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A Woodcut and Its Wanderings in Seventeenth-Century England

Christopher Marsh

ABSTRACT This essay traces the career of a distinctive woodcut picture that appears on dozens of seventeenth-century ballad broadsheets. Christopher Marsh argues that woodcuts have often been neglected by scholars and that they deserve careful attention. The common habit of redeploying old pictures on new ballads may, for example, have encouraged consumers to build associations between individual woodcuts and particular characteristics or themes. In order to understand the visual aesthetic of early-modern balladry, it is therefore necessary to think in fresh and creative ways about the effects of the repetition of pictures on cognition. **KEYWORDS:** relationship between ballads and their illustrations; reuse of woodcuts in printing; depictions of courtship; role of familiarity in interpretation of images

☞ **THE MAJORITY OF SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY** ballad illustrations depict individual human figures, either male or female, in little black boxes. The beauty of such generic images was that they enabled publishers and printers to shuffle them around, reusing old pictures in new configurations on dozens of different ballads, thereby saving themselves the costs associated with commissioning new artwork. The appeal of this approach has not, however, been readily apparent either to the ballad specialists of the academic world or to the scholars who dip into balladry more occasionally while working on something else. Indeed, the recycling habit is one of the principal factors underlying the neglect of these woodcuts. There has been a pronounced tendency to assume that the reuse of images suggests apathy about their significance on the part of producers and consumers alike.¹ Fortunately, the situation is

1. Natascha Würzbach, *The Rise of the English Street Ballad* (Cambridge, 1990), 9; Margaret Aston, "Bibles to Ballads: Some Pictorial Migrations in the Reformation," in *Christianity and Community in the West: Essays for John Bossy*, ed. Simon Ditchfield (Aldershot, U.K., 2001), 2, 17–18. See also Robin Ganev, *Songs of Protest, Songs of Love: Popular Ballads in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Manchester, 2009), 14.

changing under the influence of the so-called visual turn, and a number of authors have now begun to investigate the role of ballad woodcuts in the generation of meaning.² We are moving, slowly, toward an understanding that, for early modern consumers, the appeal of a ballad lay not only in its textual content but also in the interaction among the words, the images, the melody, and the performance. Each publication was a little web of possibilities in itself, but it also took its part in a far more extensive web that incorporated the ballad genre as a whole. Of course, this observation makes ballads harder for scholars to digest in a hurry, but it may also help them to understand how and why these publications were so very popular, despite texts that often seem either monstrously melodramatic or light and trite.

The purpose of this essay is to consider the part played by images in the appeal of balladry. In the absence of detailed evidence about contemporary interpretative habits, what can we surmise from the images themselves about the ways in which these pictures may have been viewed and understood? How did consumers process them? And how did they respond to the incongruity and repetition that sometimes disappoints or confuses modern minds? This essay argues that woodcuts, like tunes, were a crucial and central component of balladry rather than a feeble decorative extra. Pictures, though recycled, were selected and placed with some skill and care, probably setting up complex and often unconscious crosscurrents between ballads in the brains of viewers. They thus took their place in the vast interconnected network of meanings and references that constituted balladry as a whole. Wandering woodcuts also contributed to what Margreta de Grazia and Peter Stallybrass call “the unsettled nature of the printed text.”³ Pictures helped to render meanings variable, personal, and unstable. The nature of one’s engagement with a ballad depended—and still depends—on one’s previous encounters with its constituent parts, including its pictures. The fact that most woodcuts were not designed primarily for the individual ballads upon which they appeared meant that viewers had to work hard in order to locate or manufacture meaning. The redeployment of pictures was in fact an incitement to engagement and debate, rather than a reflection of apathy. The consumer was also a producer, as sug-

2. Alexandra Franklin, “The Art of Illustration in Bodleian Broadside Ballads before 1820,” *Bodleian Library Record* 17, no. 5 (2002): 327–52, and “Making Sense of Ballad Illustrations in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” in *Studies in Ephemeria: Text and Image in Eighteenth-Century Print*, ed. Kevin D. Murphy and Sally O’Driscoll (Lewisburg, Pa., 2013), 169–93; Patricia Fumerton, “Remembering by Dismembering: Databases, Archiving and the Recollection of Seventeenth-Century Broadside Ballads,” in *Ballads and Broad-sides in Britain, 1500–1800*, ed. Patricia Fumerton and Anita Guerrini (Farnham, U.K., 2010), 13–34; Patricia Fumerton, Carl Stahmer, Kris McAbee, and Megan Palmer-Browne, “Vexed Impressions: Toward a Digital Archive of Broadside Ballad Illustrations,” in *Digitizing Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture*, ed. Brent Nelson and Melissa Terras (Tempe, Ariz., 2012), 257–85; Theodore Barrow, “From ‘Easter Wedding’ to ‘The Frantick Lover’: The Repeated Woodcut and its Shifting Roles,” in *Studies in Ephemeria*, ed. Murphy and O’Driscoll, 219–39. See also James Knapp, “The Bastard Art: Woodcut Illustration in Sixteenth-Century England,” in *Printing and Parenting in Early Modern England*, ed. Douglas Brooks (Farnham, U.K., 2003), 151–72.

3. Margreta de Grazia and Peter Stallybrass, “The Materiality of the Shakespearean Text,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (1993): 260.

gested by a wealth of work on popular music in more recent times and by scientific research concerning the intricacies of visual cognition.⁴

Threading and treading a path across the shifting sands of the woodcut world can be difficult, so it is time to recruit an experienced native guide. The man pictured in figure 1 was one of the best-known characters in seventeenth-century England. His first appearance seems to have been in the 1650s, and his attire suggests the second half of the century rather than the first.⁵ He was therefore a late starter, but after his arrival he proved tireless, striding from ballad to ballad for several decades, caught perpetually in the moment immediately preceding an interpersonal engagement of one sort or another. He moves from left to right, which, according to cognitive scientists, is the direction that Western viewers prefer to see represented in pictures, because this is also the manner in which they read.⁶ This man-on-the-move also seems to exude bonhomie. An assessment of his appearance based on early modern advice concerning posture and gesture suggests that he is also manly and of good status: his arm does not droop; he strikes a balance between the hurry of a mere lackey and the tardiness of a good-for-nothing; he keeps his hat on, evidently not expecting to meet a superior; he displays facial hair; and he stands erect while looking straight ahead, thus avoiding the slovenly slouch of a mere peasant. He may even have something to tell us about the history of the handshake, though he is a tease and never quite seals the deal. The work of various scholars suggests that hand-shaking was more strongly associated with friendship and reconciliation than with mere meeting and greeting, but that welcoming guests by taking their hands was a courteous and chivalric gesture that could also serve to earn their esteem. It was acceptable for a man to take a woman by the hand, provided that both parties were aware of the dangerous temptation that might be fueled by such intimacy. In 1644, John Bulwer took a broader view than that adopted by scholars, associating hand-shaking with friendship, love, benevolence, salutation, entertainment, welcoming, reconciliation, and congratulation. With good reason, he declared, “The Hand, that busie instrument, is most talkative.”⁷ The character in our picture can help us to think about handshakes of all sorts, and he will therefore be referred to as the “how-de-do man” in the discussion that follows.

4. See, for example, Keith Negus, *Popular Music in Theory: An Introduction* (Cambridge, 1996), and Arthur P. Shimamura, *Experiencing Art: In the Brain of the Beholder* (Oxford, 2013).

5. It is as difficult to date clothes with precision as it is to date ballads, but most or all of the broadsheets that featured this individual were issued after around 1655. His shoes and hat, together with his combination of loose breeches (gathered at the knee), coat, and waistcoat, seem consistent with this.

6. Shimamura, *Experiencing Art*, 92.

7. Herman Roodenburg, “The ‘Hand of Friendship’: Shaking Hands and Other Gestures in the Dutch Republic,” in *A Cultural History of Gesture*, ed. Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (Ithaca, N.Y., 1991), 152–78; Michael J. Braddick, “Introduction,” in *The Politics of Gesture: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Michael J. Braddick (Oxford, 2009), 18; Kim M. Phillips, “Bodily Walls, Windows and Doors: The Politics of Gesture in Late Fifteenth-Century Books for Women,” in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al. (Turnhout, Belgium, 2000), 194–95; John Walter, “Gesturing at Authority: Deciphering the Gestural Code of Early Modern England,” in *The Politics of Gesture*, ed. Braddick, 96–143; J[ohn] B[ulwer], *Chirologia, or, The naturall language of the hand* (London, 1644).

FIGURE 1. Detail from “The Famous Sea-Fight between Captain Ward and the Rain-Bow” (1624–80?). Euing 108, EBBA31815. By permission of University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

We will concentrate on the 104 appearances that the how-de-do man made on ballads in the Pepys, Roxburghe, and Euing Ballads (a representative group of collections that includes close to 4,000 of the estimated 11,000 extant sheets from seventeenth-century England). Of course, no seventeenth-century consumer would have seen them all, and it is important to remember that levels of engagement must have covered a spectrum from the fragmentary to the obsessional.⁸ Only the exceptionally devoted might have noticed, for example, that the how-de-do man actually existed in at least thirteen subtly different versions. Most of the differences consist in small details such as the number of blades of grass per clump or the precise shape of the hat, and it seems likely that casual observers perceived most of the pictures as identical. The extent of the variation comes as a surprise even to dedicated scholars, and our inability to spot the differences at a superficial glance clearly tells us something about the manner in which the human mind processes pictures, tending to assimilate images

8. On fragmentary ballad-consumption, see Fumerton, “Remembering by Dismembering,” 13–34.

when the differences between them are relatively slight.⁹ The how-de-do man walks across ballads issued by twenty-one different individuals, and thus it is apparent that any publisher worth his salt needed access to a recognizable version.¹⁰ He was everywhere, and in our central sample of 104 ballads, he can be found in close proximity to 108 other woodcuts, many of which were also regularly recycled and therefore highly familiar. The how-de-do man, though never quite touching the flesh of another, was as well-connected in our giant web as it was possible to be. We are in good hands and we will follow him across the landscape, pausing now and again to meet some of his friends and acquaintances.

Overwhelmingly, the how-de-do man is a positive presence, a character for whom we are invited to experience feelings of admiration, sympathy, or empathy. All judgments here are of course subjective, but it seems that roughly 75 percent of his outings are in this category. Perhaps we might begin with “A Sweet and Pleasant Sonnet,” upon which he plays a happy philosopher, wisely articulating Edward Dyer’s famous lines, “My mind to me a kingdom is, / such perfect joys therein I find.” Here, he is an exemplary citizen, lacking material wealth but craving none of it because his inward resources enable him to feel “rich with little store.”¹¹ More frequently, the how-de-do man is a paragon not of philosophical equilibrium but of honest romanticism. On “The Virgins Constancy,” for example, his exemplary status is made explicit in the subtitle: “’Tis a gallant new Ditty ’twixt *William* and *Kathern*, / Their true loves for young ones may serve for a pattern.”¹² And on “Truths Integrity,” he approaches his sweetheart with a spring in his step to illustrate a song with the optimistic refrain, “Love will find out the way” (fig. 2). The image implies that an embrace is about to occur, though we must imagine it for ourselves. Although his sweetheart is confined in a sturdy black box, the how-de-do man will surely use his eager hands to effect an entrance.¹³

The well-known ballad “Modesty Amazed” tells the tale of an ardent young man named Roger who must persuade his sweetheart’s mother that his intentions are honorable. In a clever twist on the normal two-person picture scheme, the designer

9. Shimamura, *Experiencing Art*, 119–20. Each of the following ballads presents a slightly different version of the picture: EBBA 32055, 30356, 30864, 32015, 30809, 31815, 30682, 31159, 31146, 32025, 21721, 20658, and 21748.

10. The publishers were E. Andrews, John Andrews, J. Back, C. Bates, James Bissel, J. Blare, P. Brooksby, Richard Burton, J. Clarke, J. Conyers, F. Coles, J. Deacon, W. Gilbertson, A. M[ilbourn], W. O[nley], T. Passinger, W. Thackeray, G. Tracey, T. Vere, W. Whitwood, and J. Wright.

11. “A Sweet and Pleasant Sonnet” (1680–82), Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge (hereafter PL), Pepys 2.7, EBBA 21665.

12. “The Virgins Constancy” (1678–88), PL, Pepys 4.55, EBBA 21721.

13. “Truths Integrity” (1655–58), University of Glasgow Library (hereafter UGL), Euing 358, EBBA 32055.

FIGURE 2. Detail from "Truths Integrity" (1655–58). Euing 358, EBBA 32055. By permission of University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

has here positioned an additional female figure in between the two lovers (fig. 3).¹⁴ Presumably representing the mother, she sits obstructively with her back to Roger, as if shielding her daughter from his advances. The text informs us that Roger eventually proves himself trustworthy and that maternal consent to the match is duly given.¹⁵ In other instances, it is fitting that the how-de-do man, this most honest of wooers, also shows himself capable of playing the part of the happy husband. "The Married-Mans Best Portion," for example, presents him striding toward a woman in order to demonstrate "the Excellency, and incomparable Worth of a good Wife, as also how much Happiness doth continually attend upon that Man that enjoys her."¹⁶

14. It is very difficult to know exactly who made the crucial decisions over picture placement (publishers? printers? compositors?) and the term *designer* will therefore be used to encompass all possibilities.

15. "Modesty Amazed" (1685–88), UGL, Euing 218, EBBA 31695.

16. "The Married-Mans Best Portion" (1678–88?), PL, Pepys 4.84, EBBA 21748.

FIGURE 3. Detail from “Modesty Amazed” (1685–88). Euing 218, EBBA 31695. By permission of University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

It would be misleading, however, to create the impression that the essentially buoyant presence of the how-de-do man is unremittingly happy and wholesome. On many ballads, he stands in for characters whose romantic relationships are difficult and occasionally disastrous. At the lighter end of the spectrum, he appears on “The Woman to the Plow and the Man to the Hen-Roost,” a highly successful song in which a husband quarrels with his wife over the relative value of their respective labor to the household economy. They swap roles, each eager to make a point, but find that neither can cope with the other’s responsibilities. Eventually, they revert to their normal duties and a reconciliation is achieved. The how-de-do man features on the second half of the ballad, reaching out his hand toward his wife, presumably to reference the narrative’s optimistic outcome.¹⁷ On “The Poor Mans Comfort,” another version of the same picture represents a husband, lost in despair because of his material misfortunes, who has to be consoled and counselled by his immensely loving and supportive wife. Here, perhaps, the sympathy of many consumers, schooled in the conventions of proper marital conduct, would have been complicated by the husband’s lack of manly resolution and his consequent decision to “be ruled” by his wise wife in the future. She is undoubtedly the heroine of the piece, a point that is reinforced by the associations of the chosen tune, “Fair Angel of England.”¹⁸ In other ballads, male dejection turns to tragedy, and the how-de-do man plays his part here, too. “The Woful Complaint, and Lamentable Death of a Forsaken Lover” introduces us to a depressed

17. “The Woman to the Plow and the Man to the Hen-Roost” (1681–84), UGL, Euing 398, EBBA 32025.

18. “The Poor Mans Comfort” (1684–86), PL, Pepys 4.92, EBBA 21756.

man whose sweetheart has rejected him. He wanders in the woods before eventually killing himself, and the illustrations are arranged so that he looks straight through the place at which a willing woman would normally be situated and on toward an image of his own skeleton.¹⁹ On ballads of the period, the double image of the how-de-do man approaching a woman was so common that the absence of a female figure could itself make a point with eloquence.

In other cases, the positive status of the how-de-do man was complicated not by his occasionally suicidal tendencies but by his association with tales about lustful men who played fast and loose with the orthodox rules of sexual engagement. Of course, this approach to life probably enhanced the how-de-do man's capacity to induce admiration in many consumers, particularly young men, but by endowing the illustration with a mildly subversive thrust, it may have muddled his appeal to others. On "The Jealous Old Dotard: or, The Discovery of Cuckoldry," the how-de-do man represents the "lusty Gallant" who makes love to the young wife of a cantankerous and "sapless" old man. The crucial verses are positioned right alongside the image of our hero, who appears to be walking away from the troubled couple, having completed his business. The woman asks her husband, "Why art thou so cross my old man[?]," and he replies concisely, "'Cause you Cuckold me you Slut."²⁰ In "The Nine Maidens Fury," a young man plays the field ("he was for trimming both maids & women") and almost receives his comeuppance. Nine local girls join forces and hatch a plan to castrate him, cancelling the operation only when the man's true sweetheart, Susan, intervenes to urge mercy. The three recycled woodcuts are arranged with precision and skill (fig. 4). The how-de-do man appears on the left, strolling happily toward his beloved, a fan-carrying maiden positioned on the right. In between them, however, the designer has cleverly interposed a little boxed illustration of a mini-mob of angry women, who appear to be charging toward the how-de-do man with a variety of improvised weapons in their hands (are they going to castrate him with a toasting fork and a warming pan?). The package is completed by the tune, "She got money by't," which already carried powerfully bawdy associations.²¹

On "A New Ballad of King Edward and Jane Shore," the pictures tell the story in comparably satisfying fashion (fig. 5). The text presents an impressive list of history's most powerful seductresses, and each verse ends with a refrain stating that none of them can hold a torch to England's own Jane Shore, who famously "overcame King Edward although he had her under." The tone is one of mock celebration, and the ballad was itself a spoof upon an earlier song about a thoroughly admirable historical hero (hence the recycled tune, "St. George for England"). Jane Shore, however, was an ambivalent figure, regularly presented in ballads and other forms of literature both as an

19. "The Woful Complaint, and Lamentable Death of a Forsaken Lover" (1663–74), UGL, Euing 391, EBBA 32015.

20. "The Jealous Old Dotard: or, The Discovery of Cuckoldry" (1672–96), British Library (hereafter BL), Roxburghe 3.84–85, EBBA 30417.

21. "The Nine Maidens Fury" (1685–88), PL, Pepys 3.275, EBBA 21289. For the associations of the melody, see the broadsides listed in Claude M. Simpson, *The British Broadside Ballad and Its Music* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1966), 655–66.

FIGURE 4. Detail from "The Nine Maidens Fury" (1685–88). Pepys 3.275, EBBA 21289. By permission of the Pepys Library, Magdalene College Cambridge.

example of the dangerous consequences of pride and as a model of charity and remorse. In this "New Ballad," the admiration that is expressed for her is suitably complicated and satirical. A four-picture sequence adds an additional layer of significance: first, a warlike King Edward rides his horse; second and third, the how-de-do man, representing the monarch, walks eagerly toward a receptive (and for us increasingly familiar) woman who stands in for Jane Shore; finally, we see the how-de-do man again, heading off to the right, presumably to indicate that the king has now completed his adulterous assignation (for printers and punters alike, there was great mileage in a figure who could both arrive and depart without requiring modification). More speculatively, we might consider the possibility that the pictures add an implied criticism of the king, who appears to have abandoned the proper business of state, referenced in the first picture, for an affair with a harlot, represented in the other three. It may be no coincidence that Charles II, who occupied England's throne at the time of this ballad's publication, was also a famous philanderer.²²

Heterosexual romance of one sort or another was thus the how-de-do man's principal business, but he was also deployed regularly in order to illustrate other forms of love and devotion. On "Englands Pleasant May-Flower," he is besotted not by a woman but by the restored Charles II, himself depicted as a giant crowned number "2." The confounding of viewer expectations by this purposeful switch surely brings an additional frisson to the royalism of this song. In conjunction with the text, the how-de-do man is here presented as a kind of political everyman, extending the hand of reconciliation and friendship toward a more celebrated wanderer upon his return home:

A mighty Monarch he shall Reign
which makes me chant and say
Now brave King Charles is come again
the twenty ninth of May.²³

Another ballad, "The Worlds Wonder," features the how-de-do man as one of two French prophets whose devotion is to God and to society as a whole. They "declare themselves to be a Thousand Years old a peice, and Preach Repentance to the World; telling what shall happen for these Nine Years following, and when the World shall end." This ballad also allows us an insight into the filtering out of incongruous details that must have been an integral feature of ballad cognition and consumption. We are told in the text that the ancient prognosticators attire themselves in "Strange kinds of habit . . . , the like ne'r seen by mortal Eye," and yet the how-de-do man wears conventional clothes that mortal eyes have witnessed all too often.²⁴ Clearly, early modern

22. "A New Ballad of King Edward and Jane Shore" (1671), BL, Roxburghe 3.258, EBBA 30969. For Jane Shore as an ambivalent figure, see/hear "The Woful Lamentation of Mistris Jane Shore," PL, Pepys 1.486-487, EBBA 20229. See also Richard Helgerson, "Weeping for Jane Shore," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 98, no. 3 (1999): 451-76.

23. "Englands Pleasant May-Flower" (1660), UGL, Euing 100, EBBA 31781.

24. "The Worlds Wonder" (1678-80), BL, Roxburghe 2.526-527, EBBA 31031. Some of the other woodcuts, however, feature individuals whose clothes do look slightly more exotic.

FIGURE 5. Detail from "A New Ballad of King Edward and Jane Shore" (1671). Roxburghe 3.258, EBBA 30969. © The British Library Board.

minds were adept at ignoring such inconsistencies as they sought to marry words and woodcuts.

Several of the how-de-do man's positive associations are brought together on "The Discontented Lover." In the text, a man laments the death of his beloved and turns instead to the good fellowship provided by hearty Royalist friends who drink healths to their king ("We look so divine, / When our noses do shine"). Two pairs of pictures illustrate the ballad: on the left, the how-de-do man approaches a welcoming woman whom we have already encountered twice (here, however, she is his lost love and the gap between them becomes poignant rather than promising); and on the right, he appears again, this time greeting a man who approaches him in similarly friendly fashion (the text leads us to believe that they will shortly make their way, arm in arm, to the alehouse). In this ballad, therefore, three species of love—heterosexual, homosexual, and political—are cleverly combined, and the how-de-do man brings his good reputation to bear on all of them.²⁵ In the disjointed England of the 1650s, with one king dead and another in exile, it is easy to understand why this song struck a chord with Royalists.

On other sheets, the how-de-do man's positive vibe allows him to represent a godly counselor, a heroic pirate, and that famous personification of ale, Sir John Barley-corn. In some cases, we might imagine him not as one of the characters in a song but as the narrator or ballad singer.²⁶ It is really up to us to decide; the designer places the pictures on the sheet with an idea in mind, but a secondary placement then occurs as each viewer/listener makes meaning of the song-sheet. On "The Plow-Mans Prophesie," the how-de-do man's cordial gesture seems to direct our attention toward the other pictures, three in total, from his own position directly over the opening line, "Come listen all you that to mirth are inclin'd."²⁷ In sum, the how-de-do man is a kind of friend to us and over time, perhaps, we learn to love him as he loves others.

This is not, however, the whole story. Just over one in eight of his appearances are far less admirable, a fact that raises interesting questions about their relationship to those surveyed so far. Sometimes he is an out-and-out villain. On "Strange News from Westmoreland," for example, he stars as the evil husband who falsely denies murdering his wife and then, following the mysterious arrival of an avenging angel in beautiful human form, has his neck broken by a correspondingly ugly devil. The picture scheme, composed of four recycled woodcuts, is highly creative (fig. 6). The how-de-do man and the now-familiar welcoming woman are presented, unusually and symbolically, with their backs to one another across the middle of the sheet, a clear inversion of the anticipated arrangement. Her normally romantic hand gesture becomes one of display or perhaps importunacy as she looks toward an elaborate little

25. "The Discontented Lover" (1624–80?), PL, Pepys 3.38, EBBA 21034.

26. "A Godly New Ballad, Intituled, A Dozen of Points" (1658–64), UGL, Euing 126, EBBA 31834; "The Famous Sea-Fight between Captain Ward and the Rain-Bow" (1624–80), UGL, Euing 108, EBBA 31815; "A Pleasant New Ballad to Sing Evening and Morn" (1674–79), UGL, Euing 282, EBBA 31896; "A Pretty Ballad of the Lord of Lorn" (1663–74), UGL, Euing 264, EBBA 31871.

27. "The Plow-Mans Prophesie" (1664–1703), PL, Pepys 4.297, EBBA 21959.

FIGURE 6. Detail from “Strange News from Westmoreland” (1662–68). Euing 342, EBBA 32030. By permission of University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

woodcut in which a group of excited individuals witness the appearance of an angel in the sky (the picture thus explains the angel's appearance more explicitly than does the text). On the right-hand side of the sheet, the how-de-do man has also found a new focus, and he marches with hand extended toward an image of the devil. Overall, this is a remarkable construction from recycled parts, most notable for the manner in which the old associations of the how-de-do man and his female companion are simultaneously recruited and redirected for dramatic effect.²⁸

"A Caveat for Cut-Purses," a song that began life on the lips of the ballad singer Nightingale in Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* (1612), is less cosmic in its themes, but it too presents the how-de-do man in an abnormally unflattering light. On the left of the sheet, he apparently plays a petty criminal approaching his victim, and his outstretched hand, normally offered in friendship, is now engaged in crime. The two images, viewed as a sequence, create the impression that the cutpurse's hand travels from the right side of the first picture into the left side of the second picture, where it hovers with menace. Perhaps the generally good credit of the how-de-do man is in play here, too, reminding us that criminals often deceive us by feigning affability.²⁹ He is no more admirable on "A Wonderful Example of God's Justice." This tells the sorry story of Jasper Conningham, who proposes an incestuous union with his godly sister and is promptly burnt to a crisp by a predictably angry God. It is surprising to see the how-de-do man here, but the significance of his appearance lies once again in the juxtaposition of old associations and a new tale. Following the pattern established on many romantic ballads, he is paired with the welcoming woman, whom he approaches with eager intent. In this ballad, however, she is revealed to be his sister, and thus the sexual undertones are wildly inappropriate.³⁰ Beyond these examples, the how-de-do man also appears as a decrepit old man who cannot make love to his youthful wife, a disreputable young man who seduces a virgin just "to get her Maiden-head," and a wicked excise man who meets his match in a thieving Essex girl.³¹ In all such cases, viewers may recall happier moments from the how-de-do man's life and conclude that all individuals, no matter how purposefully they walk, will sometimes lose their way.

Despite these examples, the overall balance is strongly positive, and consumers may therefore have tended to seek an optimistic interpretation of the how-de-do man's presence in the 11.5 percent of cases where the arrangement of pictures seems to leave his precise role more ambiguous. On "The Poor Folks Complaint," for example, he can be identified either as an uncharitable rich man or as the narrator who sings on behalf of society's struggling lower orders.³² In such situations, many viewers, drawing on existing knowledge of the image, may have been prepared to give the how-de-do man

28. "Strange News from Westmoreland" (1662–68), UGL, Euing 342, EBBA 32030.

29. "A Caveat for Cut-Purses" (1647–65), BL, Roxburghe 2.46–47, EBBA 30274. The victim of the crime appears to carry a musical instrument, though it could also be interpreted as a bag.

30. "A Wonderful Example of God's Justice" (1673–79), UGL, Euing 399, EBBA 32026.

31. "The Old Mans Complaint" (1640–74), BL, Roxburghe 3.196–197, EBBA 30843; "Jenny, Jenny; or, The false-hearted Knight" (1574–79?), BL, Roxburghe 2.221, EBBA 30682; "The Crafty Miss" (1671–1702?), PL, Pepys 3.274, EBBA 21288.

32. "The Poor Folks Complaint" (1678–88), PL, Pepys 4.340, EBBA 22003.

the benefit of the doubt. On “A Looking-Glass for a Christian Family,” he appears to be turning his back upon the devil, and it is tempting—particularly in view of his essentially good credit—to identify him as an adherent of virtue rather than vice (both types are alluded to in the text).³³ If ballad designers wish us to see him differently, then they must do something to shake our associations and assumptions. On another edition of the same ballad, it is intriguing to note that the how-de-do man has been made to speak: “My Gold is my God,” he declares, and thus we must reinterpret the composite scene in an instant. He is no longer rejecting evil but devoting himself to sinful materialism and doing the bidding of a devil who sends him on his way.³⁴ This is one of only two cases in which the how-de-do man is explicitly labeled, and the other example also undercuts his generally admirable reputation. On “The Rich Mens Joyes,” he appears as “The Rich Miser,” marching toward a lowly cottage in order to collect the rent that a cowering tenant can ill afford to pay (fig. 7). In this case, his outstretched hand is suddenly grasping and greedy. The most relevant lines, as so often, are situated immediately beneath the picture:

Here we may see how brave gallants can glory,
 having all things at their hearts content;
 But to the Poor ’tis a sorrowful story,
 when a harsh Landlord calls out for Rent.³⁵

It seems clear that a label is required in this instance precisely because we may otherwise be tempted by our prior knowledge to find a different interpretation. No publisher or printer ever identified this character explicitly as “the good fellow” or “the honest lover,” because most viewers, drawing upon what they already knew, could be expected to attach such labels for themselves.

All ballads took their place in a vast interconnected web. “Intertextuality” shows the way but takes us only so far; cross-references were forged not just by words but also by pictures (and melodies, too). To study a single ballad in isolation is therefore to risk missing a substantial proportion of its significance. These compositions were intricately linked, and the links were shifting and developing all the time, rather like the connections among the 100 billion neurons that make up the human brain. Many individual pictures were used, copied, and redeployed so many times that they steadily built up reputations and associations across the decades. The how-de-do man is a striking case, but a similar analysis could be applied to a wide range of comparable pictures. A common pattern saw the establishment of a primary thematic connection—romance in this particular case—followed by the juxtaposition of this dominant topic

33. “A Looking-Glass for a Christian Family” (1684–86), PL, Pepys 2.34, EBBA 20658.

34. “A Looking-Glass for a Christian Family” (1683?), BL, Roxburghe 2.283, EBBA 30740.

35. “The Rich Mens Joyes” (1688?), PL, Pepys 5.274v, EBBA 22436.

FIGURE 7. Detail from “The Rich Mens Joye” (1688?). By permission of the Pepys Library, Magdalene College Cambridge.

with other, contrasting narratives. On occasion, this experimentation may have been accidental, the product of hurry and carelessness on the part of those who set up ballads for the press. At other times, however, we surely see the purposeful workings of some highly creative minds, adept at making something new from something old. Either way, viewers faced the challenge of finding meaning in pictures that they already knew but now encountered afresh.

The absence of clear evidence on early modern pictorial cognition creates its own challenge, though we can learn much from the work of modern scientists on the vital roles played in visual processing by prior knowledge, association, familiarity, the compulsion to interpret, and the arousal that characteristically accompanies the perception of disjuncture.³⁶ In all these respects, ballad pictures of the seventeenth century appear to have been designed and deployed with stimulation in mind. This should really come as no surprise, but it is a feature of the genre that has often been overlooked. The mysterious individuals who selected from the printer’s stock the woodcuts that would adorn a particular song managed to cater to all manner of consumers, ranging from those whose engagement with balladry was slight and occasional through to those who counted themselves experts. One role of the pictures was, of course, to convert the former into the latter with a view to boosting future sales.

36. Shimamura, *Experiencing Art*, 16, 107–17, 119, 203–5. See also Robert L. Solso, *Cognition and the Visual Arts* (Cambridge, Mass, 1994); *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (London, 1998); and Richard Howells, *Visual Culture* (Cambridge, 2003).

In order to make the most of the pictures, viewers had to put in some serious cognitive work, though we can be sure that much of it was unconscious and automatic.³⁷ The evidence of the sheets suggests that seventeenth-century consumers were much more adept than we are at interpreting old pictures in subtly new roles and guises. They juggled prior associations with new input and worked inventively to seek out meaning, guided of course by the texts that they read, heard, or remembered (of course, this all tallies with recent work from various disciplines on the active consumer).³⁸ And because this process was complex, it was also highly variable and heavily dependent upon the precise nature of one's foreknowledge. When one studies a recycled ballad woodcut, it can be remarkably difficult to disregard completely the associations gathered during previous engagements with it. We *can* think anew, but the traces of what went before will always remain, haunting the mind. As we have seen, this combination can generate significance above and beyond that which is explicitly suggested by the text. The nature of our earlier engagement with a picture plays a vital role in conditioning subsequent encounters, and it also guarantees the possibility of multiple interpretations, varying either subtly or more radically. We can also assume that part of the appeal of ballad-consumption lay in the process of reinterpreting well-known woodcuts for new songs. Once again, cognitive scientists inform us helpfully that interpretative challenges are often highly rewarding because of the manner in which they engage the mind.³⁹

It is equally clear that early modern consumers were skilled at deciding whether to integrate or ignore apparent inconsistencies between text and picture. In the ballads and pictures considered already, we might note the thousand-year-old man who does not look a day over forty, the king who dresses like a mere subject, and the five women who represent nine maidens. Other ballads present more striking examples of such incongruity. In one, a dying man grins happily from his deathbed, perhaps because he shares it with an equally enthusiastic woman. Another song describes Shrewsbury as a wonderful place to live but is illustrated by a woodcut showing a town surrounded by cannons and clearly under siege.⁴⁰ Of course, it is very difficult for us to avoid a kind of gentle, chuckling mockery, a vaguely antiquarian admiration for such ham-fisted artistry. This may not, however, help us to understand how these pictures were once understood. It seems likely that minor discrepancies of detail were probably filtered out by viewers who were thoroughly accustomed to finding meaning in pictures that, to our literalist eyes, simply do not fit. Even now, experience suggests that the more one works with these images, the less conscious one becomes of the fact that the clothes worn by a poor countryman, for instance, look suspiciously like those of a wealthy London citizen. Such things cease to matter and even to register as the depth of one's immersion increases.

37. Shimamura, *Experiencing Art*, 101–2.

38. See note 4.

39. Shimamura, *Experiencing Art*, 16, 203–5.

40. “The Dying Mans Good Counsel” (1681–84), PL, Pepys 2.44, EBBA 20668; “Shrowsbury for Me,” PL, Pepys 2.135, EBBA 20755.

Arguably, the simple figures upon which this essay has concentrated were not really simple at all. Instead, repeated exposure to the same characters in different settings seems to have enabled the gradual emergence of picture-personalities that were surprisingly complex and rounded. We might contrast the rigidity of the actual carved woodblock—an essential characteristic—with the fluidity and flexibility of the pictures once they got out into the world. Though the physical appearance of the depicted individuals changed comparatively little, the viewer had to reinterpret woodcuts every time they took on new roles and interacted with other images, whether fresh or familiar. Perhaps these little figures were like actors, each playing many parts but specializing in those of a particular sort. And perhaps, like actors, they sometimes found it difficult to escape their associations (the origins of the term *type-cast* lie in the world of print, after all). Alternatively, familiar figures such as the how-de-do man may have felt more like old friends whom viewers had followed through the highs and lows of their lives. By 1700, the how-de-do man had enjoyed multiple romances, endured the loss of loved ones, and undertaken several foreign voyages. He had been both a pirate and a loyal sailor. He had met the king, but he had also clasped the devil's cloven hoof. In his darker moments, he had exploited the poor, though he had also spoken out on their behalf. He had sometimes spent too long in the alehouse. He was a faithful lover, yet he had also quarreled with several wives and murdered one. He had lived to a thousand and died young. He had also committed suicide at least twice. He had been burned alive and almost castrated. He was not an altogether stable and reliable friend, but he was at least interesting to know.

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