentant traitor's judicial sentence:

My body must in quarters eke be cut,
 And on the City gates they should be put,
 To be a sight for others to take heed,
 Where ravenous Fowles upon my flesh will feed.

The last of these memorable lines also provides the inspiration for the accompanying woodcut picture, in which four ravens peck hungrily at the displayed limbs of the departed youth.²⁴ When such a ballad was performed before early modern audiences, it was much more than a sensational song to a melody of sombre mood. It was also a musical link with all those who, in previous decades and centuries, had paid the price for their sins. This gave the 'dying speech' ballads a rooted and universal quality that contemporary listeners evidently found difficult to resist. Samuel Pepys collected ten execution ballads set to this hit tune of the gallows.²⁵

The melody's association with hanging also added expressive force when it was recommended for ballads of more mundane moral instruction. 'Fortune' provided the tune for many such songs, typically aimed at the young. It brought to its texts a stern and threatening reminder of what became of the dissolute. Nobody dies in *The Virgins ABC*, but the rope nevertheless seems to hang ominously over the heads of the youthful women at whom the ballad is aimed. A piece of clumsy patriarchal moralising is transformed by the tune into something with dark and intimidating undertones. It opens,

All youthful Virgins,
 to this song give ear,
 And learn these lessons,
 which are taught you here:
 An Alphabet of Vertues,
 here are set,
 And being learn'd
 will make a Maid compleat.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 490–1.

²⁵ *Pepys Ballads*, vol. I, pp. 124, 126, 130, vol. II, pp. 153, 154, 169, 170, 196, 200, 204. For comparison, CD track 7 is an arrangement of the melody for lute.

There follows a weighty and uncompromising statement of the standards by which young women are expected to conduct themselves. The melody seems to hint at the dire consequences that await any maiden who allows scorn, pride, vanity, wantonness or lust to consume her (other songs to the tune described the execution of specific women who had succumbed to such vices). The tone of *The Virgins ABC* is overwhelmingly negative, and the words 'not', 'never', 'no' and 'nor' are heard on twenty-two occasions.²⁶

Many other tunes accumulated strong and lasting associations in a comparable manner. Robin Hood had his own melody, specified over and over again on closely interrelated narrative ballads about his adventures (there were separate ballads with titles such as *Robin Hood and the Tanner*, pairing the hero variously with a tanner, a ranger, a stranger, a bishop, a beggar and a butcher, all to the same tune). The slow tones of 'O man in desperation' suggested the urgency of repentance and the imminence of divine punishment for those who failed to heed the call. 'Queen Dido', famously selected by Deloney for his song about the Marian exile of the Duchess of Suffolk, came to be associated during the seventeenth century with some combination of virtue, gentility and enforced travel. These connections were all called into play, for example, in a post-Restoration ballad about the escape of Charles II following the Battle of Worcester in 1651. From the 1680s, 'Russell's farewell' came to rival 'Fortune' as a tune heard at and associated with executions. Pepys collected thirty-eight ballads set to this tune, the vast majority of which reported or dramatised the public deaths of criminals and traitors. Several seventeenth-century tunes were associated particularly with politics, most frequently of the royalist or Tory variety. When listeners in the later seventeenth century heard songs set to 'When the king enjoys his own again', 'Hey boys up go we' and 'Lilliburlero' they must have known what to expect, even before they considered the words. Throughout the period, there were also numerous tunes that spoke primarily of courtship and marriage. Interestingly, individual melodies might feature with equal prominence in joyous and sorrowful love songs. Listeners needed the texts to spell out the precise details, but songs set to 'Under and over', 'Bonny sweet Robin' and

²⁶ *Pepys Ballads*, vol. I, pp. 500–1. The tune is here called 'The young mans ABC'. This appears to be one of several alternative names for 'Fortune' or 'Aim not too high'. A ballad entitled *The Young Mans ABC* was definitely set to 'Aim not too high' (*Pepys Ballads*, vol. I, pp. 508–9) and, as was customary, an old tune picked up a new title – but not, in this case, one that was destined to last.

'The spinning wheel' could be connected with the general subject of romance, before a single word was heard.²⁷

Composers sometimes recommended two or more alternative tunes for the singing of particular songs. This tactic became more common in the later seventeenth century and presumably reflected a desire to maximise the market by ensuring that a high proportion of potential buyers could call up from their memories a suitable tune. One ballad was set

To a dainty new note, Which if you cannot hit
There's another tune which doth as well fit,
That's the Mother beguiles the Daughter.²⁸

Double or multiple citations opened up the possibility that a single text might carry divergent meanings, depending on the musical choice made by the singer. In most instances, the prior associations of the recommended tunes were broadly comparable, and the subtle distinctions that may have existed between them are probably beyond our acoustic range. In other cases, however, the differences were a little more obvious, and a single song could take on a variety of identities. In 1696, for example, *The Successful Commander* was designed for singing 'To the Tune of, Let Caesar live long; or, If Love's a sweet Passion'. This ballad celebrated the action of the Earl of Athlone in burning the French magazine at Givet after hearing of Sir George Barclay's plot to assassinate King William in 1696. 'Let Caesar live long' was a bright, major melody, strongly associated with attachment to Charles II and, later, to William III. When used as the setting for *The Successful Commander*, it helps to create a mood of patriotic self-confidence, militaristic triumphalism and upbeat masculinity, while also ensuring that the king, though mentioned only sparingly in the text, nevertheless maintains a constant presence in the listener's mind (CD track 21 and Appendix).²⁹

The second tune, 'If love's a sweet passion', sets a rather different tone (CD track 22 and Appendix). It was only six years old, having appeared first in Purcell's *The Fairy Queen*, but it was already a big hit on the broadside circuit. Its minor key and somewhat restless modulations combined with its origins to generate associations that were much more plaintive than those of 'Let Caesar live long'. This was primarily a romantic melody, well experienced in the task of enlisting sympathy for characters

²⁷ References to these tunes, too numerous to list here, can be traced via the indexes to the *Pepys Ballads* and Simpson's *British Broadside Ballad*.

²⁸ *Pepys Ballads*, vol. I, p. 268. ²⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 340.

as they struggled with the turbulent bitter-sweet emotions of love (the opening lines in the original song asked 'If love's a sweet passion, why does it torment?'). In 1695, it had also been specified for a ballad lamenting the death of Queen Mary and expressing popular support for the grieving king.³⁰ When applied to *The Successful Commander* it therefore contributes to the text a mood of love and sympathy, more resonant of relief than of euphoria. To some degree, this seems to undercut the predominantly bold and celebratory tone of the words by adding more than a *frisson* of anxious concern for the constantly endangered monarch. The tune alters the balance between delight and danger, and the reference to 'that horrible thing, / Which had been contriv'd against William our King' seems to take on a new emotional prominence. In contrast, when the same words are sung to the brasher measures of 'Let Caesar live long' they hardly seem central. *The Successful Commander*, therefore, is one text but two songs.

This was by no means the only ballad in which the prior associations of a tune seemed to draw attention to one particular aspect of the text rather than to its general and predominant themes. A broadside of 1603 entitled *A New Song to the Great Comfort and Rejoycing of all True English Harts, at our most gracious King JAMES his proclamation* was set, rather remarkably, to a tune called 'Englands pride is gone'. This was another name for the well-known melody 'Welladay', most famous as the setting for the song of 1601 that lamented the execution of the Earl of Essex. In the new ballad, therefore, musical phrases that were loaded with grief were tied to joyous words of welcome for the incoming Scottish king (the tune, set to the original words, can be heard on track 16 of the CD). The earlier opening verse, quoted above, was replaced by something entirely different:

Sweet England Rejoyce and sing,
 Lovingly: lovingly:
 God hath sent us now a King,
 Praised be him.
 Of King HENRIES Linage is he
 Princely borne by degree.
 A braver Prince cannot be,
 then [than] is Noble King James.

In 1603, the tune's associations with mournful eulogy were so strong that it must have been all but impossible to sing this verse without thoughts of

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 373. On the two tunes, see also Simpson, *British Broadside Ballad*, pp. 359–61, 434–7.

its predecessor. The old text haunts the new and suggests that the ballad was as much a lament for the dead monarch as a celebration of the new one. The composer's choice of tune thus reflected rather beautifully the mixed sensations of continuity and change that inevitably attended the passing of a monarch.³¹

Similarly, a white-letter ballad of 1646, *The World is Turned Upside Down*, seems a curious creation when it is read without its tune. It is full of depressed royalist commentary on recent measures taken by parliamentary authority against various forms of traditional culture, including holy days, charity and festive hospitality. Each verse, however, also features a refrain that opens with the seemingly incongruous injunction, 'Yet let's be content'. The final stanza is a representative example:

To conclude, I'll tell you news that's right,
 Christmas was kil'd at Nasbie fight:
 Charity was slain at that same time,
 Jack Tell troth too, a friend of mine,
 Likewise then did die,
 Rost beef and shred pie,
 Pig, Goose and Capon no quarter found.
 Yet let's be content, and the times lament,
 You see the world is quite turn'd round.³²

The optimism of a single phrase in the penultimate line seems strangely isolated and inconsistent in the midst of so many regrets for a lost world. When the ballad's tune is added to the mix, however, this brief call for contentment becomes suddenly more comprehensible. The ballad was set 'To the Tune of, When the King enjoys his own again' and it is under the influence of this hit royalist melody that it must be considered. It had apparently been composed specially in the mid-1640s, probably by Martin Parker, for a ballad entitled *The King Enjoyes his Own Again* which was 'To be joyfully sung with its own proper tune'. It is a wonderful melody, and it retains the power to convey – in conjunction with its original words – a powerful sense of optimism in desperate times (**CD track 23 and Appendix**). By all accounts, it became the royalist anthem *par excellence* during the profoundly discordant decades of the mid-seventeenth century. From a war-torn perspective around 1644, the author boldly prophesied the eventual restoration of royal order to England, and each

³¹ *A New Song to the Great Comfort and Rejoycing of All True English Harts* (London, 1603).

³² *The World is Turned Upside Down* (London, 1646).

verse concluded with an uplifting refrain, 'when the King comes home in peace again'.³³ The song's instant vogue meant that by 1646 its tune conveyed to royalists a sense of optimistic anticipation, both by sound and by association. It was thus a vital component of the more verbally perplexing ballad *The World is Turned Upside Down*, and capable of conveying positive predictions and messages of reassurance, despite the predominant pessimism of the words. In association with the tune, the words 'Yet let's be content' become a crucial and central component of the song, rather than a strangely inconsistent inclusion.

A similar analysis could be applied to many other songs. In *All is Ours and Our Husbands*, a broadside of about 1672, a 'hostess' defends herself and others of her occupation against charges of cheating, over-charging and stealing. The sexual dimension of their profiteering activities is mentioned only briefly, yet the famously phallic tune – 'The carman's whistle' – ensures the centrality of bawdry in the listener's imagination. The original ballad set to this tune was Elizabethan and had been slammed by Henry Chettle in 1592 as a piece of 'odious and lascivious ribauldrie'. It had clearly retained these associations through the intervening decades, and it therefore contributed significantly to the rude mood of *All is Ours*.³⁴ During the 1680s, the tune to which *The Westminster Lovers* was sung had a rather gloomier impact upon its verses. At first sight, the text looks like a conventional courtship dialogue between two young lovers, Thomas and Isabella. If it had been set to a bright love tune, listeners would surely have anticipated a happy outcome, with the partners eventually settling their differences and joining together in wedlock. The melody, however, tells a different story. Unusually, the composer set this text to 'Russell's farewell', the tune associated with condemned political traitors preparing to be hanged. It thus warns us, right from the outset, that nothing good will come of this particular love affair. Sure enough, Thomas and Isabella are so tormented by their imprudent passion that they die in anguish, one after the other. This moment comes as something of a shock if the text is read alone, but with the grim associations of the tune, it becomes the inevitable outcome of a doomed passion. One of the accompanying pictures portrays Cupid flying through the clouds, his bow and arrow at the ready. In this instance, however, he brings no joy, but rather

³³ Roxburghe ballads, C20F7–F10, vol. III, p. 256, B1; Simpson, *British Broadside Ballads*, pp. 764–8. See also below, pp. 322–3.

³⁴ *All is Ours and Our Husbands* (London, c. 1672); Chettle, quoted by Simpson, *British Broadside Ballad*, p. 86.

stands in for the executioner who was a more familiar figure in ballads set to 'Russell's farewell'.³⁵

In songs such as this, the existing resonances of a melody were not only called upon, but simultaneously redirected in some more or less subtle way. Elizabethan puritans went through a phase of attempting to kidnap popular melodies in their efforts to popularise Protestantism.³⁶ In the decades before 1580, the presses regularly issued godly ballads that 'moralised' existing songs, typically retaining the tunes but rewriting the words. The objective was clearly to overwhelm the existing associations of successful melodies by substituting more spiritual possibilities. Few of the resultant godly ballads have survived, but the Stationers' Registers bear regular witness to their existence. *O Swete Olyver* was followed swiftly by *O Sweete Olyver Altered to the Scriptures*, while *Row Well ye Mariners* generated a string of pious parodies: *Roo Well ye Marynors Moralyzed*, *Stande Faste ye Maryners*, *Row Well ye Christes Maryners*, *Rowe Well Godes Marynours* and the more mysterious *Rowe Well ye Marynours for those that Loke Bygge*.³⁷ In most cases, it seems that the prior associations of the tune were amatory, and that the godly balladeers made it their business to redefine love as primarily a bond between God and humanity rather than between man and woman. Thus the author of *The Sinner, Dispisinge the World and All Earthly Vanities* chose the tune 'Dainty, come thow to me', taking care to replace the original refrain with a new one, 'Jesu, come thow to mee'.³⁸ In 1567, a Scottish publication, *A Compendious Book of Godly and Spiritual Songs*, contained a number of texts apparently intended for worldly tunes. Listeners who were already familiar with the love tune 'John, come kiss me now' would probably have recognised the opening verse of one song, which seems to have been lifted wholesale from the existing secular version:

John, cum kis me now,
 Johne, cum kis me now,
 Johne, cum kis me by and by,
 And mak no moir adow.

³⁵ Roxburghe ballads, C20F7-F10, vol. II, p. 510, BL.

³⁶ This project can be related to the use of *contrafacta* by Protestant evangelicals on the continent. See, for example, the discussion in Rebecca Wagner Oettinger, *Music as Propaganda in the German Reformation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), ch. 4.

³⁷ Rollins, *An Analytical Index to the Ballad-entries*, pp. 172-3, 201. See also Collinson, *Birthpangs of Protestant England*, pp. 109-10, and Simpson, *British Broadside Ballad*, pp. 269, 618.

³⁸ *Shirburn Ballads*, p. 84. This tune has not been traced.

The second verse, however, bore little relation to the lascivious original, and must have come as something of a surprise:

The Lord, thy God, I am,
That Johne dois the call,
Johne representit man
Be [by] grace celestiall.³⁹

It was perhaps not surprising that such efforts failed to produce the desired results, and that puritans abandoned their tuneful tactic of thematic re-programming during the early 1580s. Their labours were not wholly in vain, however, for the lively tune 'Row well, ye mariners' held on to its new pious associations even after puritanism had left it behind.⁴⁰

The technique of redirecting melodic associations did not die with the enthusiasm of the puritans. Instead, it was adopted and adapted by other ballad-writers.⁴¹ The tune 'I'll never love thee more' was, for example, named on a ballad by Thomas Jordan entitled [A] *Dialogue betwixt Tom and Dick, the Former a Countryman, the Other a citizen. Presented to his Excellency and the Council of State, at Drapers Hall in London, March 28, 1660* (CD track 24 and Appendix). This unusually firm evidence of an actual rendition was confirmed by Thomas Rugg, who referred in his journal to the lavish festivities staged by various London companies in honour of General George Monck after his arrival from Scotland in January 1660. The hero of the hour was treated to 'many pretty anticks, some the cittizan and the soldier, other the country Tom and citty Dick'.⁴² Monck presumably sat through at least one performance of this ballad, and one wonders what he made of the chosen tune. 'I'll never love thee more' was associated most strongly with love, courtship and marriage. Most obviously, it therefore added romantic and faintly homo-erotic undertones to a ballad in which two men, Tom and Dick, declare their adulation for the heroic general. Monck is described as a 'bonny lad', a 'gallant man' and a 'good fellow'. He has saved the nation from further civil war and economic plight. Understandably, the countryman and the citizen are united in their love for him, and each verse ends with some variation on the lines 'If GEORGE prove not a Gallant man, / Ne're trust Good-fellow more.'

³⁹ *A Compendious Book of Godly and Spiritual Songs*, ed. A. F. Mitchell (Edinburgh, 1897), p. 158.

⁴⁰ Simpson, *British Broadside Ballad*, p. 619.

⁴¹ Ethnomusicologists have also encountered it in non-western cultures. See, for example, Wade, *Thinking Musically*, p. 14.

⁴² *Diurnal of Thomas Rugg*, p. 71.

This tune, however, brought with it a spirit of romance that was far from simple. Earlier ballads using the melody had tended to emphasise some of the more problematic aspects of love. In one, a hen-pecked husband bitterly regrets his marriage and wishes 'Anything for a quiet life'. In several others, the tensions and suspicions that attend upon courtship are amply revealed. And in the ballad that gave the tune its title, a man threatens to imprison his sweetheart in a doorless marble cell in order to ensure that she remains faithful to him. Any sign of infidelity on her part will be matched by his hostility. 'I'll never Love thee more', he warns her at the conclusion of every verse.⁴³ The Restoration *Dialogue betwixt Tom and Dick* therefore carried the potential for a somewhat sharper interpretation in which the attitude of the English people towards the powerful general combined grateful adoration with a whispered suggestion of suspicion. Undeniably, Monck is praised to the skies, but the ballad's repetitive refrains also remind him of the need to fulfil his side of the bargain: 'But if GEORGE does not do the knack / Ne're trust good-fellow more'; 'And yet if GEORGE don't humme his Gigge / Ne're trust good-fellow more'; 'Yet – if GEORGE don't what we desire / Ne're trust good-fellow more'. These refrains represent a series of references – both verbal and musical – to the earlier ballad, and they suggest the possibility of an almost contractual arrangement in which Tom and Dick will love George, but only while he continues to satisfy their needs. At the date of the Drapers' performance, the political future was uncertain, but everybody recognised that Monck's military power and his role as an intermediary between parliament and the king made him a key player. Influential voices within the city of London had come to support the idea of restoring the monarchy, and they therefore sought to convince Monck of their argument. The *Dialogue betwixt Tom and Dick*, with its heavy emphasis upon recent economic hardships, can be heard as part of this effort. Thus the song, though primarily celebratory, also voiced a warning that was alluded to in words but amplified by melody. The tune's romantic associations were applied to a political relationship and deployed both to express devotion and to urge reciprocation. This was not an unconditional love.⁴⁴

Two decades later, another composer set *The True Lovers Conquest* to the tune of 'Hark! The thundring cannons rore'. This recently composed

⁴³ *Pepys Ballads*, vol. I, pp. 378–9 (for a comparable example, see also vol. I, pp. 280–1), vol. III, p. 266, pt. 2; Simpson, *British Broadside Ballad*, p. 356.

⁴⁴ *Dialogue betwixt Tom and Dick* (London, 1660).

melody was strongly associated with ballads celebrating the King of Poland's heroic success in breaking the Turkish siege of Vienna in 1683. The original song mocked the Turks for their capitulation, attributing it in part to their coffee-drinking habits. In the wake of this song, other ballad-writers took up the tune, generally preserving its associations with political conflict and victory. The author of *The True Lovers Conquest* was clearly well aware of the tune's significance, and decided to appropriate it in order to bring new life and laughter to his account of a romantic tussle between a maiden and her suitor. He fashioned a musical dialogue that concluded – predictably enough – with the young woman's abject surrender:

Methinks my heart begins to yield,
 I can myself no longer shield,
 O youth, thou now hast won the field,
 come then and use thy pleasure:
 I can no longer thee withstand,
 But wholly am at thy command,
 Here's my heart, and here's my hand,
 thou art my only treasure.⁴⁵

It is obvious that the militaristic melody must have added depth and delight to such a verse, at least in the minds of ardent young men.

In particularly successful cases, a tune might develop a new and lasting association to rival or reinvigorate its previous attachments. This made possible a creative counterpoint between different themes that was implied by the tune rather than articulated explicitly in the text. Many melodies acquired twin-track associations in this manner. 'Dulcina' was associated, from the early seventeenth century onwards, with ballads that were either romantic or religious. It was one of Slatyer's 'solemne tunes', yet it was also chosen by Martin Parker for a ballad offering courtship advice to young men: *A Proverbe Old, yet Nere Forgot, Tis Good to Strike while the Irons Hott*. Romance was clearly the tune's dominant theme, and it seems likely that its associations with love added a certain romantic warmth to *Two Pleasant Ditties, One of the Birth, the Other of the Passion of Christ*. Indeed, the second of these songs opens with a verse that urges listeners to forsake earthly devotion and turn instead to Christ (CD track 25 and Appendix). Verbal messages and visual metaphors combined with the extra-textual power of melodic association to sound a persuasive call.

⁴⁵ *Pepys Ballads*, vol. III, p. 214; Simpson, *British Broadside Ballad*, pp. 287–9.

Conversely, Parker's witty courtship song, written a few years later, perhaps drew some of its humour from the tune's parallel associations with this godly ballad. A *Proverbe Old* follows its predecessor in urging members of the audience – specifically young men – to shift their gaze from something worthless to something truly valuable, but Parker's purpose is to contrast the superficial beauty of maidens with the deeper charms of widows (**CD track 26 and Appendix**). The latter, he remarks, are currently numerous, available and willing:

get one with Gold,
though nere so old,
Tis good to strike while the Irons hott.'

This amounts to a creative cross-reference in which the tune has the power to generate recollections of its previous incarnations, thereby endowing the new song with additional layers of significance, among the initiated at least.⁴⁶

The trajectory of the lilting tune known variously as 'With a fadding', 'The pudding' and 'An Orange' is particularly intriguing. Under the first two titles, it had come to be associated in the early and mid-seventeenth century with kissing, courtship, drink, dance and innuendo. It was a good-time tune, and many of the verses to which it was set concluded with refrains in which the terms 'fadding' and 'pudding' were charged with bawdy meaning. In common parlance, one way to hint at a pregnancy was to suggest that a woman had illicitly consumed a pudding (nowadays we prefer to think of buns in ovens). These tags enabled balladeers to be smutty without being explicit, and the tune must have come to sound sexually suggestive. *The Merry Forrester* celebrated the wonders of kissing in terms that look innocent enough on paper, but the previous history of the melody must have ensured that the minds of many listeners drifted towards other types of embrace and their consequences (**CD track 27 and Appendix**). It still carried bawdy connotations during the 1680s, when the heroine of *The Passionate Damsel* explained her desperation to marry in terms of a burning desire for sexual fulfilment.⁴⁷

During the late 1680s, the tune took an abrupt and surprising turn when it was attached to a group of ballads celebrating the coming of William III. His supporters faced the unenviable task of convincing the English that an apparently cold and suspicious Dutchman who, according

⁴⁶ *Shirburn Ballads*, p. 62; *Pepys Ballads*, vol. I, pp. 386–7. Another melody, 'Walsingham', was also associated both with spiritual and romantic devotion.

⁴⁷ Simpson, *British Broadside Ballad*, pp. 792–4; Taylor, *All the Workes*, vol. III, p. 514; *Pepys Ballads*, vol. I, pp. 224–5; *The Passionate Damsel* (London, c. 1686).

to Gilbert Burnet, listened to others 'with a dry silence', was in reality the loud and lusty answer to all their prayers.⁴⁸ William's balladeering friends were determined that their new hero should not go unsung and so they set to work. They could conceivably have called exclusively on tunes with patriotic associations ('Let Caesar live long', for example), but several of these were complicated by their attachment to the Stuart kings, one of whom had just been expelled. 'The pudding', in contrast, had no political past and it was hurriedly requisitioned as a Williamite tune. In 1689, one typical ballad, *The Famous Orange: or, An Excellent Antidote against Romish Poison*, opened in joyous mood (CD track 28 and Appendix):

There's none can express,
Your great Happiness,
The like was ne're seen since the Days of Queen Bess,
A Nation enslav'd,
And Justice outbrav'd,
To be thus redeemed, and gallantly sav'd,
By an Orange.⁴⁹

The tune was not, however, a neutral one, and it seems possible that the ballad-writers who attempted to popularise William following the events of 1688 were instinctively using a well-known melody in order to manipulate his image in such a way that accusations concerning his defects (frostiness and sexual inadequacy, for example) were repudiated by musical association. In defiance of the Jacobite slur that William was 'not qualified for his wife', the balladeers were presenting him as hot and sexy. In response to the rumour that William had been castrated at birth by a midwife, his supporters sang loudly of his balls.⁵⁰ The fact that they did so by melodic allusion made it possible to circumvent the conventions which prevented them from proclaiming the king's sexual prowess in clear and verbal terms. These were clearly new songs, and the rhyme scheme was altered in an act of appropriation, but the tune's associations were very well established. We might also note the way in which these largely anonymous composers drew on the reputation of the citrus fruit itself as a desirable courtship gift and an instrument of celebration (see Figure 6.2). Charles II had courted his subjects by throwing oranges to them in 1661, and twenty-seven years later supporters of William III decorated their


⁴⁸ Craig Rose, *England in the 1690s: Revolution, Religion and War* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 35.

⁴⁹ *Pepys Ballads*, vol. II, p. 260.

⁵⁰ 'Coronation Ballad', quoted by P. Kleber Monod, *Jacobitism and the English People, 1688-1788* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 55.

THE FAMOUS ORANGE:

Or, an Excellent Antidote against Romish Poison.



With these gallant Notes
Of our Prince of Wales
Which really he is, if it were not for Folly;
But their own conceits
This wonderful Prince
They make him a Poet, if ever he had mind
To be so present,
Our Queen was content,
That he into France, should straightway be sent,
His High to counsel,
And thence to deal,
Will be so sufficiently able to do it.

With an Orange
Our Catholick race
To be very fair,
To stand by the Duke, a his new fashion'd Hair,
Should for us be well,
But yet who can tell
Why all may sing backwards, because they be
fond,
Our Friers and Devils
And such kind of Devils,
That prefer'd eye Station, has now got the
Mind they can croak, (Whistles,
And keep on their Clock,
Our thinking to swallow, they must with a
Clock,
Our Irish Deer Jags,
And such four-Jags,
Wholly without all our Station with Devils,
Forgetting of England's
Tyrants nothing against them, can make Devils,
Like an Orange,
Who have such Fate,
Strong League and his Muse,
To be thus equal'd to King and Peers,
When they come to fight,
For young Tyrants Right,
They should be thus shamefully put to the flight,
By an Orange!

Alas, Alas,
Fate had her own reason,
The Rocks the Ocean & English is not here to be
Wee taken up our Jewels, (Spain)
To be, Patrick's Child,
Who had the clearest this same old Orange
Of an Orange

What scrambling play
Do we see 'ry day?
What Mouths & Wretches, to run their stay?
Our Justice new
To both Star and Sea,
They'd run far enough, if they did but know
How,
Of the Rock and the Dove,
With many names who:
The King, and the Queen, and the Countess's
Who straightly follow'd
By that and by Good,
As not being able to strike the Spanish,
Of an Orange.

Who se Whoredoms all,
What is your silver Cell,
Where ever you dwell, who is he as V White-Hall:
If both your House
Your time to improve,
And would 'tis in Britain learn quickly to like
A Dutch Orange,
So if you delay
And ride away
Your time (that is given to be in) as play:
You'll surely be dead,
And beautifully tall,
And fairly ripen, you so sweetly fall,
A Brave Orange.

If you have your liver,
Religion and Mithers,
That turn out these Horrors, that look in your
Whore:
Whom you see your King:
For Protestants Sincerely there's nothing to gain
As an Orange.

This bold Roman Whore
Has been digging a Hell,
And some time obtaining with your and with
All your Jewels were fall, (Whore):
And your hopes were 'em past,
But Providence sent you a spirit time as fall,
In an Orange

When you have got Power,
Do not be slow,
Your Whorem (as formerly) they know:
But let's all agree,
So give it liberty,
And let's 'em all together, by setting us free,
By an Orange

Figure 6.2. In 1689, William III's unofficial propagandists drew on the romantic symbolism of the orange and the associations of an old but sexy tune in presenting him to the English public. The Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge, Pepys Ballads, *The Famous Orange* (London, 1689).

houses with oranges in order to greet him.⁵¹ All in all, efforts were clearly being made to portray the incoming monarch as lovable, affectionate and gallant. He was not dry but juicy. The tactic evidently caught the popular imagination, and it was not long before the old tune titles were displaced in favour of a new one, 'The Orange'.

Furthermore, the associations of this melody may just have run deeper still. The first musical phrase of 'The Orange' is virtually identical to that of another melody, 'Jog on', and this old and popular tune was itself strongly associated with songs celebrating the defeat of the Spanish Armada exactly one hundred years earlier.⁵² It was also known as '88' and it retained its marketability right through into the eighteenth century. It resonated with both humour and patriotism, and it apparently held on to both associations throughout the early modern period. In the 1670s, for example, it was named in the *Oxford Drollery* for a deeply scatological song about two brothers called 'Love me' and 'Lick me', but it was also

⁵¹ *Diurnal of Thomas Rugg*, p. 180; 'Curious Extracts from a Manuscript Diary, of the Time of James II and William and Mary', ed. Edward L. Cutts, *Essex Archaeological Transactions* 1 (1855), 124.

⁵² There is an example in *Choyce Drollery* (London, 1656), pp. 38–9.

chosen by Dr Walter Pope for his satirical broadside *The Catholick Ballad: or, An Invitation to Popery*. Of course, this song was nothing of the sort: it lambasted all Catholics and 'the tune of, Eighty eight' played its part in ensuring that the central message was clear. It was well chosen, for it suggested both a spirit of mischief and a mood of patriotic Protestantism. It spoke in light-hearted vein of English nationhood, the reformed religion and a monarch of truly famous memory. The ballad was an immensely successful one, and the tune was therefore as well known in the decades before 1688 as it had been in the decades following 1588. It seems difficult to believe that the precise affinity between the unusual opening bars of the two tunes was a mere coincidence, particularly if we note the passing verbal references to Elizabeth I and the Armada itself in some of the 'Orange' songs.⁵³ Instead, it is at least worth arguing that one of the reasons for the selection of the 'pudding'/'Orange' tune by the political balladeers of the later seventeenth century was that it included this unusual musical reference to the Armada, thus allying 1688 with 1588, and William III by association with a great, home-grown, Protestant heroine. Having made William sexy, the balladeers were also making him English.

We should not assume, however, that this positive interpretation was the only one that contemporaries could have placed upon these ballads. In the minds of many English people, William was not a new Eliza, and his arrival was deeply controversial. The arguably flippant side of the songs and the 'pudding' tune almost invited listeners to attend to other, more satirical, possibilities. The choice of tune was a risky one, for King William could all too easily emerge as laughable rather than lovable. He was, after all, being likened to a foreign fruit. Like all fruit, the orange had the potential to turn rotten, and at least one ballad-writer was aware of the danger:

Perhaps you may think to *Peters* they Stink,
 Because from our Neighbours they'r brought over Sea,
 Yet sure, 'tis presum'd,
 They may be perfum'd,
 By th' scent of good *cloves*,
 for they may be stuck in an *Orange*.⁵⁴

⁵³ William Hicke, *Oxford Drollery* (London, 1679), pp. 112–13; Roxburghe ballads, C2017–1410, vol. I, pp. 26–7, B1. (*The Catholick Ballad* is also discussed in McShane Jones, 'Rime and Reason', p. 213, though she is surely mistaken in dismissing the tune title as a merely verbal joke); for references to Elizabeth and/or the Armada in the 'Orange' ballads, see above, p. 312, and also *Pepys Ballads*, vol. V, p. 132. 'Jog on' is discussed in Simpson, *British Broadside Ballad*, p. 392 (but the author makes no connection with the later tune).

⁵⁴ *Pepys Ballads*, vol. V, p. 109.

There were many ways to listen, and the receivers of ballads were just as important as the composers when it came to the construction of meaning. A great deal depended upon their prior knowledge of any specific tune and upon their prior attitudes to the subjects under discussion. Sadly, we can take this matter no further, for it is not possible to say with any certainty whether this derisory alternative interpretation of the 'Orange' ballads was popular, nor whether it contributed to the commercial success of the ballads. What proportion of the population welcomed William with a smirk?

With greater certainty, we can say that 'the tune of an Orange' reached the 1690s with the capacity to signify both Williamite patriotism and sexual humour. The dual associations came together in *The Maidens Frollicksome Undertaking to Press Twenty Taylors*. In this song, a group of ten plucky maidens disguise themselves as seamen in order to recruit twice as many reluctant tailors to the king's service. They use a combination of psychological and physical force, and the melody reinforces both the patriotism of the piece and its sexual undertones. Without the tune, this ballad might still amuse, but it would undoubtedly be a paler thing.⁵⁵

The 'Orange' songs were not the only ones in which the associations of a melody – whether by accident or design – set up interpretative possibilities that were not explicit in the text. *A New-yeeres-gift for the Pope* was published during the mid-1620s, at a time when Prince Charles was busy courting a Spanish princess (and domestic controversy). Only half of the ballad survives, but the gist of the jest is plain enough (CD track 30 and Appendix). On the face of it, the text made no direct reference to the political context, concentrating instead on a contest between true and false religion in which Protestants and Catholics each try to tip the scales of justice in their favour. The Catholics load their side with all manner of trinkets, crosses, pictures and statues, but they are soundly defeated by the Protestants, who trust instead in the sheer weight of the Bible alone (see Figure 6.3). Each verse concludes with some version of a refrain that emphasises the futility of Catholic efforts: 'Yet all is in vaine, they cannot, they cannot, / Yet all is in vaine they cannot.'⁵⁶ There was nothing particularly surprising about any of this, but the lively melody – 'Thomas you cannot' – unsettles the simplicity of the text and introduces new and potentially controversial possibilities. It was associated primarily with sexual relations and, in particular, with an earlier song about the difficulties encountered by a man named Thomas as he struggles to satisfy

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 276. ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 62.

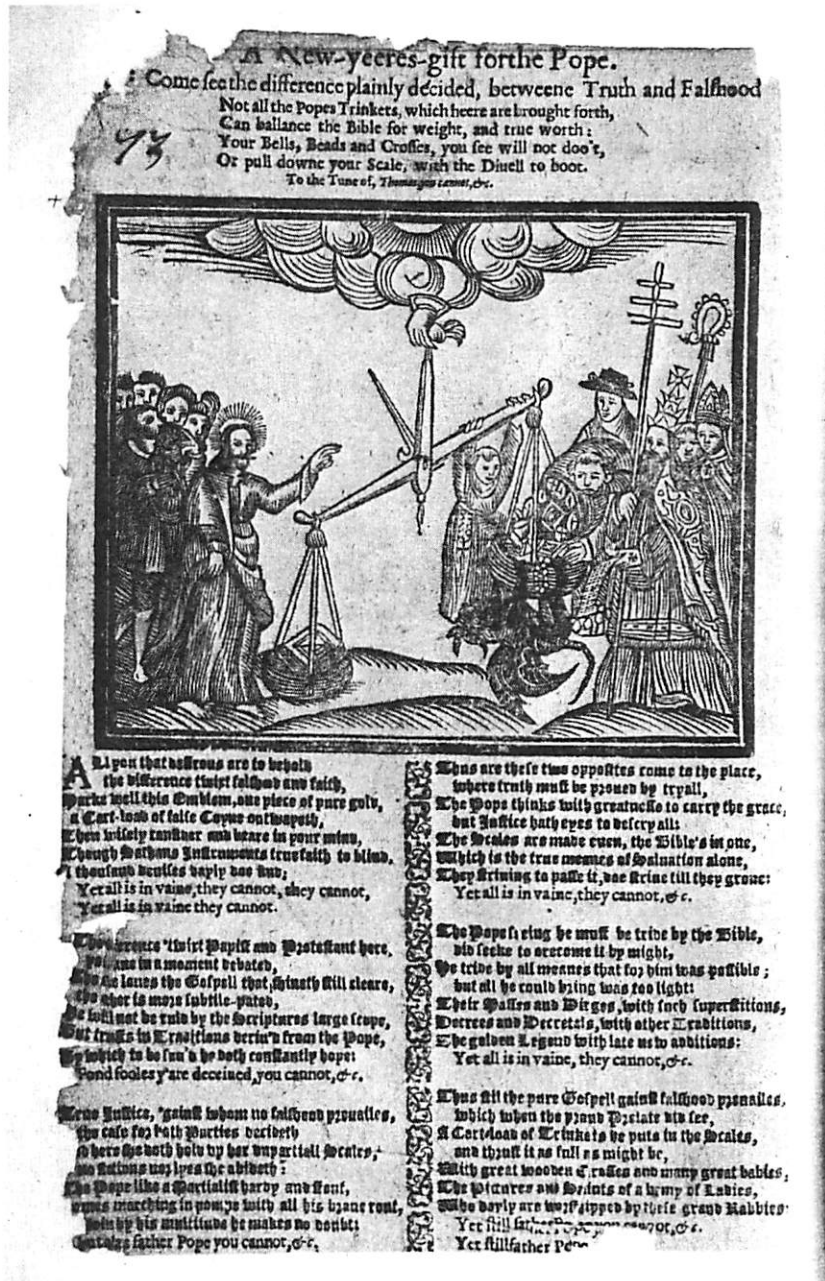


Figure 6.3. This anti-Catholic ballad of the mid-1620s combined a religious text and picture with a tune that carried bawdy associations. The Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge, Pepys Ballads, *A New-yeeres-gift for the Pope* (London, c. 1624).

a spirited maiden (CD track 29 and Appendix). At first he is eager and she undecided. Moments later, she conquers her doubts and is overtaken by desire, but now Thomas's sexual courage deserts him and the poor man fails repeatedly to perform (he perhaps manages it in the final verse, which, tragically, is lost). Throughout this tense exchange, the girl taunts the boy with cries of 'Thomas! You cannot, you cannot! / O Thomas, O Thomas, you cannot!'⁵⁷

'Thomas you cannot' was thus a song about incompatible sexual wishes and the difficulties faced by feeble men when attached to lustful women. In the atmosphere of the mid-1620s, it is surely not stretching the bounds of credibility to suggest that, somewhere in here, there was a joke about the tortured courtship of Charles Stuart. He, like Thomas, had struggled to win a woman, and the fact that his intended spouse was a foreign Catholic princess offered a link between the divergent meanings of text and tune within *A New-yeeres-gift*. There were good reasons for burying such matter in the melody, for the governments of the day were deeply troubled by the wealth of rumour and libellous criticism that surrounded the court and the Duke of Buckingham in particular.⁵⁸ We cannot date the ballad with certainty, though it seems most plausible to argue that it belongs to the period during or immediately after the expedition to Spain by Charles and Buckingham in 1623. This mission caused extreme anxiety in England, and even loyal royalists were intensely relieved when it all came to nought. John Taylor rejoiced that a period during which Britain had suffered the pangs of 'dutifull Jealousie' was at an end, and he described the mood of near-hysteria that was stimulated by the empty-handed return of the two adventurers on 5 October. Guns fired, trumpets blasted, drums were beaten, bells rang, God was thanked and everybody got drunk. Two boatmen were so delighted that, somewhat short-sightedly, they destroyed their own boats 'in a Bonfire most merrily'. According to Taylor, 'This was a day all dedicate to Mirth'. Ballad-sellers were also in on the act, though several of the individuals who worked the streets of Portsmouth had to twiddle their thumbs in prison, where they had been placed for the offence of announcing the prince's arrival in the town before it had actually occurred. In seeking to anticipate an opportunity, they had missed one.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ *Fishop Percy's Folio Manuscript: Loose and Humorous Songs*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall (London, 1868), pp. 116–18.

⁵⁸ See, for example, Bellany, 'Singing Libel in Early Stuart England'.

⁵⁹ Taylor, *All the Workes*, vol. III, pp. 585–9; Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture*, p. 388.

Other commentators were more directly critical of the government, and numerous hard-hitting verses circulated in manuscript. According to convention, they aimed their darts at the royal favourite rather than at the king and the prince, but James and Charles made the justifiable assumption that many of the accusations levelled at Buckingham were also intended for them. In a world awash with rumour, the duke was associated with an interconnected litany of reprehensible failings: moral corruption, Roman Catholicism, pro-Spanish attitudes, lustful depravity (homosexual and heterosexual) and the pox. It is within this context that *A New-yeeres-gift* should be imagined, and it seems entirely possible that its infectious tune, savouring so strongly of bawdry, can be heard as a coded swipe at all three men. It may have registered with knowledgeable listeners primarily as a joke about Charles's failed courtship, but perhaps it also placed a question mark over the nature of his relationship with Buckingham. It may be no coincidence that the name reportedly adopted by the duke when he and Charles travelled incognito to Spain was 'Thomas'.⁶⁰

A ballad of 1675 was equally dependent on a melody for its humorous impact (see Figure 6.4). It has at its head an assurance that it contains no mention of warfare, courtship, monsters, wonders and death, 'Nor any thing under the Sky, But onely of my Dog and I' (these last four words provide the ballad's title and refrain). The text opens with a man singing fondly and, for all a modern reader knows, innocently, of his beloved pet (CD track 31 and Appendix):

You that are of the merry Throng,
Give good attention to my Song,
Ile give you weighty reasons why,
'Tis made upon my Dog and I,
My Dog and I, my Dog and I,
'Tis made upon my Dog and I.⁶¹

There is, however, nothing innocent about these inseparable companions. The tune tells us immediately that this is a thoroughly bawdy ballad in which dog = penis. 'Bobbing Joan', a simple and beautiful melody that was used both for songs and dances, was associated first and foremost with lust

⁶⁰ Bellany, 'Singing Libel in Early Stuart England'; Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture*, pp. 388–9; Roger Lockyer, *Buckingham: the Life and Political Career of George Villiers* (London: Longman, 1981), p. 136; John Bowle, *Charles I: A Biography* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975), pp. 66, 69.

⁶¹ *Pepys Ballads*, vol. IV, p. 229.



Figure 6.4. When is a dog not a dog? In this ballad, the tune's long-established association with sex told listeners that all was not as suggested by the title and introductory lines. The Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge, Pepys Ballads, *My Dog and I* (London, 1675).

and its fulfilment. It appears to have earned its name from a ballad entitled *Bobbin' Jo: or, The Longing Lass Satisfied at last*, in which the euphemistic refrain ran, "The bobbin' jo, the bobbin jo, / And canst thou dance the bobbing jo."⁶² In *My Dog and I*, therefore, the melody helps to make the joke by calling to mind the lewdness of the more famous song.

The role of such tunes may help to explain why early modern ballads, which sometimes look rather bland to modern eyes, were regularly categorised *en masse* by moralists as dangerously licentious. Our ancestors perhaps heard more in them than we are trained or accustomed to do. Not all examples were so lascivious. Thomas Deloney, for example, wrote a ballad about the capture of a Spanish vessel in 1588 and gibingly set it to a tune that was associated with a French enemy of Philip II. In a ballad published a century later, a man declares his undying love for a Welsh woman to the tune of 'Sir John Johnson's Farewell', another name for the immensely successful execution melody 'Russell's farewell'. Surely, we are to understand that this poor lovesick man is doomed, even if the words do

⁶² Simpson, *British Broadside Ballad*, pp. 46–7.

not quite tell us so (he remains hopeful). The text speaks of love, but the tune suggests that love is death.⁶³

This discussion of musical allusion must end, however, with the somewhat anti-climactic admission that not all early modern melodies gathered and relied upon associations in this playful manner. The recycling of tunes was one highly effective technique, but the freshness of a previously unheard melody could pull in the punters almost as effectively. Appealing to newness was, of course, a more risky tactic than trusting to tradition, but it was nevertheless worth a try. In the Euing collection of ballads, eighty-six of 408 songs are set to tunes described as 'new' (often in association with a range of additional adjectives, including 'pleasant', 'admirable', 'delicate', 'amorous' and 'dainty'). Novelty was clearly a selling feature, and composers made the most of it in their musical instructions: 'To a pleasant new Northern Tune, Now all in fashion'; 'To a most Admirable New Tune, every where much in Request'; and 'To a Pleasant New Tune . . . , Play'd and Sung at the King's Play-House'.⁶⁴ Some such tunes were one-hit wonders and failed to migrate to other songs, either because they never caught on or, in a few instances, because they were connected so strongly to their original texts that nobody deemed it appropriate to recycle them. *A Ditty Delightfull of Mother Watkins Ale* was a raunchy Elizabethan ballad with a wonderfully catchy tune ('Watkins ale' was a euphemism for semen). The song was a major hit during the 1590s, and its melody was adopted as the basis for instrumental pieces by several more courtly composers. Curiously, however, it does not appear to have been chosen as the setting for any subsequent broadside ballads.⁶⁵

Finally, some tunes were used repeatedly by ballad-writers but never accumulated distinctive thematic associations. For some reason, they were perceived as more malleable or neutral than many of the melodies discussed so far, and they supported many different textual themes. The prime example here was 'Packington's pound', one of the early modern period's top three tunes. Its Elizabethan origins are obscure, but between the late sixteenth and early eighteenth centuries it was named on perhaps one hundred different ballads. It is a superb melody, but part of the reason for its success must lie in popular perceptions of its flexibility. This, more than any other, was a tune for all seasons. It was specified on songs about

⁶³ *A Joyfull New Ballad, Declaring the Happie Obtaining of the Great Galleazzo . . . to the Tune of Mounseurs Almaine* (London, 1588); *Pepys Ballads*, vol. V, p. 203. See also Simpson, *British Broadside Ballad*, pp. 495–6, 621–4.

⁶⁴ *Euing Collection of English Broadside Ballads*, nos. 49, 71 and 234.

⁶⁵ Simpson, *British Broadside Ballad*, p. 745.

tipplers, Biblical prophets, dairymaids, executed criminals, loyal lovers, exemplary aristocrats, cutpurses, Quakers, royal babies, paupers, lusty millers, Whigs and bad husbands. 'Packington's pound' does not seem to have signified anything in particular, and it shared this characteristic with melodies such as 'Greensleeves', 'Chevy Chase' and 'I am the Duke of Norfolk'.⁶⁶

Associations in motion

Not all consumers brought the same prior knowledge to a ballad, and degrees of familiarity with the intricate web of potential melodic associations must have spanned a spectrum from the vague to the advanced. Such evidence as we have seems to suggest that relative fluency in the language of tunes was widespread. Contemporaries applied different adjectives to different categories of melody, and many must have known the difference between 'villainous tunes' (for songs about crime and execution), 'lamentable tunes' (for songs of sad love) and 'godly tunes' (for religious and moral ballads).⁶⁷ Playwrights and other authors also made reference to specific tune titles, sometimes drawing upon the associations of melodies in their efforts to stimulate audience members. In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Julia and Lucetta conduct an interesting conversation about an incoming love-letter:

JULIA: Some love of yours hath writ to you in rhyme.

LUCETTA: That I might sing it, madam, to a tune.

Give me a note. Your ladyship can set.

JULIA: As little by such toys as may be possible.

Best sing it to the tune of 'Light o' love'.

LUCETTA: It is too heavy for so light a tune.

JULIA: Heavy? Belike it hath some burden, then?

LUCETTA: Ay, and melodious were it, would you sing it.

The exchange appears to indicate the facility with which some non-musicians could talk about tunes, texts and the relationship between them (while also punning on other familiar ballad terms, such as 'burden').⁶⁸

There is a similarly playful moment in Aphra Behn's play *The Roundheads* (written in 1682 but set in 1660). At its conclusion, royalists gather around a bonfire to celebrate the end of the Rump Parliament and

⁶⁶ References to all these tunes are gathered and indexed in Simpson, *British Broadside Ballad*, and in *Pepys Ballads*.

⁶⁷ There is an interesting examination of the associations and use of one specific melody in Harold Love, 'That Satyrical Tune of "Amarillis"', *Early Music* 35 (2007), 39–46.

⁶⁸ *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, in *Complete Oxford Shakespeare*, pp. 457–8.

to anticipate the return of the king. They recognise, in their midst, a former parliamentarian official, inventively disguised as a ballad-singer. The man is duly apprehended and carried triumphantly around the fire, while a leading member of the crowd calls to a nearby fiddler, 'Play Fortune my Foe, Sirrah.' To the sound of this tune, another disguised parliament-man is discovered, exposed and forced to dance. There is a sinister and wordless joke here, for the crowd's victims are being threatened with the noose by melodic association. The enormity of their error is further emphasised by the command to dance to a tune that was never designed for such a purpose. 'Fortune my foe' was a 'villainous tune', and nobody but the deranged and desperate danced to such music.⁶⁹

This was not the only instance in which a naked tune spoke volumes. Francis Quarles's play *The Virgin Widow* contains a scene in which Quack the apothecary whistles the tune of 'As I went to Walsingham' while his wife attempts to banish him from her sight with a tirade of insults. His musical joke depended upon the ability of audience members to recognise the tune and to connect it with romantic disappointment and/or a pilgrim's life on the road.⁷⁰ During the 1660s, 'When the king enjoys his own again' was frequently played on instruments in order to express loyalty to the crown. During celebrations at Bruton (Somerset) on 29 May 1660, it sounded all day long. Around the same time, English ships sometimes greeted one another with trumpet renditions of the melody. After General Monck arrived in London in 1660, his musicians reportedly 'play'd that Tune every Morning ... till the King came himself, and then, you know, there was no more Occasion for it'.⁷¹ In fact, the tune lived on, and it could still cause a stir when sounded in an tavern during the 1720s. In the meantime, 'When the king' had become a thoroughly controversial tune, for its attachment to the Stuart cause had survived the deposition of James II in 1688 and the accession of the Hanovers in 1714. Where once it had signified mainstream loyalism, now it carried more than a hint of Jacobite sympathy. Thus it was that William Browne, keeper of the White Hart in Barnes (Surrey), landed himself in hot water by entertaining in his alehouse 'a great Number of People in a Riotous manner who with Drums & Fiddles play'd the Tune called The King shall Enjoy his own

⁶⁹ Behn, *The Roundheads, or the Good Old Cause* (London, 1682), p. 56. The tune can be heard on tracks 7, 17 and 20 of the CD.

⁷⁰ Francis Quarles, *The Virgin Widow a Comedie* (London, 1649), p. 32; Simpson, *British Broadside Ballad*, pp. 741–3.

⁷¹ *Diurnal of Thomas Rugg*, p. 179; Woodfield, *English Musicians*, p. 60 n. 29; Daniel Defoe, cited by Würzbach, *The Rise of the English Street Ballad*, pp. 283–4. The original song appears on the CD as track 23.

again'. The local constable and his assistants intervened, warning the company 'to forbear such insults upon the Government', but the musicians played on regardless.⁷²

The associations of the most familiar melodies seem to have been widely known. Samuel Pepys was understandably upset when the Dutch fleet sailed up the Medway to Chatham in June 1667, capturing a famous and symbolic ship, the *Royal Charles*. He well understood the musical vocabulary that was deployed by the raiders: 'and presently a man went up and struck her flag and Jacke, and a trumpeter sounded upon her "Joan's placket is torn"'. This brilliant piece of melodic mockery can be fully understood only when the tune's associations with romantic conquest and sexual penetration are called to mind.⁷³ Powerful and controversial points could be made by melody alone, and in one Elizabethan play about Richard II an officious loyalist arrests a man on the grounds that he has 'whistled treason'. When the suspect refutes the charge, he receives a forthright explanation: 'Sir! Ther's a peece of treason that flyes up and downe the country in the likness of a ballad, and this be the very tune of it you whisselled.' The officer, admittedly, was presented as a figure of fun, yet the currency of the belief that a tune might enable individuals to present their opinions in disguise is also suggested by the contemporary saying 'I'll whistle instead of singing.'⁷⁴

The authors of libellous local songs sometimes demonstrated a comparable familiarity with the vocabulary of melody. Thomas Chitham, the schoolmaster who in 1601 composed a scurrilous ballad under instruction from a Chelmsford barber, clearly drew upon the bawdy associations of the tune 'Watkins ale' in producing his masterpiece.⁷⁵ At the same date, a song-writing servant in Yorkshire was employing rather more elaborate and sophisticated tune tactics in devising a libellous jig – a set of short interconnected songs for dramatic performance – in derision of his master's enemy, Mr Michael Steel. The composer was twenty-two years old and bold enough to highlight Steel's alleged abandonment of his wife in favour of a maidservant named Frances. His use of tunes suggests a thorough knowledge of broadside balladry. In the first song, Michael bemoans the advanced age and frowning jealousy of his wife while arranging a late-night tryst with his eager employee. They sing in dialogue,

⁷² QS 2/6, no. 10, SHC. For a potted history of the melody, see Simpson, *British Broadside Ballad*, pp. 764–8.

⁷³ *Diary of Samuel Pepys*, vol. VIII, p. 283; Simpson, *British Broadside Ballad*, pp. 388–90.

⁷⁴ 'Richard II. Erster Teil: ein Drama aus Shakespeare's Zeit', ed. Wolfgang Keller, *Jahrbuch der Deutschen Shakespeare-Gesellschaft* 35 (1899), 87–8 (the play is often known as 'Thomas of Woodstock'); *Pepys Ballads*, vol. 1, pp. 202–3.

⁷⁵ See above, pp. 272–3.

conspiring together 'To the tune of Filiday flouts mee'. This fashionable melody had been attached most recently to ballads on aspects of love and seduction, themes that were humorously reworked in the jig. The second song, set to the tune of 'Fortune', presents another dialogue, this time between Frances and her aged mistress. Here, the tune's general associations with death, tragedy and moral warnings work to exaggerate the farcicality of a situation in which an old wife, sexually neglected by her husband, unknowingly seeks comfort from the new object of his lust:

Come Frauncis Come make hast and goe with me
 it is tyme to rest for suche a one as me
 my bones are olde and bloude has fledd awaie
 I marvell much what makes my husband staie.

More specifically, the song is also a pastiche upon the ballad that had originally produced the tune title 'Fortune my foe'. This song had presented the lamentation of a male lover, driven to desperation by the apparent indifference of his chosen woman. It is thus apparent that the young Yorkshire composer was drawing cleverly upon a range of melodic associations, and his skill was duly recognised by a troop of travelling players who took up the jig and, controversially, began performing it at the end of their productions. In all, there are six songs in the jig but, sadly, the remaining four tunes cannot be identified with confidence.⁷⁶

Other amateur balladeers from a variety of social backgrounds showed themselves equally skilled in the libellous manipulation of melody. In Jacobean Worcestershire, John and Richard Rotton, a yeoman and a weaver respectively, clearly knew what they were about as they aimed texts and tunes at Richard Nightingale and his new wife Agnes (formerly Ballamy). According to another local weaver, Richard Rotton had been heard reading and singing songs to 'the tune called Jamey'. His choice was both well informed and amply suited for the purpose of heaping humiliation upon the newly formed marriage of his adversaries. The melody was taken from a recently printed song entitled *A Proper New Ballad, Shewing a Merrie Jest of one Jeemie of Woodcock Hill*, which opened with the lines,

One Jemie there was that dwelt in a towne,
 as proper a man as proper might be:
 A wife he had would scold and frowne,
 and evermore call him noddie noddie,
 A wife he had would scold and frowne,
 and evermore call him noddie noddie.

⁷⁶ Sisson, *Lost Plays of Shakespeare's Age*, pp. 129–40; Simpson, *British Broadside Ballad*, v. 576.

When Jamey goes out to work on Woodcock Hill, another man takes his place at home 'and tickles his wives hei nonnie nonnie'. Jamey returns to witness this stimulating act, but rather than defending his honour in suitably manly fashion he accepts a compensatory payment of £5 from the interloper. In short, Jamey is a wimp and his wife is an adulteress.⁷⁷ These, then, were the associations that the tune carried as it made its way from London into Worcestershire and thus into the aggrieved mind of Richard Rotton. His malice was motivated, allegedly, by his failure to win the hand of Agnes Ballamy (also known as Nan) and by his jealousy of her husband. The text composed by or for the Rotton brothers was scurrilous and inflammatory, even without music, but 'the tune called Jamey' endowed it with additional intensity (CD track 32 and Appendix). It opened with the allegation that Agnes had been either seduced or raped by a local miller, some time shortly before her marriage to Richard Nightingale. Upon hearing of the matter, her sweetheart had confronted the miller, but Nightingale – like Jamey before him – failed conspicuously to defend his rights. The song described his abject retreat, and its final lines branded him a coward and a fool.⁷⁸

The poetry of Richard Corbet was rather more refined than that of Richard Rotton, but he too knew how to draw upon the associations of common ballad tunes. In 1615, this future bishop opened an exchange of 'sharpe invectives' in which scholars from Oxford and Cambridge mocked one another in time-honoured fashion. Corbet wrote for Oxford, but his 'Grave poeme' described the entertainments famously staged at Trinity College, Cambridge, for the visit of James I in the spring of 1615. He had himself attended these festivities – including the performance of George Ruggle's controversial play *Ignoramus* – and he maintained the theatrical mood by stating that his poetic report on proceedings was 'made rather to be sung than reade to the tune of Bonny Nell'. Unfortunately, this extremely popular tune has not survived, but we do know that it carried potent sexual undertones. In 1622, Thomas Robinson referred scathingly to a community of English Catholics in Lisbon, noting that the naughty nuns liked to entertain the resident friar by playing their instruments and singing him 'ribaldrous Songs and jigs, as that of Bonny Nell, and such other obscene and scurrilous Ballads, as would make a chaste ear to glow at the hearing of them'.

⁷⁷ *A Proper New Ballad, Shewing a Merrie Jest of one Jeemie of Woodcock Hill* (London, c. 1610). The tune is named as 'Woodcock Hill', but it picked up the new name, 'Jamey', following the publication of the ballad.

⁷⁸ STAC 8/220/31, NA. The tune is printed in Simpson, *British Broadside Ballad*, p. 797.

Corbet, in setting his 'grave' words to such a tune, presumably intended to undercut his own stated purpose for humorous effect (he also pretended that his song was translated from Latin). The nomination of 'Bonny Nell' connected gravity with depravity and poured scorn upon the objects of the author's mock-praise. The text itself contained no allegations of sexual impropriety in Cambridge, but the tune hinted heavily at this unspeakable possibility. Corbet, during his visit to Cambridge, had reportedly presented himself in public as a man who wished to rise above the petty inter-varsity squabbles that were breaking out around him, but in truth he had no such intent. He was later to become famous as a pranking ecclesiastic, and this was not the only occasion upon which he deployed melody for witty effect.⁷⁹

Corbet's song circulated widely in manuscript, and may have exerted an indirect influence over the Nottingham libellers of 1617. In that year, the town was rocked by a confrontation between puritans and their enemies. Both factions included clergymen and townsmen of high rank, and the anti-puritan group made varied and inventive use of a full range of musical weaponry. Libellous songs were penned, published and performed in numerous physical settings, and the musicians of the town were clearly drawn into the controversy as singers and instrumental accompanists. One of the songs was described, intriguingly, as 'Better to be song [sung], than [than] redd to the tune of Bonny Nell'. The instruction seemed to echo Corbet's earlier device, and it is possible that some member of the creative team in Nottingham may have been familiar with the Oxford man's song (which had singled out the puritans of Emmanuel College for particular derision). It is probably no coincidence that the Nottingham waits had in 1615–16 received payments from the steward of Trinity College, the scene of the main festivities in Cambridge.⁸⁰ This appears to be an appealing example of the way in which melodic notions could pass freely around the country, circulating among academics, musicians and provincial townsmen. The Nottingham text was, however, rather less subtle than Corbet's offering in its references to the bawdy baggage carried by 'Bonny Nell'. The composers reported on the alleged practices of the

⁷⁹ Many of the relevant documents are gathered in *REED Cambridge*, pp. 540–1, 863–88. See also Simpson, *British Broadside Ballad*, p. 58; Corbet, *Certain Elegant Poems*, pp. 58–64; 134–5; Nichols, *The Progresses, Processions, and Magnificent Festivities of King James the First* (London, 1828), vol. III, p. 66; Thomas Robinson, *The Anatomy of the English Nymph* (London, 1622), p. 13.

⁸⁰ *REED Cambridge*, p. 549.

local puritans in a tone that combined unmistakable innuendo with explicit accusation:

by night they Catichise each other
 the holy sister with the brother,
 and when the high preest hath well druncke
 each one betakes him to his puncke.⁸¹

In this instance, the words inflicted the initial wound but the tune twisted the knife. All over Nottingham, the deriders of puritanism laughed and made merry with the song. On one occasion, an alderman requested a rendition in an alehouse, then rounded on the piper for playing the wrong piece: 'that's not the song, I meant the song of the Puritans of Nottingham'. The piper was duly replaced and the new one sang the right song, much to the glee of the assembled company.⁸²

Listening experiences clearly varied, but for many people the chain of melodic associations was almost certainly a vital component of ballad consumption. One did not need to be conscious of such associations in order to process them during the personal act of listening. In fact, such devices are at their most effective when they are assimilated automatically. Even the composers of ballads may on occasion have been unaware of some of the associations carried by their chosen melodies. All possible associations were, nevertheless, implanted in their songs, ready to be selectively dug out or left to lie by members of the exceptionally varied audience. Melodies worked their magic in several ways. They could reinforce their texts, reiterating the primary verbal messages by calling upon a wealth of supportive musical precedent. On the other hand, tunes could undermine or subvert their verses. They could also offer listeners a number of interpretative routes along which to travel, some of which might lead in opposite directions. Something similar can perhaps be said of the many recycled woodcut pictures, which were often placed with rather more deliberation than historians have allowed. Textual echoes also connected ballads past and present, and here too we might find evidence of subtle reinforcement and meaningful revision. This was a culture within which people liked to play with cultural components, whether verbal, visual or musical, constantly reassembling them into new configurations, like children twisting a kaleidoscope. To put it in more aural terms, our ancestors thrived on riddle, rhyme and resonance.

⁸¹ Sisson, *Lost Plays of Shakespeare's Age*, p. 202. ⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 199.