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Best-selling Ballads and their Pictures in Seventeenth-Century England

Broadside ballads were the cheapest form of literature available in seventeenth-century England and they have been extensively used by scholars in their efforts to understand the religious, political and social history of the period.¹ The diminutive woodcut pictures that adorned the majority of these single-sheet songs were very probably the most widely consumed and commonly recognised artworks of their age. Pictures ensured that balladry was not only textual, oral and aural but visual too, a fact that helps to explain the unusually impressive social reach of the form. In an ideal commercial scenario, the ballad-seller's ear-catching song drew consumers across the marketplace before the lure of a tiny picture brought them close enough for a purchase to be possible. Punters might feel the appeal whether they were literate or not. Within the ballad genre, there was on average an image for every seventy-seven lines of text, a far more impressive ratio than that found in books, pamphlets, plays, chapbooks or broadsides more generally.² Given that the inclusion of pictures complicated the production process and raised the retail price of ballads, this is clear evidence that publishers were conscious of the value of woodcuts. Writers who operated in other genres shared this awareness, and in 1648 the author of the pamphlet, *Mercurius Britannicus Alive Again*, asked 'how many Ballads would sell without a formall wood cut?' He added, 'These generall

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¹ An interest in the connections between balladry and other aspects of early-modern life stretches back at least as far as the series of 'ballad histories' written by Charles Harding Firth in the early twentieth century. More recently, ballads have featured extensively in a range of scholarly works, including: Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety 1550-1640* (Cambridge, 1991); Elizabeth Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England* (London, 1999); Bernard Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2003); Patricia Fumerton, *Unsettled. The Culture of Mobility and the Working Poor in Early Modern England* (Chicago, 2006); Patricia Fumerton and Anita Guerrini (eds.), *Ballads and Broadsides in Britain, 1500-1800* (Farnham, 2010), 207-28; Angela McShane, *Political Broadside Ballads of Seventeenth-Century England: a Critical Bibliography* (London, 2011); Mark Hailwood, *Alehouses and Good Fellowship in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge, 2014).

² There is little point in calculating an average for such disparate literary forms but it might be noted that the 1610 edition of John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, a work famous for its pictures, included one woodcut for every 3147 lines of text. In the 1577 edition of Raphael Holinshed *Chronicles*, a heavily illustrated work, the ratio was 1:879.

compliances must needs be observed, or else the people ... will not be brought to parley'.³ In other words, no pictures, no purchasers.

When stage-plays of the period feature ballad-sellers at work in the streets, their potential customers cluster closely around them, evidently intent upon seeing the songs as well as hearing them. In *The Triumphant Widow* by William Cavendish, Gervas jockeys for position close to the ballad-seller, bluntly warning another member of the throng to stand aside because 'you have no judgment'. His sister, Cicely, supports his efforts by pleading, 'Oh pray let Gervas see, he has a notable vein this way'. Gervas, having secured a suitable vantage point, exclaims, 'Oh Cicely, here's the brave Ballet you and I use to sing, I know it by the Picture'.⁴ In such works, ballad-connoisseurs are being mocked but we can nevertheless gather valuable clues regarding their mental habits. For Gervas and Cicely, picture recognition is a cue that leads them to sing the ballad in question. In this case, it is the woodcut that points the way towards interaction with both the text and the tune. A ballad was a composite or multi-media literary form, and 'knowing it by the picture' was for consumers one of several desirable skills.

In the light of such evidence, it is surprising that the woodcuts on ballads have often been treated dismissively. According to Natascha Würzbach, ballad illustrations were 'a crude affair and had little actual illustrative function with regard to the text'. The recycling of existing pictures, she argued, often led to 'a crass incongruence between illustration and text'. Würzbach therefore excluded pictures from her analysis, though she admitted that their presence on the original sheets must have helped to sell copies. Robin Ganev was even more curt, tackling the issue in a single sentence: 'Unfortunately, the analysis of images and music will have to be left to art historians and musicologists'. Even Margaret Aston, one of the least iconophobic of historians, argued that most ballad woodcuts 'did not (and do not) lend themselves to detailed study' because they were crudely drawn and 'intended more to convey atmosphere or attract purchasers than to contribute to the words'. They only fitted their texts 'in the most generalised way, and were often reused in other

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³ Anon., *Mercurius Britanicus Alive Again* (London, 1648), 2.

⁴ William Cavendish, *The Triumphant Widow* (London, 1677), 6-7.

ballads'. Contemporary consumers 'were most unlikely to have given great thought to the pictures'.⁵ Clearly, scholarly scepticism about the value and significance of commonplace ballad woodcuts is surprisingly widespread.

Fortunately, there is another strand within the ballad scholarship of the last few decades. Tessa Watt, concentrating on 'popular piety', has asserted the importance of woodcuts, demonstrating that 'godly' images on ballads were often directly descended from the sacred scenes that had been painted onto late-medieval church walls before being white-washed during the sixteenth century.⁶ Thus woodcuts help to explain the hybrid nature of the English Reformation. More recently, Alexandra Franklin and Theodore Barrow have urged us to contemplate the manner in which ballad images may actually have contributed to the generation of meaning. Franklin, concentrating on the 'long eighteenth century', detects distinctive 'modes of illustration' in which pictures fulfilled either 'reflective', 'narrative' or 'allusive' functions with respect to the texts that they accompanied. She calls ballad-printing 'an art of collage' and raises the possibility that recycled pictures may have accumulated associations as they moved between texts. In contrast, Barrow argues that each new ballad constituted a clean slate, requiring the viewer – aided by the printer – to reinterpret old pictures in new configurations. Against the common assumption, he argues that woodcuts were often carefully assembled on ballad sheets in order to provide a pictorial narrative that fitted the text quite closely.⁷

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⁵ Natascha Würzbach, *The Rise of the English Street Ballad 1550-1650* (Cambridge, 1990), 9; Robin Ganev, *Songs of Protest, Songs of Love. Popular Ballads in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Manchester, 2009), 14; Margaret Aston, 'Bibles to Ballads: Some Pictorial Migrations in the Reformation', in Simon Ditchfield (ed.), *Christianity and Community in the West: Essays for John Bossy* (Aldershot, 2001), 106-30.

⁶ Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety*, 171-4, 331-2. Watt's interest in visual continuities across the Reformation divide and her argument that Protestant England was not necessarily iconophobic are further developed in Tara Hamling, *Decorating the 'Godly' Household. Religious Art in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven, 2010).

⁷ Alexandra Franklin, 'Making Sense of Broadside Ballad Illustrations in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', in Kevin D. Murphy and Sally O'Driscoll (eds.), *Studies in Ephemera. Text and Image in Eighteenth-Century Print* (Lewisburg, 2013), 169-93, and 'The Art of Illustration in Bodleian Broadside Ballads before 1820', *Bodleian Library Record*, 17.5 (2002), 327-52; Theodore Barrow, 'From "Easter Wedding" to "The Frantick Lover": the repeated woodcut and its shifting roles', in Murphy and O'Driscoll (eds.), *Studies in Ephemera*, 219-39.

These writings take their place within a wider body of scholarship that insists increasingly upon the importance of the pictorial within the cultural lives of the seventeenth-century population. Carol Gibson-Wood shows that Londoners of middling rank formed a significant portion of the market for paintings during the late seventeenth century. Domestic walls were decorated with painted images of landscapes, portraits, animals, battles and Biblical scenes. Alexander Globe's case study of the London trader, Peter Stent, suggests that the market for prints made from etched and engraved copper plates was lively, broad and expanding in the mid-seventeenth century. Beyond the home, people saw pictures on the signs outside shops, on the walls of inns and taverns, on display at fairs, in church windows that had escaped the iconoclasm of the previous century, and in many more places besides. They also made their own art in the form of sketches on paper and graffiti on other surfaces.⁸

The task of investigating what contemporary viewers made of it all is, of course, rather more taxing. Recent work on pictorial culture beyond the ballad shares with Franklin and Barrow a wish to understand an early-modern aesthetic that may not be obvious to modern observers. On the use of woodcuts in books, the work of Ruth Samson Luborsky and James Knapp is of particular relevance to the present discussion. Luborsky argues that book-consumers may actually have enjoyed the experience of 'disjunction' when faced with pages upon which obvious text-image correspondence was absent. Similarly, Knapp cautions against the assumption that the repeated use of individual images to illustrate different sections of text within a book necessarily implies a lack of sophistication or attention on the part of publishers or those who worked for them. He suggests that 'direct illustration', in which the picture matches the text closely, may not have been to early-modern consumers quite the 'gold standard' that it has become to their modern descendants. We

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⁸ Carol Gibson-Wood, 'Picture Consumption in London at the End of the Seventeenth Century', *The Art Bulletin*, 84.3 (2002), 491-500; Alexander Globe, *Peter Stent. London Printseller circa 1642-1665* (Vancouver, 1985); Helen Pierce, 'Anti-Episcopacy and Graphic Satire in England 1640-45', *Historical Journal*, 47.4 (2004), 820; Tamling, *Decorating the 'Godly' Household*; Barry Reay, *Popular Cultures in England 1550-1750* (London, 1998), 59; Juliet Fleming, *Graffiti and the Writing Arts of Early Modern England* (London, 2001). For an overview, see Tara Hamling, 'Visual Culture', in Andrew Hadfield, Matthew Dimmock and Abigail Shinn (eds.), *The Ashgate Companion to Popular Culture in Early Modern England* (Farnham, 2014), 73-102.

need, he argues, to 'imagine other image-text relationships'. Moving further back in time, comparable suggestions have been made by Martha Driver in her work on woodcuts in the late-medieval books printed by Wynkyn de Worde. He developed 'a thoughtful pictorial methodology' that allowed images to 'trigger the memory of heard text', and his frequent redeployment of familiar woodcuts had the effect of setting up 'networks of meaning across a variety of contexts'.⁹ The search for a lost or elusive pre-modern aesthetic also characterises the best of recent work on the related culture of the early modern print. The writings of Helen Pierce, for example, are particularly helpful in suggesting that the repetitive and allusive use of visual tropes within graphic satire and other forms was a vital generator of meaning rather than evidence that artistic originality was lacking in the period.¹⁰

In the light of such work, it would surely be mistaken to assume that early-modern consumers responded to ballad pictures much as we might do, dismissing them as mere decoration on the grounds that they were often neither original nor specific to the all-conquering texts. Indeed, there is an obvious tension between the argument that pictures attracted purchasers and the assertion that nobody can have taken much interest in them. It is much more likely that early modern consumers applied patterns of expectation and understanding that do not exactly match our own. The challenge is to explore rather than implicitly deny the differences between modern modes of interpretation and those that probably prevailed in the seventeenth century. If we could see woodcuts through the eyes of Mistress Overdue and her brother, what might we learn about the features that made a particular example appealing or stimulating?

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⁹ Ruth Samson Luborsky, 'Connections and Disconnections between Images and Texts: the Case of Secular Tudor Book Illustration', *Word and Image*, 3.1 (Jan-March, 1987), 74-85; James A. Knapp, 'The Bastard Art: Woodcut Illustration in Sixteenth-Century England', in Douglas Brooks (ed.), *Printing and Parenting in Early Modern England* (Aldershot, 2005), 151-72, and *Illustrating the Past in Early Modern England* (Farnham, 2003), 24-5; Martha W. Driver, *The Image in Print. Book Illustration in Late Medieval England and its Sources* (London, 2004), 3, 19 and 35.

¹⁰ Helen Pierce, 'Anti-Episcopacy and Graphic Satire' and *Unseemly Pictures. Graphic Satire and Politics in Early Modern England* (New Haven, 2008). See also: Anthony Griffiths, *The Print in Stuart England 1603-1689* (London, 1998); Sheila O'Connell, *The Popular Print in England 1550-1850* (London, 1999); Michael Hunter (ed.), *Printed Images in Early Modern Britain. Essays in Interpretation* (Farnham, 2010); Malcolm Jones, *The Print in Early Modern England* (New Haven, 2010).

This article aims to further our understanding of the pictorial aesthetics that characterised balladry and, by extension, printed literature more generally. Of course, there is an evidential problem here, for consumers were not in the habit of explaining either how they used ballad pictures or what meanings they attached to them. We know that users and collectors sometimes cut the pictures from ballads but we do not know why.¹¹ And we know that they appreciated the presence of woodcuts; if they had not done so then the commercially motivated publishers would have saved themselves the costs. As this observation suggests, it is frequently necessary to compensate for the relative lack of evidence about consumption by concentrating instead on the habits and tactics employed by the producers.

A rather different type of compensatory evidence can be found in recent work by cognitive scientists on the ways in which humans process pictures. Arthur Shimamura's fascinating survey, *Experiencing Art: In the Brain of the Beholder*, contains much that deserves the attention of historians. Shimamura emphasises, for example, the vital role played by various forms of prior knowledge when humans engage with artwork of all sorts. Partly for this reason, we are drawn to the familiar, generally preferring pictures that we have seen before (these are easier to process because 'familiarity breeds fluency'). This seems to imply that those who insist upon originality as the cornerstone of aesthetic value may actually be fighting against their own hard-wired instincts (or misunderstanding those instincts by refusing to acknowledge the pull of the familiar even within a self-consciously *avant-garde* work of art). Our brains, Shimamura explains, generate 'schema', templates against which every new visual experience is assessed and stored. The creation of association is therefore fundamentally important, and attention is drawn to 'the enormous capacity we have for associative links'.¹² This emphasis seems to encourage historians of imagery to move

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¹¹ See below, XX.

¹² Arthur P. Shimamura, *Experiencing Art. In the Brain of the Beholder* (Oxford, 2013). This section draws upon the entire book but the quotations can be found on 107 and 119. See also Robert L. Solso, *Cognition and the Visual Arts* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994); Nicholas Mirzoeff (ed.), *The Visual Culture Reader* (London, 1998); Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (London, 1999); Richard Howells, *Visual Culture* (Cambridge, 2003).

further towards an awareness of the complex role played by repetition and reflection in the understanding of pictures by early-modern consumers.

According to Shimamura, we use our prior knowledge to make inferences about what we see, an activity that also involves the filling in of gaps. When viewing works of art, we interpret gestures, build characters and embellish scenes, looking, as it were, *behind* the pictures. If an image is accompanied by text – a title or a caption, for example – we allow the words to play a key role in guiding our understanding. We are programmed not only to seek out meaning in an artwork but also to find a way of resolving any discrepancies that we encounter. Interestingly, a sense of satisfaction is often linked to our success in negotiating a path through such apparent contradictions. An arousing picture is one that generates sufficient tension to challenge us but not so much that we give up and turn away. Our emotional response to a work of art is guided by the accumulated memories that we apply to it. Of course, no two people carry precisely the same prior knowledge, and thus the meaning located in or attached to a picture may vary considerably between individuals, depending on their previous experience of the specific image, its genre and, of course, life itself. And much of what we do takes place beneath the level of consciousness; our brains respond to pictorial input in ways that do not necessarily result in explicit awareness. There is no single region of the brain that manages all this; instead, the cognition of pictures involves ‘a pattern of brain activity at multiple sites’.¹³ The basic mechanics of this process have changed very little in thousands of years but the psychological and emotional impact of pictures is, of course, heavily conditioned by shifting cultural norms and expectations. We should therefore not assume that what early-modern viewers found in a picture coincides neatly with what we see there.

In the illustrated pages that follow, the focus will be on all available editions of several ballads from a carefully selected group of one hundred and twenty-five best-sellers.¹⁴ The current

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¹³ Shimamura, *Experiencing Art*, 23.

¹⁴ The present work is part of a project in which I am working with Angela McShane to identify and commission new recordings by The Carnival Band of 100 hit songs (images and performances will eventually appear on a website that accompanies a book). I would like to thank the Arts and Humanities Research Council for its generous financial support.

habit of many scholars is to dip into balladry in search of attractive evidence on particular topics of interest. Ballads have never been more accessible, and it is of course both understandable and commendable that researchers are exploiting the newly digitised resources. There is, however, a danger in assuming that all ballads were of equal significance. Low survival rates make conclusive statements on this subject difficult but we can say with certainty that some titles enjoyed huge success, either in the short term or the long term, while others flowered feebly and faded fast. Ideally, we should try to establish what distinguished a 'hit' from a 'miss', and the relative appeal of different pictures must have played its part in this. By looking particularly at highly successful ballads, this article aims to open this up as a topic for discussion (though we will also track some of the pictures outwards from the core group in order to assess their wider currency).¹⁵ Criteria for inclusion in this collection of hit ballads include the following: repeated appearances on the lists of best-selling songs that were sometimes compiled by the leading ballad publishers in order to protect their copyright; other evidence that licences were obtained from the Stationers' Company; the number of known editions and the density of their concentration in short periods of time; the number of extant copies; the survival of songs into oral tradition in the decades and centuries after 1700; and the capacity of individual songs to generate new titles for existing tunes. The ranking of each ballad within the list will be indicated in brackets after the title is given (where there is no such number, the ballad under discussion has been drawn from beyond the sample for comparative purposes).

1.

The seventeenth century was the great age of the ballad woodcut (printed songs of the sixteenth century, like those of the eighteenth, were less likely to include illustrations). In order to produce a

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¹⁵ On the subject of print popularity, see also Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2000), and Andy Kesson and Emma Smith, *The Elizabethan Top Ten. Defining Print Popularity in Early Modern England* (Farnham, 2013), introduction.

picture, the artist worked with assorted tools – most importantly gouges and knives – to create a raised image in a small block of wood by scraping away the background (a representative example held in the Huntington Library has a face measuring six by seven centimetres and a depth of two and a half centimetres).¹⁶ The fact that the resultant picture stood up from the block meant that it was vulnerable to damage, and artists knew that clear, simple lines would prove the most durable. Thus there was a limit upon the level of intricate detail that could successfully be depicted. Faces tended to appear relatively expressionless, and bodily gestures therefore took the lead in the representation of attitude. The woodblock, once carved, was inserted carefully into a frame, along with all the moveable type for the ballad's title and text. Next, the components were inked with dabbers, and the paper – held in a frame of its own – was placed on top of the container. Finally, the two frames were together passed into the printing press where sufficient force was applied to produce a reverse image of text and picture on the paper.

The artist, almost always anonymous, was just one link in a chain of possible influences upon the content of the picture. For first editions of a ballad, the author of the text may have been able to make suggestions in discussion with the publisher (the relative influence of the two parties must have depended on the nature of the deal struck between them). The publisher, having agreed terms and secured the required number of verses, recruited a printer and handed over a manuscript copy of the text. The printer then spoke to either the type-setter (if using an existing image) or the artist (if commissioning a new one) about the most suitable picture. It seems that woodblocks were generally the property of printers rather than publishers; this meant that printers who held impressive collections of images were likely to prove attractive to those who paid their fees. Once the ballad had been proof-read and corrected, the required number of copies was printed and sent back to the publisher for distribution. More indirectly, the ballad-sellers who subsequently carried

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¹⁶ The Huntington holds a small but remarkable collection of eighteenth-century woodblocks, some of which once belonged to the Newcastle printer, John White (the dimensions given are those of a block currently stored in box 16). On the woodcutting technique, see also Simone Chess, 'Woodcuts: Methods and Meanings of Ballad Illustration', in Patricia Fumerton (ed.), *Broadside Ballads from the Pepys Collection: A Selection of Texts, Approaches and Recordings* (Tempe, Arizona, 2012), 33-8.

the sheets out into the world may have reported back to the publisher on what was succeeding and what was failing in the public spaces – street corners, market places, fairs – where the product finally encountered the consumer. For subsequent editions, the process was similar except for the fact that those involved clearly worked from previous printed texts, making minor changes without necessarily consulting the original author. Thus the publication of a ballad involved the work of many hands, and it deserves to be considered ‘a social and institutional event’ rather than the achievement of a particular individual.¹⁷ In specific cases, it is usually impossible to determine exactly where the key decisions about pictures were taken, and the umbrella term ‘designer’ – though anachronistic – will therefore be used to cover all the various possibilities.

Some ballads ended up in private collections, their woodcuts effectively imprisoned within the covers of volumes compiled and controlled by privileged individuals. Many others circulated more widely, often going on public display before they eventually disintegrated or were appropriated for more mundane purposes (stoppers for jars, linings for containers, toilet paper). English people of the seventeenth century might encounter ballads and their woodcuts in the hands of chapmen, on the walls of alehouses, pinned up in the homes of neighbours or tacked to posts on urban streets. In the early nineteenth century and probably before, English urban centres had their ‘pinners-up’, individuals who attached ballads to lines of twine for display on walls and railings.¹⁸ Ballads and their pictures clearly had a significant public profile and few people can have been unfamiliar with them. And the best-known pictures of all must have been those that appeared on the most successful ballads.

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¹⁷ Jerome McGann, cited in Margreta de Grazia and Peter Stallybrass, ‘The Materiality of the Shakespearean Text’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 44.3 (Autumn, 1993), 274

¹⁸ Charles Hindley, *The Life and Times of James Catnach (late of Seven Dials) Ballad Monger* (London, 1878), 390.

Put simply, ballad designers could choose between specially-drawn pictures that illustrated songs explicitly and more general woodcuts that might be used to accompany a variety of different texts. In the paragraphs that follow, a distinction will therefore be made between pictures that were 'specific' and those that were 'generic'. Such categorisation is, of course, problematic because it tends to imply clearly-defined and mutually exclusive modes of illustration, thus drawing our attention away from the fluidity and variability that must, in practice, have characterised both the production and consumption of these pictures. As we shall see, publishers frequently combined the two types of picture on a single sheet, and a particular image might move from one category to another and back again. Moreover, two viewers, bringing different prior knowledge to a picture, might understand it in contrasting ways. In the interests of analytical clarity, however, there is merit in considering the two approaches in turn.¹⁹

The vast majority of ballad woodcuts – approximately 95% of those in the Pepys Collection – were not specially designed for the texts that they illustrated. An obvious driver here was cost; it was cheaper and quicker to use existing woodblocks than to commission new ones. The habitual recycling of images is a particularly interesting aspect of the subject because it challenges directly our own tastes and expectations when it comes to text-image relationships. Most of us would not be happy if we were to pick up a magazine in which the articles were accompanied by already-familiar pictures that did not portray the actual individuals or events described in the texts. This, however, is precisely how most seventeenth-century ballad woodcuts worked, and it is one of the principal reasons for the dismissive attitude adopted by several scholars. In fact, ballad designers did not simply grab woodblocks at random and insert them into the printing frame, 'regardless of their fitness or unfitness'.²⁰ Instead, those involved in the art of generic illustration – or, to put it rather differently, the art of enabling viewers to render the generic specific – were actually much more subtle, creative and resourceful than has often been acknowledged. On best-selling ballads in

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¹⁹ See also the distinction between 'decorative', 'general' and 'direct' images applied by art historians in their analysis of book-illustrations (for example, Luborsky, 'Connections and Disconnections', 74).

²⁰ Hyder E. Rollins, 'The Black-Letter Broadside ballad', *Publications of the Modern Languages Association of America*, 34 n.s. 27 (1919), 263.

particular, existing woodblocks were frequently deployed in a manner that was simple, direct and effective. Most editions of *Cupids Courtesy* (number 97) adopted a picture scheme in which a generic man in the prime of life is targeted by the flying love-cherub. This combination of two woodcuts nicely encapsulates the narrative that follows: a wanderer comes across Cupid in the woods and makes the mistake of doubting his power, hereby provoking the dispatch of an amorous arrow. The inequalities of scale between the two pictures may seem to us cack-handed yet the effect is, arguably, to emphasise the irresistible power of the boy with the bow.²¹

The combination of woodcuts that usually illustrated black-letter editions of *The Ballad of the Cloak* (number 3), one of the period's most successful political songs, suggests considerable ingenuity on the part of the designers (**figure 1**). This is an anti-Presbyterian song, first published in 1663 but particularly popular among Tories at the time of the Popish Plot in 1679 and for many years afterwards. Throughout this period, the song reminded conservatives of the damage that puritanical governance had allegedly done to the pillars of English society during the years between 1649 and 1660. At this time, the radical 'Cloak' had oppressed the Anglican 'Gown', and the ballad is couched in terms of the conflict between the two. The picture first appeared on an edition of 1679 and is a composite of two recycled images: at the top, a radical 'tub preacher' urges his listeners to 'Remember the good old cause' (in other words, the mid-century assault upon crown and church) while a little crowd listens eagerly; beneath them, an old image of a church, complete with a suitably gowned cleric, has been turned, symbolically, on its side. The first verses reiterate this pictorial point: listeners and readers are reminded that the Cloak 'tore Common-Prayers', 'voted down Prelates', 'pull'd down Organs' and the Creed, and 'threw to the ground' the Ten Commandments.²²

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²¹ *Cupids Courtesy* (W. Thackeray. J. M. and A. M., 1689-92, EBBA 34018). This article is illustrated by twelve examples but it makes reference to many more woodcuts and ballads than this. In all cases, I will therefore provide a reference that should enable readers to consult on-line facsimiles of the ballads under consideration. To minimise irritation, I will concentrate wherever possible on the excellent English Broadside Ballad Archive (EBBA), <http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/>. The quickest route to the ballads is by entering the EBBA number – 34018 in this case – into the 'Ballad Search' box. Where there is no EBBA image, the reader will be directed instead to the Bodleian Library Broadside Ballads (BLBB), <http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/ballads/>.

²² *The Ballad of the Cloak* (P. Brooksby, c. 1679, EBBA 20830). See also EBBA 31657, 30995 and 33297. For further discussion of this picture, see below, XX.

The printer, with limited resources upon which to call, has executed a neat trick by simply toppling his stock church, and one suspects that the novelty of this technique made some contribution to the enormous success of the song.²³ This and other woodcuts were designed to catch the flitting eye in a crowded marketplace but also to repay the attentions of those who felt minded to peer more closely.²⁴

When modern minds process early-modern ballad pictures, they may be confused by the fact that illustrations of clearly different individuals were sometimes used on two sides of the same sheet to depict a single character from the song's textual narrative. For example, the two male characters depicted on *The Essex Man Coozened by a Whore* – not one of our hits – have little in common, and yet they apparently play the same part in relation to the text.²⁵ Within our group of best-sellers, however, such radical disjuncture is actually quite rare. Indeed, there is evidence that leading designers were working towards greater consistency in this regard. Three successive editions of *A Pleasant New Song Betwixt a Sailor and his Love* (number 60) make the point. In the first, the gallant on the left and the soldier on the right already look compatible (though neither can represent the eponymous 'sailor' with precision).²⁶ In an edition from around 1660, the designer seems to have attempted to find two generic woodcuts that can plausibly be viewed as representations of the same individual in different poses.²⁷ In a still later edition, issued in the 1680s, another step is taken and now we see the same man on both sides of the ballad (**figure 2**). In this version, the generic pictures tell the story simply and clearly: a sailor, who has recently been to sea, returns to his initially disgruntled but ultimately welcoming wife.²⁸ We are looking, however, at

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²³ The church can be seen, right way up, on several contemporary ballads, including *A Looking Glass for all True Protestants* (F. Coles, T. Vere, J. Wright and J. Clark, 1679, EBBA 20692). See also EBBA 20756 and 21887. The upper woodcut had appeared many years earlier on the frontispiece of John Taylor's satirical pamphlet, *A Seasonable Lecture* (London, 1642). The gaggle of listeners can also be seen on EBBA 20756, 20780 and 20764.

²⁴ On the importance of remembering that people interact with images in a wide variety of ways, see Tamling, 'Visual Culture'.

²⁵ *The Essex Man Coozened* (H. Gosson, 1631, EBBA 20136). For discussion of the woodcut of Elizabeth I that also appears on this ballad (as the 'whore' of the title!), see below, XX.

²⁶ *A Pleasant New Song* (no. 60; F. C., 1624-80, EBBA 30249).

²⁷ *Pleasant New Song* (F. Coles, T. Vere and William Gilbertson, 1658-64, EBBA 31875).

²⁸ *Pleasant New Song* (unknown publisher, 1681-4, EBBA 21822).

two different versions of this exceptionally familiar walking man; the printing process, in which the paper sheet passed through the press only once, meant that two separate woodblocks had to be used in order to produce this effect. Some generic pictures were clearly so popular that an individual printer might have more than one version on the shelves.

Those who chose a ballad's woodcuts from existing stock were also conscious of the visual vocabulary of body-language that was depicted (balladry forms a rich resource that has yet to be thoroughly investigated by historians of gesture).²⁹ On the hit ballads and many others, men of doubtful masculinity were often pictured in slouching posture, leaning sideways, or raising both arms in helpless alarm, sometimes with the horns of the horrified cuckold neatly added.³⁰ All of these poses indicated the failure of proper masculine self-control. Virile men, in contrast, stood with their feet set unnecessarily far apart, or with their pelvises thrust slightly forward. Alternatively, they faced outwards with hand on hip, a posture that may not look particularly manly today but that clearly had combative overtones in Renaissance culture (it has been observed that Dutch paintings of the period, expressing an assertive spirit of independence, reveal 'an explosion of male elbows'). The stance was discouraged in conduct manuals but was nevertheless firmly established as a signifier of admirable, confrontational masculinity in the art of the period.³¹ The primary significance

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²⁹ On the history of gesture, see: Herman Roodenburg, 'The "Hand of Friendship": Shaking Hands and Other Gestures in the Dutch Republic', in Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (eds.), *A Cultural History of Gesture* (Cambridge, 1991), 152-78; Joaneath Spicer, 'The Renaissance Elbow', in Bremmer and Roodenburg (eds.), *A Cultural History of Gesture*; Kim M. Phillips, 'Bodily Walls, Windows and Doors: the Politics of Gesture in Late Fifteenth Century Books for Women', in Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al. (eds.), *Medieval Women. Texts and Contexts in Late-Medieval Britain* (Turnhout, 2000), 185-98; Zirka Z. Filipczak, 'Poses and Passions: Mona Lisa's "Closely Folded" Hands', in Gail Paster, Katherine Rowe and Mary Floyd-Wilson (eds.), *Reading the Early Modern Passions. Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion* (Philadelphia, 2004), 68-88; John Walter, 'Gesturing at Authority: Deciphering the Gestural Code of Early Modern England', in Michael J. Braddick (ed.), *The Politics of Gesture. Historical Perspectives* (Oxford, 2009), 96-143; Michael J. Braddick, 'Introduction', in Braddick (ed.), *The Politics of Gesture*, 9-35. Much of this research was inspired, either directly or indirectly, by the celebrated work of the sociologist Erving Goffman, especially *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959; repr. Harmondsworth, 1969).

³⁰ See, for example, the men who appear on *The Woman to the Plow; And the Man to the Hen-Roost* (no. 74; F. Grove, 1629, EBBA 32024), *The Cooper of Norfolk* (no. 125; Francis Grove, 1623-61, EBBA 30027) and *An Answer to the London Cuckold* (J. Deacon, 1685-88, EBBA 21787). On the unmanliness of the sideways neck, see Filipczak, 'Poses and Passions', 71 and 87.

³¹ *A Pleasant Jigg Between Jack & his Mistress* (P. Brooksby and associates, 1675-96, EBBA 21007); *Pleasant New Song* (no. 60; John Grismond, c. 1624, EBBA 20198); *A Wonder Beyond Mans Expectation* (H. Gosson, c.

of these gestures was well understood and designers were therefore free to apply a flexible creativity to the placement of their woodcuts, sometimes setting up a mild dissonance between image and text. An apparently confident man might appear, for example, on a ballad about a jilted male sweetheart or a cuckold, creating the impression that his self-belief is misplaced (tell-tale horns were sometimes added to his head in order to reinforce the point) or that misfortune stalks us all. The belligerence of the man with his hand on his hip thus shaded into the disgruntlement of the rejected lover, adding a new layer to the significance of the gesture.³²

In England, an interesting example appeared on one edition of the hit ballad, *A Constant Wife, a Kind Wife, A Loving Wife, and a Fine Wife* (number 54). Here, a stocky man faces boldly outward, one arm akimbo (**figure 3**). He has clearly been chosen to represent the brave central character of the text, who must do battle with his sweetheart's obstructive and unreasonable relatives in order to win her hand.³³ Interestingly, this woodcut had appeared many years earlier, during the intense literary controversy between Thomas Nashe and Gabriel Harvey in the 1590s. The two men exchanged abusive pamphlets for several years, each viciously undermining the breeding, masculinity and scholarship of the other, until the Archbishop of Canterbury ordered an end to the affair. In an anonymous book entitled *The Trimming of Thomas Nashe*, however, the woodcut in question depicts the man's feet in shackles and the accompanying text teaches us to see Nashe as anything but heroic. Instead, he is presented in prose and picture as a man of impudence and bluster who moves in and out of prison, deserving the mockery of all wise and responsible citizens. In the picture, upon which the text is a commentary, he wears a short coat so that his idiocy will be apparent to all, and his distinctive 'round' haircut and beardless face are the result of this literary 'trimming'.³⁴ The old woodblock had found its way from the Elizabethan printer of this

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1635, EBBA 20271); Joaneath Spicer, 'The Renaissance Elbow', p. 86. See also Filipczak, 'Poses and Passions', 83.

³² *A Good Wife, or None* (no. 77; Francis Coules, 1624-80, EBBA 30086); *The Jealous Old Dotard* (P. Brooksby, 1672-96, EBBA 34065).

³³ *A Constant Wife* (no. 54; F. C., 1631, EBBA 20181).

³⁴ Anon., *The Trimming of Thomas Nashe* (London, 1597), E2r. This work has been attributed both to Harvey himself and to the Cambridge barber, Richard Lichfield. On the quarrel between the two authors, see Maria

pamphlet, Edward Alde, to his Caroline successor, possibly his widow Elizabeth, and was then brought back to life for a new generation (in this case, it seems unlikely that many viewers of the ballad would have recalled the earlier work). In the meantime, it may have gathered dust following the ban imposed upon works related to the Nashe-Harvey controversy in 1599. We should also note the manner in which the latter printer has modified the woodblock, apparently in order to render it more suitable for its new home. In the text of *A Constant Wife*, the courageous husband-to-be is neither imprisoned nor mocked, and it seems that Nashe's original chain has therefore been carefully filed away. Thus a fool becomes a fighter (albeit one with a peculiar hair-style). This woodblock was re-used only occasionally after this date, though many other pictures demonstrated the virile vibe of any man who stood with hand on hip and feet apart.³⁵

Remarkably, this was not the only gesture-rich picture from the Nashe-Harvey controversy that found its way into seventeenth-century balladry. In fact, Nashe had struck first, including an alleged depiction of his adversary in a work of 1596 entitled *Have with you to Saffron-Walden*. Gabriel Harvey is presented as an elderly, downward-looking man in a tall hat and fashionable clothes, apparently reaching into his pocket. According to Nash's caption, he is 'readie to let fly upon Ajax'. This seems to suggest that Harvey is preparing to do battle like a hero of old, though he hardly looks like a warrior (there is also a lavatorial pun upon 'a jakes' or water closet). In the text, Nashe explains that he has deliberately depicted Harvey in 'round hose' rather than his customary 'Venetians' in order to plump up his ridiculously skinny physique and prevent him from looking 'like a case of tooth-pikes ... put in a sute of apparell'.³⁶ The woodcut is thus a figure of fun, depicting a man who may seek confrontation but who is ill-equipped to endure it. Harvey's manliness is restricted not by a chain but by the inadequacies of his physique and personality. For this reason,

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Teresa Micaela Prendergast, 'Promiscuous Textualities: the Nashe-Harvey Controversy and the Unnatural Productions of Print', in Brooks (ed.), *Printing and Parenting*, 173-95.

³⁵ The Nashe figure appeared, for example, on *The Married Mans Lesson* (John Wright the younger, 1634-58, EBBA 30343). In a variation on the 'jilted lover' theme, the woodcut here represents a jealous husband whose determination to confront his wife places his marriage at risk.

³⁶ Thomas Nashe, *Have with you to Saffron-Walden* (London, 1596), F4r. See also *Oxford DNB*, 'Thomas Nashe'.

the image required no modification by ballad designers and was used repeatedly on ‘hits’ and ‘misses’ alike, most often to represent individuals who were, in one way or another, unmanly and inadequate (**figure 4**). In several cases, the man of the woodcut appears, when considered alongside the accompanying text, to be searching his clothes for cash. Sometimes, he cannot find it because he has already squandered his estate on unseemly recreations. On other ballads, he seems to stand for any character who is guilty of money-grabbing (pickpockets, misers, lawyers).³⁷ In another thread of songs, he represents the downtrodden husband, ready to submit to his wife’s incessant demands for cash or her urge to take charge of the household keys.³⁸ It appears that the same block continued in use for around a century, by which time the figure that had once stood for Gabriel Harvey was falling victim to the iconoclastic woodworm of the Restoration period.³⁹

In seventeenth-century thinking, there stood in front of every weak man a strong woman, and on ballads of the period the Harvey image was regularly paired with a separate woodcut of a woman who raised one demanding arm while pointing an accusing finger with the other (**figure 5**). In 1644, a keen analyst of hand-movements described such finger-pointing as ‘a gesture of command and direction’, appropriate to ‘imperious masters’ who possessed ‘hautinesse of spirit, and an insolent humour of domineering’.⁴⁰ If the man with his hand in his pocket came to represent male weakness, the woman with the commanding fingers stepped eagerly forward to fill the power vacuum. She also led an independent existence, appearing on numerous songs in which she was associated with some measure of female assertiveness and anger. On one edition of *A Proper New Ballad, Intituled, The Wandring Prince of Troy* (number 1), she takes the part of Dido’s grisly ghost, summoning Aeneas to his death in punishment for his callous treatment of her. Beyond our list of hits, she stood defiant and alone on *The Cucking of a Scould*, a song about a highly anti-social woman

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³⁷ See, for example, *The Forlorne Traveller* (F. Coules, 1624-80, EBBA 30350) and *The Plow-Mans Prophetie* (J. Blare, 1664-1703, EBBA 21959).

³⁸ Examples include *The Country-Mans New Care Away* (unknown publisher, c. 1635, EBBA 30029). See also n. XX, below.

³⁹ Woodworm-holes are conspicuous on *The Plow-Mans Prophetie*.

⁴⁰ J[ohn] B[ulwer], *Chirologia, or, The Naturall Language of the Hand* (London, 1644), 162, 166.

who is ducked in a pond until, eventually and with much ado, she repents.⁴¹ In other ballads, this woodcut-woman seems to play a variety of mutually reinforcing roles: a cruel daughter-in-law; the angry wife of a philanderer; a misanthropic nurse; an unfaithful wife; and a deceitful trickster.⁴² She evidently became so well known that there were several slightly different blocks in circulation, and even the accidental destruction of her all-important right arm did not dampen her militant spirit. On more than one ballad, she appeared in two different forms, with arms in slightly different states of disrepair.⁴³ Thus she was an obvious candidate for the role of partner to our most unmanly man. In *Any Thing for a Quiet Life*, the pair represents a recently married couple, the wife domineering and the husband pathetically subservient. His feet are close together, hers far apart; a reversal of the postural ideal. Another ballad, entitled *A Man Cannot Lose his Money, but He shall be Mockt too*, used the same two pictures, and indeed the same tune, to tell the tale of a crafty woman who tricks an unsuspecting man out of his cash.⁴⁴ There are other examples too, some of which feature an old man dominated and abused not by his wife but by his children.⁴⁵ It is therefore clear that these two characters often travelled together, illustrating a variety of songs about relationships in which the balance of authority had been improperly inverted.

Cognitive processes, reinforced by the habitually connective thinking of the early modern age, make it extremely likely that woodcuts such as these built up reputations and associations as they passed between ballads over many years.⁴⁶ It seems undeniable that the pictures contributed to the meanings generated by these paper songs and that designers selected their cuts with a measure of care. The decision-makers were, however, constrained by the limits of their own stock

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⁴¹ *A Proper New Ballad* (no. 1; John Wright, c. 1630, EBBA 20276); *The Cucking of a Scould* (G. P., c. 1630, EBBA 20029).

⁴² *A New Ballad Intituled, The Old Mans Complaint* (H. G., 1630, EBBA 20004); *Knavery in All Trades* (F. Grove, 1632, EBBA 20073); *Sure my Nurse was a Witch* (H. G., c. 1630, EBBA 20091); *The Two Welsh Lovers* (unknown publisher, c. 1625, EBBA 20125); *A Man Cannot Lose his Money, but He Shall be Mockt too* (Francis Grove, c. 1625, EBBA 20219).

⁴³ See, for example, *The Cunning Age* (John Trundle, 1625, EBBA 20194).

⁴⁴ *Any Thing for a Quiet Life* (G. P., c. 1620, EBBA 20175); *A Man Cannot Lose his Money*.

⁴⁵ *A New Ballad Intituled, The Old Mans Complaint*.

⁴⁶ On this point, see also: Patricia Fumerton, 'Remembering by Dismembering: Databases, Archiving, and the Recollection of Seventeenth-Century Broadside Ballads', in Patricia Fumerton and Anita Guerrini (eds.), *Ballads and Broad-sides*, 19; Frances Dolan, 'Tracking the Petty Traitor Across Genres', in Fumerton and Guerrini (eds.), *Ballads and Broad-sides*, 161; and Franklin, 'The Art of Illustration', 331

and, presumably, by the time available to them. For this reason, there were certainly occasions upon which some of the more highly-charged woodcuts were called upon to play parts rather different from those to which they were accustomed. The woman with the raised arm appeared, for example, on *Truths Integrity* (number 124), a song with the sentimental and optimistic refrain line 'Love will find out the way'.⁴⁷ The text contains nothing to suggest that she might be bent on usurping her sweetheart's power or pocketing his cash. How might ballad consumers have responded to the presence of our wilful wife on such a song? At the individual level, a great deal depended upon the extent of one's prior knowledge and this, of course, must have varied considerably among consumers. Those who came to this ballad without any preconceptions might presumably have tried to imagine the woman in the picture reaching out warmly and eagerly towards her sweetheart. In contrast, those who already knew her as a scold or dominatrix may have found that their understanding of the song was coloured or unsettled by this awareness. Their task, in cognitive terms, was to deploy existing knowledge in order to resolve the tension between words and woodcut. A conventionally-educated male viewer might, for example, have been tempted to see not only a wholesome maiden welcoming a young man but the domineering wife that she might become if not subjected to the necessary masculine control. A range of possible interpretations was available, and the choices made instinctively or deliberately by viewers must have been conditioned heavily by the knowledge they brought with them to the encounter (including preconceptions linked to age, status and, most notably in this case, gender).

Ballad women were portrayed in other poses too, and some of them matched the wilful wife for assertiveness. One image that must have begun life as a picture of Elizabeth I – majestic and confident, with an orb in one hand and a sceptre in the other – came to suggest some combination of pride, disdain and deceit on many ballads (**figure 6**). Gesture, of course, is context-dependent, and body language that was appropriate in a queen was questionable in a commoner. The prominent elbows displayed in the picture are a case in point, suggesting either regality or

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⁴⁷ *Truths Integrity* (no. 124; F. Coules, 1624-80, EBBA 30290).

impudence. The variable significance of gesture meant that our miniature monarch was ambiguous, her meaning shifting with the context supplied by each successive song. In the hit ballads, her slipperiness was cleverly exploited by the designer who placed the image at the top of *The Woful Lamentation of Mistris Jane Shore* (number 67), the commoner who had famously become King Edward IV's concubine before suffering the inevitable 'miserable end'. The ballad, set forth 'for the example of all lewd Livers', invited both sympathy and condemnation, and the picture spoke silently of Shore's beauty and vanity, her achievements and her impudence. There may also be a visual joke here, for a 'queen' (or 'quean') was both a female ruler and a woman of disrepute.⁴⁸ On other ballads, the woodcut stood both for virtuous aristocratic ladies and for lowly prostitutes, but encountering it in either case cannot have been a wholly straightforward experience for knowledgeable viewers.⁴⁹ Somewhat surprisingly, the little queen carried her own baggage.

Most ballad women were, however, much less domineering in their body language than those encountered so far. Many carried fans and looked both demure and sympathetic. One very common woodcut presented a woman with soft hands, angled downwards in a gesture of romantic welcome that may also have implied submissiveness (**figure 7**).⁵⁰ She was the antithesis of the woman with her arm raised. There was always the potential for variation and instability, however, and the soft-handed woman could be both admirable and culpable, depending on whether the text described an exemplary courtship or one in which the maiden gave herself too readily to an ardent sweetheart.⁵¹ Even the female fan did not invariably serve merely as a status symbol or a signifier of romantically receptive femininity. Some of the pictures, when considered in connection to the texts, suggest that a woman's fan could represent both openness to male advances and some combination

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⁴⁸ *The Woful Lamentation of Mistris Jane Shore* (no. 67; F. Coles, T. Vere and J. Wright, 1663-74, EBBA 32019). This image bears a resemblance to several engraved prints of Elizabeth I and was probably based upon one of them. See Anthony Griffiths, *The Print in Stuart Britain*, 40-3. See also n. XX, above.

⁴⁹ *Constance of Cleveland* (no. 105; F. Coles, T. Vere, J. Wright and J. Clarke, 1674-9, EBBA 33266); *The Essex Man Coozened*. See above, n. XX.

⁵⁰ On this gesture, see B[ulwer], *Chirologia*, 41, 122.

⁵¹ She appears, for example, on the hit ballads *An Excellent Ditty, Called the Shepherds Wooing Dulcina* (no. 92; F. Coles and associates, 1674-9, EBBA 21673) and *A Lamentable Ballad of the Ladies Fall* (no. 32; W. Thackeray and T. Passinger, 1686-88, EBBA 20242). On the desirability of soft hands, see Filipczak, 'Poses and Passions', 83, and Spicer, 'The Renaissance Elbow', 115.

of modesty, suspicion or even hostility. One woman in particular appeared on several hit ballads in which the central female character was resistant, whether temporarily or permanently, to either her suitor or her spouse. In the woodcut, she faces sideways, a large fan held in both hands before her, covering her belly in a stance that interacted with each new text in order to generate variable meanings. In several cases, arguably, the fashion accessory is a defensive weapon as well as a lure.⁵²

The associations that accrued to individual pictures meant that, on occasion, woodcuts that might appear irrelevant or incongruent to us were probably nothing of the sort to knowledgeable seventeenth-century viewers. In any case, ballad-consumers were thoroughly used to pictures that were not directly inspired by the texts they accompanied but that nevertheless could be connected with them at some level. *A Wonderful Example of Gods Justice Shewed upon one Jasper Conningham* (number 73) is an interesting case. It tells the alarming story of a Scottish gentleman who made a pass at his godly sister and, in trying to persuade her to have sex with him, denied the existence of God. Not surprisingly, he was promptly consumed by divinely-directed flames.⁵³ The first picture on the ballad, however, presented a man being swallowed into the ground in front of alarmed onlookers (**figure 8**). It helped to make the general point that blasphemy was likely to have terrible consequences, and viewers clearly did not turn away in disgust merely because there was a disjuncture between the modes of dispatch in text and image. This picture was clearly recycled though it has not, so far, been traced to another source. The second woodcut to appear on the ballad was certainly well-known already, and the key to its significance can probably be found in its previous life. It appears to be a courtroom scene in which two competing men argue their case in the presence of a judge and lawyers. We can assume that it was originally designed specifically for a different story, and we know for sure that it then passed into the stock of generic illustrations. On several songs of the period – a number of which appear upon our list of hits – this woodcut had

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⁵² In various closely related versions, she appears in this less than receptive role on *A Good Wife or None* (no. 77; F. Coles, T. Vere, J. Wright and J. Clarke, 1674-9, EBBA 21715), *The Woman to the Plow and The Man to the Hen-Roost* (no. 74; J. Wright and associates, 1681-4, EBBA 21764) and *A Courtly New Ballad of the Wooing of the Fair Maid of London by King Edward* (no. 37; F. Coles, T. Vere and J. Wright, 1663-74; BLBB Douce Ballads 2.178b).

⁵³ *A Wonderful Example* (no. 73; J. Wright, J. Clarke, W. Thackeray and T. Passinger, 1681-4, EBBA 20784).

acquired a general association with divine judgement, usually of a fairly graphic sort. It had for several decades been firmly attached to two extremely successful songs in particular, though it does not seem to suit either of them precisely: at number 31, we have *The Judgement of God Shewed upon on[e] John Faustus*, in which the famous German conjuror sells his soul to the devil and ends up splattered all over the walls of his own hall; and at number 26, *A Most Notable Example of an Ungracious Son*, featuring a man who disowns his poor old father and so is rewarded with a pie in which the wholesome meat he planned to eat has been miraculously transfigured into a colony of 'loathsome Toads'.⁵⁴ Viewers of the ballad about the incestuous Scottish atheist were not so much being fobbed off with an old and irrelevant picture as invited to connect Jasper Conningham's tragic case with examples of other misguided individuals who had offended God and paid a high price.

Despite the movement of pictures from sheet to sheet, it is also apparent that generic woodcuts sometimes formed strong bonds with some of the individual songs upon which they appeared. Publishers and printers experimented until they found satisfying pictures for each ballad but they then stuck loyally to their chosen woodcuts on subsequent editions. Even when different publishers issued editions of the same song, they used the woodcuts that had worked in the past or found close imitations. This is a crucial indicator of the deep conservatism that seems to have characterised the leading ballad publishers. Designers were extremely reluctant to meddle with a successful format, partly because to do so might incur additional costs but also, presumably, because they understood that the purchasing public did not necessarily thirst after novelty and innovation. An encounter reported by the antiquarian William Hone in 1823 suggests that this attitude endured for many decades. He attempted to buy some old wood blocks from a publisher of broadsides, having been attracted by the 'rude' quality of their execution. To Hone's surprise, the publisher was extremely reluctant to negotiate, saying 'he was afraid it would be impossible to get any of the same kind cut again'. Hone therefore offered to commission new wood blocks, 'much better engraved', and to swap these for the originals. To this, the publisher said, 'Yes, but better are

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⁵⁴ *The Judgement of God* (no. 31; F. Coles, T. Vere and W. Gilbertson, 1658-74, EBBA 31853); *A Most Notable Example* (no. 26; A. M., 1684-95, EBBA 33322).

not so good; I can get better myself: now these are old favourites, and better cuts will not please my customers so well'. He only agreed to part with the original blocks when Hone assured him that the replacements could be precise and indistinguishable copies rather than 'better' versions.⁵⁵

The process by which an 'old favourite' emerged can be traced by considering the surviving seventeenth-century editions of *The Ballad of Constant Susanna* (number 20). The first of these carried a single generic picture of a woman with a fan when it was published by Henry Gosson, around 1624. Subsequent publishers decided that such a successful song, telling the Biblical story of Susanna and the two lecherous elders whom she resisted, deserved a more elaborate pictorial scheme. In 1640, the left side of John Wright's edition included a carefully-devised grouping of three little generic figures: in the context of the song, we see a modest Susanna in her garden, uncomfortably trapped between two older men, one of whom extends an arm in her direction. And on the right, there is that familiar courtroom scene again, suggestive of the judgement – both divine and earthly in this case – that marks the climax of the tale. Ten years later, around 1650, the format emerged that was to dominate editions of this ballad for the rest of the century. Again, it seems that the pictures were recycled from a so far unidentified source rather than drawn specifically, though they were clearly chosen with some care. On the left, the textual episode in which Susanna is approached and bullied by the elders in her garden is represented by a forest scene in which a man and a woman, accompanied by their dog, encounter what looks like a travelling chapman. The fit is far from precise, but the outdoor setting, the number of individuals and their sex ratio are at least appropriate. Then, on the right, we have a picture in which a nearly naked woman presents some sort of fruit to a seated figure while a Roman soldier and a king look on. Again, the match with the ballad is approximate rather than precise. Susanna does indeed take her clothes off in the song, planning to wash herself in the privacy of her garden. And she is watched by two men, hidden rather more effectively than those depicted here. There is, furthermore, a reference to fruit in the song; the wicked deceit of the elders is eventually exposed when they contradict one another about

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⁵⁵ William Hone, *Ancient Mysteries Described* (London, 1823), 100-01.

whether Susanna was bathing beneath a mulberry bush or a pomegranate tree.⁵⁶ This picture, despite what might look to us like a number of imprecisions, was the one that stuck on the ballads and, presumably, in seventeenth-century minds. It seems likely that part of the appeal of such images lay in the challenge presented to viewers who faced the task of finding meaning for themselves in woodcuts that had their origins elsewhere.

More broadly, images of Susanna in a variety of forms were extremely common in early-modern English and European culture. Her story appeared on the walls of alehouses and aristocratic mansions alike, and auction catalogues of the period regularly listed pictures of ‘Susanna and the elders’.⁵⁷ The popularity of this tale and the associated images was perhaps rooted in its capacity to provide both a moral exemplar for young women and a titillating thrill for old men. The apparent dominance of the latter possibility in paintings and prints of the period may in part have influenced the decision of ballad artists to undress Susanna during the course of the seventeenth century. When the woodcut of the naked woman was used on other ballads, however, it sometimes retained its association with an unsettling mixture of purity and eroticism.⁵⁸ Intriguingly, Susanna’s story, her picture and her melody all carried these somewhat contradictory suggestions, a fact that may help to account for their combined popularity.⁵⁹

Not surprisingly, printers watched the field and commissioned copies of generic images that had already enjoyed success. In some instances, there were several distinct versions of a familiar

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⁵⁶ *The Ballad of Constant Susanna* (no. 20; H. Gosson, 1624, EBBA 32077); *An Excellent Ballad Intituled, The Constancy of Susanna* (John Wright, c. 1640, EBBA 30043, and J. Wright, J. Clarke, W. Thackeray and T. Passinger, 1681-4, EBBA 20234). It is notable that the ballad narrative is highly faithful to the Biblical account of Susanna’s ordeal.

⁵⁷ Donald Lupton, *London the Countrey Carbonadoed and Quartred into Severall Characters* (London, 1632), 127; at Little Moreton Hall, Cheshire, an Elizabethan frieze depicting Susanna and the Elders has survived; *A Catalogue of Divers Excellent Italian Pictures* (London, 1686), 2. There were, of course, numerous artistic representations of Susanna in the period, including paintings by Rubens, Rembrandt and Van Dyck (several of these were imitated and issued in England as engraved prints). On the appearance of Susanna in domestic decoration, see Tamling, *Decorating the ‘Godly’ Household*, 134-37.

⁵⁸ See, for example, *Tom and Will* (J. Wright, J. Clarke, W. Thackeray and T. Passinger, 1681-4, EBBA 21244).

⁵⁹ The melody apparently began life in association with the famous Elizabethan ballad, *The Pangs of Love*, composed by William Elderton.

woodcut in existence during the same period.⁶⁰ Viewers were probably unaware of the subtle differences that distinguished one example from another; printers and publishers, after all, invested considerable effort in ensuring the similarity of their own woodcuts to existing and winning models. On other occasions, there is evidence that printers and their artists conducted running repairs on woodblocks of proven value in order to prolong their lives and avoid the costs of producing full replacements. The little frames that often surrounded the pictures were particularly vulnerable to damage and were sometimes filed away entirely, and minor details were adjusted for some combination of aesthetic and practical reasons. *The Ballad of the Cloak* (number 3), already considered above, was so successful that it was issued by rival publishers during the last third of the seventeenth century. If we compare the editions issued by Philip Brooksby (1679) and Anthony Milborne (1693-95), it is apparent that these publishers – though in competition – were using the same woodblock, either because they engaged the same printer or because the item had changed hands. We can also see that Milborne’s printer has modified this deteriorating woodblock in the years between the two editions. In the later version, the tub-preacher’s words have been inverted, the vegetation outside the front of the toppled church has been replaced by a conventional section of decorative bordering and – behind the building – the fence, the horseman and the dog have all been removed.⁶¹

The loyalty of designers to existing pictures even applied to woodblocks that had, over the years, become damaged almost beyond recognition. An edition of *The Virgins A.B.C.* (number 101) was issued during the 1680s with an image so badly smudged that modern eyes find it difficult to interpret. Its outline, however, would have been immediately familiar to virtually all ballad-consumers of the seventeenth century. This was a tried and trusted picture of a maiden with a fan, and it had appeared, in slightly different versions, on all known editions of this song since the 1630s

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⁶⁰ I have so far counted thirteen distinct versions of the walking man who appears on many ballads of the seventeenth century (see **figure 2**).

⁶¹ *Ballad of the Cloak* (no. 3; P. Brooksby, 1679, EBBA 20830; and A. M., W.O. and T. Thackeray, 1693-5, EBBA 31657). The second version can be seen in **figure 1**.

(it had also been seen on many other songs).⁶² This model maiden adorned *The Virgins A.B.C.* not because the printer had nothing else available – all ballad printers held several woodblocks carved with the images of young women – but because it was judged that customers expected to see this very picture with this very song.

3.

Consumers were evidently happy to accept the challenge of finding meaning in images that were not specially drawn for the songs upon which they appeared. This was not, however, the only approach adopted by designers. Indeed, it is becoming clear that purchasers, though ready to work with generic images, actually preferred ballads on which the tie between words and woodcuts was more direct and obvious. The specific picture seems to have represented the gold standard, after all. The exercise of devising a list of best-sellers demonstrates that chart-toppers were much more likely than other ballads to feature specially-designed pictures. In fact, this is the single clearest difference between highly successful songs and balladry as a whole. Forty-three per cent of our hit ballads in all known editions carried woodcuts that illustrated their songs directly (the figure was as low as ten per cent for ballads in general). Furthermore, there is a clear trend within the list: sixty-five per cent of the top twenty had specific pictures, falling to thirty per cent in the lower reaches of our chart.

Unfortunately, extremely low survival rates for the decades before 1640 often make it difficult to investigate the stages by which a song acquired a specific picture. Did such pictures help to turn individual ballads into hits or did publishers instead react to the success of an early edition, perhaps with generic pictures or no pictures at all, by deciding to invest unusual resources in the illustration of subsequent versions? The latter pattern is suggested in the case of *A Good Warning for all Maidens by the Example of Gods Judgement Shewed on one Jermans Wife of Clifton, in the*

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⁶² *The Virgins A. B. C.* (no. 101; J. Wright, J. Clarke, W. Thackeray and T. Passinger, 1681-4, EBBA 20236). For other versions, see EBBA 30292, 31980 and 31981.

County of Nottingham, who Lying in Child-bed, was Born Away, and Never Heard of After (number 13). To cut a long song short, a beautiful maiden becomes engaged to a young man named Bateman, then breaks her word and his heart by deciding to wed instead a much wealthier and older man called Jerman. Bateman, inconsolable, hangs himself outside the woman's front door on the day of her nuptials. His ghost then haunts the young wife but she is initially protected from harm by the fact that she is pregnant. Once the baby is delivered, however, Bateman's ghost intervenes immediately to engineer her mysterious nocturnal disappearance. The first known edition of this ballad, dating from around 1650, was issued without a picture. But all subsequent versions featured two specially-drawn pictures (**figure 9**): on the left, husband and wife converse while Bateman hangs; on the right, his ghost, taper in hand, gesticulates at the foot of the bed while a flying fiend carries off the woman who should have been his wife.⁶³ In combination, the two woodcuts provide graphic pictorial reinforcement of the textual and musical 'warning'; the young woman who breaks a promise cannot expect a good night's sleep.

This and other examples demonstrate conclusively that considerable time and creative energy were invested in the production of memorable images for a surprising number of these chart-topping songs. One method was to compress the narrative of a ballad into a single pictorial frame by including in one picture as many details from the story as could be accommodated. The woodcut that appeared on *The Lamentable and Tragical History of Titus Andronicus* (number 34), a spin-off from Shakespeare's play, forms a kind of gory composite representation of the story featuring a variety of details (**figure 10**): the hunting trip that resulted in the murder of Titus' prospective son-in-law; the brave action of his daughter Lavinia who, having been raped and mutilated by the Empress' two sons, tells her story by scratching out letters in the sand, holding a stick between her now handless arms; the live burial of the evil Moor, lover to the Empress; the episode in which Titus slits the throats of the Empress' evil sons while Lavinia collects their blood in a

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⁶³ *A Warning for Maidens* (no. 13; unknown publisher, c. 1650, EBBA 30336); *A Good warning for All Maidens* (F. Coles, T. Vere and W. Gilbertson, 1658-64, EBBA 31836); *A Godly Warning for all Maidens* (W. Thackeray and T. Passinger, 1686-88, EBBA 20238). See also EBBA 33905 and 33907.

pot; and finally, in a special box at the bottom right of the picture, the climactic feast during which Titus serves the Empress a giant pie filled with the flesh of her own sons.⁶⁴ Viewers presumably amused themselves by picking out the gruesome details as they got to know this violent thriller.

A different, but equally effective, approach was to highlight in the picture a single, key moment from the narrative. *A Worthy Example of a Vertuous Wife* (number 55) tells the classical tale of Pero and her father Cimon, though it names neither of them. The song describes a feisty but loyal daughter who, alone among her sisters, comes to their father's rescue when he is imprisoned and deprived of all food by Rome's tyrannical Emperor. Every time she visits him, she is searched by the guards to make sure that she is not carrying any food packages. She gets around this problem by feeding her hungry father 'with Milk from her own Breast'. In this manner, she keeps him alive for a year and a day until, eventually, the Emperor relents and pardons the miraculously irreducible old man. Not surprisingly, the woodcut artist picked out the breast-feeding moment as the most compelling focus for his image (**figure 11**). In the woodcut – a downmarket counterpart of famous paintings by Rubens, Caravaggio and many others – the duped guards stand nattering over to the left. In the centre, a little girl gestures proudly towards her ingenious mother, while her grateful granddad sucks away happily. The watching child is not mentioned in the text at all, but is perhaps included here in order to explain the heroine's ability to produce milk (it is not uncommon for pictures to contribute supplementary information). The child's presence also serves to portray the woman as an exemplary feminine provider, sandwiched between her needy offspring and her helpless father. Perhaps this reduces the hint of a threat to conventional gender relations posed by a woman who has defied the Emperor and who, we are told, had previously offended her father by 'matching against his mind'. The picture presents a perfect, if peculiar, moment of reconciliation.⁶⁵

Specially-drawn pictures, not surprisingly, were even more likely than generic images to establish strong connections with their individual songs. The image of the breast-feeding woman appeared, for example, on all eight surviving editions of this ballad from the seventeenth century,

⁶⁴ *The Lamentable and Tragical History* (no. 34; J. Clarke, W. Thackeray and T. Passinger, 1684-6, EBBA 20800).

⁶⁵ *A Worthy Example* (F. Coles, T. Vere and William Gilbertson, 1658-64, EBBA 32041).

and it has not been found on other songs. Specific pictures also matched their generic counterparts in continuing to appear well after the blocks had sustained significant damage. *A Proper New Ballad, Intituled, The Wandring Prince of Troy* (number 1) recounts the story of the ill-fated romance between Dido and Aeneas. Early editions, as we have seen, carried only generic images, but from around 1660, many versions displayed a specially drawn woodcut in which the ghost of Dido appears to Aeneas, summoning him to accompany her into the spirit-world. We might note in passing how the most relevant verse ('Aeneas, quoth this grisly ghost ...') is situated right beneath the picture. This was a common practice that suggests, once again, the care that was often taken in the presentation of these supposedly simple songs. The same picture was still in use thirty years later, by which time a part of the block had fallen off and woodworm had peppered what remained of it with burrowing holes. Dido and Aeneas now seem to stand in a most unlikely snowstorm.⁶⁶

The unwillingness to change a successful pattern is also seen, rather surprisingly, in a minority of highly successful ballads that bore no pictures at all. Three of the songs in our chart (numbers 2, 19 and 53) were all published in several editions and have survived in multiple copies, none of which carries a woodcut.⁶⁷ It is difficult to explain this, except by suggesting that those involved in the production of these particular ballads sometimes considered it risky to 'improve' songs that were already highly successful. Of course, the addition of a picture would also have made necessary a significant re-arrangement of the text in order to create space, but it has already been observed that such minor modifications were nevertheless executed on repeat editions of several other songs. In the cases of the ballads that never carried woodcuts, it is as if picturelessness had become so characteristic a feature that no change was considered necessary or desirable.

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⁶⁶ *A Proper New Ballad* (no. 1; F. Coles, T. Vere and W. Gilbertson, 1658-64, EBBA 31866); *An Excellent Ballad, Intituled, The Wandring Prince of Troy* (F. Coles, T. Vere and J. Wright, 1663-74, EBBA 31770; and J. Clarke, W. Thackeray and T. Passinger, 1684-6, EBBA 20262).

⁶⁷ *A Memorable Song upon the Unhappy Hunting in Chevy Chase* (no. 2; H. G., 1630, EBBA 20279). See also EBBA 30408, 31689 and 31673; *[A Pleasant] New Ballad of the Mery Miller of Mansfield* (no. 19; unknown publisher, 1584-1627, EBBA 32229). See also EBBA 33170, 30116, 31378, 20252, 30162 and 33052; *An Excellent Ballad of George Barnwel* (no. 53; F. Coles and associates, 1658-64, EBBA 31764). See also EBBA 20778, 30382 and 32718.

It is clear, once again, that the strong ties between specific pictures and their songs led printers to commission their own copies of proven woodcuts. *The Norfolk Gentleman his Last Will and Testament* (number 4) presents the story that later became known as ‘The babes in the wood’ and its main woodcut adopted the ‘all in one’ tactic that was also used on the ballad about Titus Andronicus (**Figure 12**). The artist found room for a wealth of detail: the ruffians, hired to kill the children, attack one another; only one of them survives the fight, and he is later hanged; the deserted infants die in the woods and are thoughtfully covered in leaves by robins; and the wicked uncle’s barn goes up in flames while his livestock drop dead. Incidentally, the prominence of the little feathered undertakers in later ‘folk’ versions of the song may indicate the power of pictures to bring particular incidents to the fore and, more generally, to assist consumers in the task of committing ballads to memory.⁶⁸ The picture was later copied for another printer, though all the details were reversed, presumably because the unidentified carver worked from a printed edition, either forgetting or not caring that the picture would be flipped in the production process.⁶⁹ The new version, with one fewer flying birds and black rather than white pigs, was itself subsequently re-used and also became the model for additional copies.⁷⁰ This was clearly an image that ballad-printers needed to hold in stock, and it continued to appear in various versions well into the eighteenth century.⁷¹

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Scholars have often underestimated or overlooked ballad picture. Far from being mere decorations, crassly inappropriate to their texts, these images were stimulants to engagement and aids to

⁶⁸ On the persistence of the robins, see Berton Levi St. Arnaud, ‘Emily Dickinson’s “Babes in the Woods”: A Ballad Reborn’, *Journal of American Folklore*, 90.358 (1977), 430-41.

⁶⁹ *The Norfolk Gentleman* (no. 4; F. Coles and associates, 1658-64, EBBA 31809).

⁷⁰ EBBA 20246, 31808 and 33762. For later versions, see EBBA 31290, 33763 and 33764.

⁷¹ For a stimulating discussion of the manner in which later publishers copied or purchased one another’s wood blocks, see Barry McKay, ‘Cumbrian Chapbook Cuts. Some Sources and Other Versions’, in Peter Isaac and Barry McKay, *The Reach of Print: Making, Selling and Using Books* (Winchester and New Castle, Del., 1998), 65-84. I am extremely grateful to the author for supplying me with a copy of this piece at short notice.

memory. They were thus a vital and integral feature of the form. This study suggests that a 'hit' picture was, above all, one that readily made connections beyond itself, like a neuron firing in a busy brain. This characteristic was also a feature of balladry as a whole but the best-selling songs upon which this article has concentrated presented pictures that were particularly rich in the links that they fostered. Most obviously, the best-loved images enabled viewers to find close parallels in the accompanying text so that the woodcut – even if it was recycled – could be interpreted as an integral feature of the ballad as a whole. Clearly, these connections were strongest and most obvious when the pictures had been specially commissioned, and the presence of such images distinguished the top ballads from the rest more conclusively than any other feature. Consumers clearly preferred specific images but the scope for links between text and woodcut was an equally important characteristic of ballads with generic images. Where images were not specially-drawn, consumers had to put in more effort, working to find connections for themselves. Having said this, it is also clear that ballad designers did what they could to help, carefully selecting and placing woodcuts in order to facilitate integrated interpretation. It was not expected, however, that the details included in the pictures would match precisely those indicated by the text. Queen Elizabeth could represent a commoner, and a pedlar might stand in for one of the elders of Babylon. It seems that consumers must have chosen, often instinctively, whether to factor in or filter out the incongruities of dress, age or gender that met their eyes. In cognitive terms, they took on the stimulating challenge of processing discrepancies and resolving tensions.

At another level, most woodcuts also invited viewers to connect one ballad with another by recalling – whether consciously or unconsciously – the previous appearances of a particular picture. Prior knowledge was continually in play. Frequently, it reinforced and amplified the textual content of a song, for woodcuts tended to become associated over time with distinct themes and repeated messages. Not infrequently, seemingly incongruent pictures can actually be understood as invitations to make comparisons rather than mere attempts to save money. Designers created connections even as they cut corners. At other times, memories of an image went some way

towards complicating and thus destabilising the text because there were tensions between one pictorial incarnation and another. The inherent ambiguity of gesture, a consequence both of its wordlessness and its dependence on context, meant that a woodcut might take on different meanings when placed alongside different texts. It seems unlikely, however, that existing associations can have been easily eradicated, especially when they were deeply rooted. The slate could never quite be wiped clean. Immersion in balladry can still generate an experience of uncertainty and instability when the component parts – text, tune and picture – are newly assembled in a manner that does not quite conform with expectation.⁷² As a result of this ambiguous potential, a picture might add something fresh to a song rather than simply shadowing the text. Different viewers, moreover, must have experienced different sensations, depending upon the depth and range of their experience within balladry. The true connoisseur, the individual with a ‘notable vein’ for the genre, was presumably someone who, like a modern jazz aficionado, picked up references that others missed. He or she deserved a place at the front of the crowd.

Successful ballad pictures also connected with the broader life-experiences of consumers; this presumably explains the heavy presence of characters, interactions and gestures drawn from contemporary social life. Of course, there was room for the exotic too – moors sinking into the ground and ghosts abducting young wives – but such scenes were out-numbered by maidens with fans and ordinary men going about their business. Their clothes were, admittedly, much grander than was normal – everybody likes to dream – but in their body language and behaviour most woodcut characters felt accessible. And behind or around them, artists positioned numerous trees, clumps of grass, contemporary buildings, boats and bedsteads. There was something homely about much of the matter depicted, a characteristic that was to a degree dictated by the relative artistic simplicity associated with the wood-carving technique. Overall, the connectability of this genre gave viewers every opportunity to integrate the images they encountered into the world they already knew. Novelty had its place but a sense of familiarity was what mattered most. It aided cognitive

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⁷² On the role of ballad tunes in generating meaning, see Christopher Marsh, *Music and Society in Early-Modern England* (Cambridge, 2010), ch. 6.

fluency and it also helped consumers to identify with the characters described in words and depicted in woodcuts. In a play entitled *The London Chaunticleres*, this quest for a personal connection motivates a lowly tinker to ask the ballad-seller for a love-song with 'a picture upon it like me'.⁷³ The tinker's enquiry raises the possibility that, for some consumers, the woodcut mattered at least as much as the text, particularly if some personal significance could be found within it.

Ballad woodcuts took their place in a wider pictorial culture that was evidently developing rapidly in the decades between 1640 and 1700. Images on ballads only became a standard feature of the genre in the 1620s, but by the middle of the century they were firmly established. The proliferation of woodcuts on ballads mirrored the roaring trade in prints and paintings that has been described by others. Perhaps this represented the re-assertion of English pictoriality in response to the image-anxiety that, in some minds at least, had attended the Reformation. Ballads were unusual among literary forms in that they made such regular use of woodcuts, though it should be noted that the comparatively sparing deployment of pictures in chapbooks and pamphlets furnishes traces of similar habits of presentation. The parallels were most noticeable, not surprisingly, in chapbooks published by those who also specialised in ballads. The designers transferred their techniques and often their actual pictures from ballad to booklet, and they took care to track the narratives as closely as possible.⁷⁴ Most political pamphlets, in contrast, carried no pictures at all, and those that did so normally restricted woodcuts to the title page. Very few of these pictures were identical to those found on ballads, and many of them seem to have been designed specifically for the pamphlets upon which they appeared. Occasionally, however, there is evidence of intriguing crossover between the two genres. A generic woodcut of a learned man in a gown, walking from left to right with a roll of paper in his hand, appeared on two pamphlets of the 1640s, both of which featured physicians. He also strode across several ballads, including best-sellers entitled *A Friends Advice* (number 96) and *The Judgement of God Shewed upon one John Faustus, Doctor in Divinity*

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⁷³ Anon, *The London Chaunticleres* (London, 1659), 8.

⁷⁴ A good example is *The History of Mrs. Jane Shore Concubine to K. Edward the Fourth* (London, 1688).

(number 31).⁷⁵ This figure was often associated with scholarship and sagacity, though his appearance on the tragic Faust ballad suggests that he could not always be relied upon to use his accumulated knowledge wisely. The manner in which pamphleteers of the early 1640s played around with similar and identical images of a robed ecclesiastic who, in the words of one author, 'stands for the Bishop of Canterbury' is also reminiscent of ballad practice. In one example, a chain has been added to the picture in order to signify Archbishop Laud's incarceration in the Tower, a modification that neatly reverses the earlier unchaining of Thomas Nashe by a different designer.⁷⁶

The significance of ballad woodcuts for our understanding of pictorial culture more generally seems to lie primarily in the evident assumption made by producers that consumers were creative beings, capable both of seeking out text-image correspondences for themselves and of working with a distinctive species of intertextuality, mediated through the repetition of images. This was a flexible and varied aesthetic, within which viewers might find significance in woodcuts that were either specifically designed for their texts or selected from stock. Some pictures, it seems, were sufficiently appealing that they were neatly snipped from their ballads and presumably displayed elsewhere, connected with the original lyrics only by memory.⁷⁷ In balladry, there was a rich but loose system of pictorial conventions at work and we are only just beginning to understand its subtleties. Furthermore, these images were so familiar that we would be well advised to follow the publishers in assuming an impressive capacity for pictorial processing at all levels of society. Indeed, the early-modern convention that poor people had a greater need of pictures than the rich may even suggest that members of the lower orders were more adept at interpreting images – these images, at least – than their supposed betters.

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⁷⁵ *The Welsh Physician* (London, 1647), title page; *The Bishops Potion* (London, 1641), title page; *A Friends Advice* (no. 96; Assigns of Thomas Symcock, 1619-29, EBBA 30074); *The Judgement of God* (no. 31; F. Coles, T. Vere and W. Gilbertson, 1658-64, EBBA 31853).

⁷⁶ See, for example, the title pages of *The Bishops Potion*, *Mercuries Message* (London, 1641), Thomas Herbert, *An Answer to the Most Envious, Scandalous, and Libellous Pamphlet Entituled Mercuries Message* (London, 1641) and *Mercuries Message Defended* (London, 1641). These images and others are discussed in Pierce, 'Anti-Episcopacy and Graphic Satire'.

⁷⁷ See, for example, *The Happy Husbandman* (P. Brooksby, 1685-88, EBBA 31845) and *The Wanton Wife of Bath* (F. Coles, 1624-80, EBBA 31985).

Finally, a comparison of English and continental approaches to the placement of pictures on broadsides suggests that the designers and producers who operated in seventeenth-century London were relatively distinctive, particularly in their attitude to the recycling of images.⁷⁸ Recent work on cheap print in Renaissance Venice indicates that Italy may provide the closest comparison. Venetian printers regularly re-used old woodblocks, though it is not clear that they did so with quite the degree of resourceful creativity that can be detected in England.⁷⁹ Poor survival rates for French and Dutch broadsides hamper assessment but there does not appear to be extensive evidence of repetitive picture deployment on the English model. We can say rather more about the land of Luther. German pictures have been extensively studied, though attention tends to fall primarily on the sixteenth century because of the important role that woodcuts played during the early Reformation and the relative decline in the prominence of woodcuts and broadsides that occurred after 1600. Robert Scribner led the way in arguing that German artists and printers re-used and re-directed old tropes and traditions from late-medieval popular culture as they sought to disseminate Protestantism but he was not in general writing about the redeployment of specific woodcuts and deliberate copies. Although precise repetition and close imitation happened on occasion, these techniques were not apparently the German norm in any part of the early modern period. The English penchant for the recycling of ballad images may well have developed in the decades after 1600 precisely because woodcut art was still far less advanced in London than in an impressive number of German cities. In England, it was more difficult to find skilled artists; pragmatic printers therefore developed the habit of working with what they already had. As we have seen, they certainly commissioned special images in particular cases but German broadside producers followed this policy much more commonly. The woodcuts that appear on German broadsides are also larger and more dominant than English images, tending to reduce significantly the space allocated to the accompanying text. Moreover, the technique of combining and arranging two or three small,

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⁷⁸ I am extremely grateful to Una McIlvenna, Rosa Salzberg and Scott Dixon for corresponding with me on this topic and for pointing me in several promising directions.

⁷⁹ Rosa Salzberg, *Ephemeral City. Cheap Print and Urban Culture in Renaissance Venice* (Manchester, 2014), 21.

generic woodcuts in order to illustrate a narrative does not appear to have been widely applied in Germany.⁸⁰ In England, the methodology that designers adopted was born of necessity but during the seventeenth century the pictoriality of balladry nevertheless evolved into a surprisingly sophisticated system of visual referencing that both belied its improvisatory origins and set it apart.

Christopher Marsh, Queen's University, Belfast.

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⁸⁰ R. W. Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk. Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation* (Cambridge, 1981). See also: Max Geisberg, *The German Single-Leaf Woodcut 1500-1550* (New York, 1974), 4 vols; Walter L. Strauss, *The German Single-Leaf Woodcut 1550-1600* (New York, 1975), 3 vols; Dorothy Alexander and Walter L. Strauss, *The German Single-Leaf Woodcut 1600-1700* (New York, 1977), 2 vols; Helmut Lehmann-Haupt, *An Introduction to the Woodcut of the Seventeenth Century* (New York, 1977); Christiane Andersson, 'Popular Imagery in German Reformation Broadshets', in Gerald P. Tyson and Sylvia S. Wagonheim (eds.), *Print and Culture in the Renaissance* (Newark, 1986), 120-50; Marian Rothstein, 'Disjunctive Images in Renaissance Books', *Renaissance and Reformation*, 14.2 (1990), 101-20.