

M. J. GRANT

AULD LANG SYNE

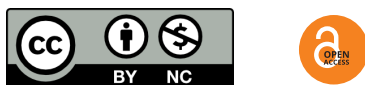
A Song and its Culture





<https://www.openbookpublishers.com>

© 2021 Morag Josephine Grant



This work is licensed under a Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0). This license allows you to share, copy, distribute and transmit the text; to adapt the text for non-commercial purposes of the text providing attribution is made to the authors (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work). Attribution should include the following information:

M. J. Grant, *Auld Lang Syne: A Song and its Culture*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0231>

Copyright and permissions for the reuse of many of the images included in this publication differ from the above. This information is provided in the captions and in the list of illustrations.

In order to access detailed and updated information on the license, please visit <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0231#copyright>. Further details about CC BY-NC licenses are available at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

All external links were active at the time of publication unless otherwise stated and have been archived via the Internet Archive Wayback Machine at <https://archive.org/web>. Digital material and resources associated with this volume are available at <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0231#resources>

Every effort has been made to identify and contact copyright holders and any omission or error will be corrected if notification is made to the publisher.

ISBN Paperback: 9781800640658

ISBN Hardback: 9781800640665

ISBN Digital (PDF): 9781800640672

ISBN Digital ebook (epub): 9781800640689

ISBN Digital ebook (mobi): 9781800640696

ISBN XML: 9781800640702

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0231

Cover illustration: Hetian Li, CC BY 4.0, based on a photograph by Ros Gasson/Scots Music Group.

Cover design by Anna Gatti.

2. Auld Lang Syne: Context and Genesis

Those who think that composing a Scotch song is a trifling business—let them try.¹

In 1787, the Edinburgh publisher James Johnson presented the public with the first of six volumes bearing the collective title *The Scots Musical Museum*.² Johnson's undertaking was only the latest in a series of such publications of "national song", which, though particularly fashionable in the 1780s and 1790s, had a long tradition. The most famous publications from the first part of the century, both published in London, were Allan Ramsay's *The Tea-Table Miscellany* of 1723, which did not include music, and William Thomson's *Orpheus Caledonius* of 1725, which did, and which borrowed heavily from the *Tea-Table Miscellany*, much to Ramsay's chagrin (Ramsay subsequently published the music to his *Miscellany* in a separate volume).³ The *Scots Musical Museum*'s title reflects the more antiquarian interests of the later eighteenth century; its own place in history was assured by the man with whom Johnson became acquainted just after the first volume was published—a young and recently celebrated poet by the name of Robert Burns.

Burns's life story has so often been recounted that it will suffice for the moment to sketch only the broadest of outlines here.⁴ He was born in 1759 in Alloway, near Ayr on the south-west coast of Scotland, to a farming family, an aspect of his biography which has played no small part in the reception of his work and which he was the first to exploit. He received enough of a formal education to awake his passion for literature, particularly the sentimental literature of the day, and started writing poetry and song lyrics in young adulthood. Burns's poems and songs, initially described as "chiefly in the Scots dialect" are in fact oftentimes an elegant balance of Scots and English.⁵ His work both reflects and utilizes local tradition and is famously scathing in its attacks on, in particular, the local church—Ayrshire at the time still boasted a severely moralizing and, in parts, inhumane Calvinist tradition; Burns, famous for his way with women, more than once had to suffer its retributions following the birth of yet another child out of wedlock.⁶

1 Robert Burns, letter to James Hoy, 6 November 1787; *Letters*, no. 149.

2 Johnson (ed.) 1787.

3 Ramsay (ed.) 1723, Thomson (ed.) 1725, Ramsay & Gardyne (eds) ca. 1725.

4 The most comprehensive and reliable biographies of Burns are Mackay 1992, Crawford 2009. For a concise introduction to Burns's life and works, see Carruthers 2006.

5 *Poems, Chiefly in the Scots Dialect* was the title of Burns's first published volume, 1786.

6 The retributions which "fornicators" faced—including forcing them to sit, in full view of their community, on a "stool of repentance" each Sunday for weeks, months, or even years—were so harsh

Burns, like so many of his contemporaries, considered emigrating to a place with less stifling climes—for him, at least, since his plan would have seen him emigrate to Jamaica to work, as a white citizen of a colonial power, on plantations that profited from the forced labour of enslaved people.⁷ Encouraged by the local reception of his poetry, he published a collection of his poems in 1786 which would have helped pay his passage: the success of the collection was the main reason that his plans changed, and he remained in Scotland until his death just ten years later.

Burns was in many ways in the right place at the right time—well capable of satisfying the contemporary trend for all things pastoral, but close enough to people's lived experience to be read across the social fabric; satirical enough to amuse, political enough (but not too much) to appeal to the socially aware in the era of revolutions, radicalism, and the Rights of Man. Thus, his plans changed: instead of emigrating, he traveled to Edinburgh, where he was immediately celebrated and made many important new contacts, including James Johnson. The friendship with Johnson, and his own new-found celebrity status, gave Burns the opportunity to turn from poetry to his other great passion, song.⁸ In the following and last ten years of his life, he dedicated himself almost exclusively to collecting, editing, and writing song lyrics for Johnson and another publisher, George Thomson—always, however, as a sideline to his day-job as a farmer on the small-holding of Ellisland, near Dumfries, and later as an exciseman in Dumfries itself. After recurring bouts of ill health, he died in July 1796 at the age of thirty-seven.

Burns's contribution to the repertoire of Scots song cannot be overstated. The songs he contributed to *The Scots Musical Museum*, and to the collections produced by Thomson, still form the backbone to this tradition. That Burns was so successful has a lot to do with the way his work was embedded in the culture of the time: it was with the musical and literary elements of that culture that he worked, absorbing and reforming the myriad songs around him, and giving new life to these and other tunes. For the most part, he worked from existing publications, including books of instrumental tunes which provided airs for his own original lyrics, though he also integrated songs he had heard sung, including those he encountered on extensive journeys through Scotland undertaken in the wake of his success.⁹ He occasionally concealed the extent of his own contribution to the songs he published, and in general Burns's work reflects the processes at work in society at large, where the boundaries

that they have been linked to extremely high rates of infanticide. When the stool of repentance fell out of use, rates of infanticide dropped dramatically. See Graham 1937, Chapter 8, IX, and Chapter 14, I.

7 Although the history of slavery is engraved in the very street names of its major cities, Scotland and its institutions have only recently begun to acknowledge their part in the slave trade, and the role slavery played in the wealth of this nation. See, e.g., Palmer 2007, Devine (ed.) 2015. On Burns's prospective involvement specifically, see Crawford 2009, 222–223; Morris, 2015.

8 As Crawford put it in discussing the role of song in Burns's life from childhood on, "Burns did not just make songs: songs made Burns" (Crawford 2009, 22).

9 For more on Burns's working methods and travels, especially his work with existing song and tune sources, see Campbell & Lytle 2020.

between “oral” and “literate”, “urban” and “rural”, “high” and “low” culture were far from clear-cut.

There could hardly be a better example of this than *Auld Lang Syne* itself. Burns’s authorship of the song we now know under this title has been disputed for centuries, with Burns’s own statements regarding its origin often quoted in evidence: “There is an old song and tune which has often thrilled thro’ my soul” he wrote to his correspondent Mrs Dunlop in 1788, introducing the song for the first time;¹⁰ and in a letter to the publisher George Thomson, already quoted in the Introduction, he claims to have taken down the song from an old man’s singing. Over the years, Burns experts have tended to divide into one of three camps as regards *Auld Lang Syne*: some take him at his word; others believe that the modern text is almost exclusively the work of Burns; the largest, middle ground is adopted by those who believe that Burns’s contribution is restricted to the two “childhood” verses in which the early exploits of the two old friends are recalled. Most commentaries on the history of *Auld Lang Syne* to date have focussed on the question of Burns’s authorship, and the predecessors of the modern song.¹¹ For this reason, and in particular thanks to the efforts of James Dick in the late nineteenth century, we have a steady supply of material to support the various claims.

This chapter and the next will draw on much of this information. However, though I will certainly make my own suggestions as to the genesis of the song, my primary interest here is how the song became assimilated into tradition in the years that followed; thus, the focus will be the extent to which Burns’s song or any of its elements was known in wider circles previous to its publication at the end of the eighteenth century. Whatever the actual truth behind the song’s origins, Burns’s association with it clearly had an enormous impact on its subsequent distribution. For those unfamiliar with the “Burns Cult” which arose soon after his early death and continues to this day, it is difficult to appreciate just how synonymous Burns’s name has become not merely with Scottish literature and song, but with Scottish identity *per se*. Moreover, Burns’s fame and the ritualistic celebration of it are not limited to Scotland and the Scottish diaspora: in pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-Soviet Russia, for example, Burns was and is one of the most loved of foreign poets.¹²

The impact of Burns on the transmission of *Auld Lang Syne* will be discussed in later chapters. This chapter, meanwhile, will sketch some of the social settings in which songs were used and transmitted in the later eighteenth century. It will also introduce some of the textual and contextual precursors of the modern song, while the next chapter will go into more detail on the musical precursors of both the tune Burns used for *Auld Lang Syne* and the tune that replaced it. The present chapter will, of necessity, also raise the involved issue of Scottish identity and nationality. The eighteenth century

10 Burns, *Letters*, no. 290.

11 See, e.g., Dick 1892; Roy 1984.

12 For a discussion of Burns in Russian, see Levin 1985.

began with an independent but financially precarious Scotland and proceeded through political union with England to a reversal of economic fortunes and the forging of a new take on Scottish identity. This process would be sealed in the early nineteenth century, at exactly the same time that *Auld Lang Syne* became established, and thanks in no small part to the efforts of another great literary figure, Sir Walter Scott. As is so often the case, these social and cultural developments are reflected in the way the society used its songs; the development of the genre of Scots national song, and the claims made for it, is one aspect of this process.

2.1 Being a Short Discourse on Song in the Eighteenth Century

The song we now know as *Auld Lang Syne* started its journey towards us thanks to a project of song collection and creation which swept across Europe in the eighteenth century. At times the orientation of these collections was antiquarian, at times commercial, but in both cases—and despite their editors' frequent claims to the contrary—the bulk of the songs were no more ancient than the late seventeenth century and oftentimes much more recent still.¹³ Songs, or at least their words, had been distributed in print for decades or even centuries before, on literally thousands of broadsides and other cheap formats which were well within the price range of most people; this tradition continued until well into the nineteenth century. Around the start of the eighteenth century, however, publications containing music also started to hit the market, the result both of developments in music printing technology, and increasing affluence. These newer songbooks were directed at the more financially secure middle classes, who had both the disposable income and the educational background required to appreciate and use them.

By far the most famous early eighteenth-century songbook, which can itself function as a textbook for the musical preoccupations and predilections of the day, is *Wit and Mirth, or, Pills to Purge Melancholy* (now often referred to by this subtitle alone). Published in several volumes between 1698 and 1720, and edited first by Henry Playford and then by Thomas D'Urfey, it contains more than a thousand songs from countless sources, including the theatre music of Henry Purcell; the volume itself became a source for other theatrical works thereafter. The book's title gives us some indication of its purpose: songs to be sung in the hours of leisure, probably under the influence of a glass of port or punch, and which oftentimes would not have satisfied the censors of a later era. Ideas of national identity, or the preserve of a cultural tradition, are hardly relevant, though the epithet "Scotch" is attached to several of the songs. This is quite typical: throughout the eighteenth century, we find songbooks published in various parts of the British Isles which contain, by their own admission, "English, Scots, and Irish" songs. These distinctions were more stylistic than ideological or historical in nature: a "Scotch" tune was one that was "Scottish" in style, not necessarily one by

13 For a fuller discussion of this topic, see, e.g., McAulay 2013.

a Scottish composer. “Scottish” characteristics could include particular rhythmic features, such as dotted “scotch snap” or strathspey rhythms, or the use of grace notes and similar ornamentation in reference to piping traditions. The use of pentatonic or five-note scales is another common feature. (The pentatonic scale is typically described as being what happens when only the black notes on a modern piano are played: this, in fact, is the way Burns’s musical colleague Stephen Clarke is said to have jokingly described how to write a Scots tune.) Many of these features are apparent in the tunes with which Burns’s *Auld Lang Syne* initially appeared, and in related tunes from a number of sources that will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Publications such as D’Urfey’s are testimony to a lively, and probably pretty noisy, participative musical culture of the day. Songs which then and now are regarded as “traditional” Scottish songs were published side-by-side with songs and anthems from the leading English composers of the day, and songs “as sung by” various famous singers at the musical entertainments held at the pleasure gardens in London and other metropolitan centres, or at the opera. These operas, too, both reflected the enthusiastic audience for songs, and played an oftentimes decisive role in distributing them. The most successful theatrical piece of the eighteenth century, and indeed one of the most successful of all time, was John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728). It set out to parody the theatrical and operatic conventions of the day, subverting the usual tales of pastoral love by setting the action in the middle of London amongst an assortment of salt-of-the-earth types and petty criminals. The text is humorous even today, but the real attraction of the piece was the music: almost exclusively, Gay used well-known songs and tunes and wrote new texts to them, often with the original meaning of the text providing an ironic, silent counterpoint. The music of *The Beggar’s Opera* includes, for example, a song to a march tune from Handel’s *Rinaldo*, and to the tunes of English, Scottish, and Irish songs such as *The Lass of Patie’s Mill*, *Chevy Chase*, *Bonny Dundee*, and *Greensleeves*. *The Beggar’s Opera* started a new theatre craze, and “ballad operas” as they were called continued to be extremely popular until well into the nineteenth century.

Theatre generally formed an arena in which people from all walks of life could come together and be treated to the same musical fare. Nor was it limited to the major cities, since travelling companies also brought many of the same offerings into rural areas, and as a result the only surviving scores of these works are often in the reduced keyboard format which these companies would have used.¹⁴ Theatre history took a slightly different course in Scotland, thanks to the efforts of the Scottish Presbyterian church to suppress it, but by the later eighteenth century they were fighting a losing battle.¹⁵ Allan Ramsay’s *The Gentle Shepherd* (1725), also a drama incorporating popular songs, is sometimes said to be the real inspiration for Gay’s *Beggar’s Opera*, though *The Gentle Shepherd* initially fell foul of the Kirk and was only revived at a later date. Songs from *The Gentle Shepherd* are found in numerous songbooks from the eighteenth century. Burns, too, famously tried his hand at the genre, in *Love and Liberty—A Cantata*

14 Fiske 1973.

15 See, e.g., Scullion 1998.

(also known as *The Jolly Beggars*; K84); it includes a song on the tune of *For A' That* sung by the visiting songster:

I am a bard of no regard
 Wi' gentle folk an' a' that
 But HOMER LIKE the glowran byke,
 Frae town to town I draw that.

The kind of tavern scene which Burns portrayed in *Love and Liberty* was just one of the social contexts in which these songs would have been sung, heard, passed on, sometimes orally, sometimes in writing. These contexts would also include gatherings at homes, or singing in the fields or at the loom. The song sung was perhaps an old song, or one picked up from travelling actors, or bought from a hawker on the street or at the fair. Gentlemen and would-be gentlemen would spend their leisure time as members of several different clubs, including clubs dedicated specifically to the singing of glees and other polyphonic songs such as catches (the first volume of *The Scots Musical Museum* is dedicated to The Catch Club of Edinburgh). In terms of pieces written and used, glees and catches were probably amongst the most successful forms of the Georgian age, and well into the nineteenth century concert programmes often specifically advertise that a glee was to be sung. Although the music was often newly composed, glees based on existing songs, particularly Scottish songs, were highly popular.¹⁶ In other clubs and associations as well, singing was an integral part of the proceedings; not least of these was the Freemasons, whose role in the spread of *Auld Lang Syne* will be discussed in Chapter 5. Taverns, which hosted many of these groups, would also provide an opportunity for more informal singing; at home, meanwhile, the womenfolk of the leisured classes would also sing to the harp or keyboard, and their repertoire, though often bowdlerized, crossed over with these other repertoires at many points.

Scots songs had been popular for years, but as ideals of nationhood and history developed in the eighteenth century, accompanied by an aesthetic preference for the “simple” and “natural” as Enlightenment ideals gave way to Romanticism, the supposedly pastoral songs of Scotland were awarded a particular, and sometimes peculiar, affection.¹⁷ Both John Aiken and the more famous Joseph Ritson were quick to insist that *real* pastoral songs had nothing to do with the uncouth, unwashed types currently tending the livestock; *real* pastoral songs were ancient and worthy.¹⁸ Simultaneously, however, there was both learned and colloquial bickering about the presence of countless Chloes, Daphnes, and other such Elysian figures in British songbooks of the time—not to mention “hills and rills, doves and loves, fountains and

16 See Rubin 2003 for a stimulating discussion of the Georgian glee and its social context.

17 For a full discussion, see Gelbart 2007.

18 Aiken 1772, particularly the “Essay on ballads and songs”: the problem as he sees it is meteorological—shepherds in softer climes have softer ways than the “coarse” shepherds of England and Scotland. Ritson is rather more restrained, noting that “The pastoral simplicity and natural genius of former ages no longer exist: a total change of manners has taken place in all parts of the country, and servile imitation usurped the place of the original invention”. Ritson 1794, cx-cxi.

mountains, with a tolerable collection of garlands and lambkins, nymphs and cupids, *bergères* and *tortorellas*", as philosopher and man of letters James Beattie put it.¹⁹

It is at this point that a distinct idea of "ancient music", or as it was later termed, "folk music", begins to emerge, with the result that other popular traditions were eventually all but suppressed out of existence in academic discussion. This was a European phenomenon, and not limited to the issue of music. Scholarly interest in the idea of the distinct linguistic, cultural, and therefore musical traditions of the peoples of the earth was enormously important in eighteenth-century thought. In the Scottish philosophical and critical tradition, enquiries into the nature of humankind also led thinkers to consider the difference between nature and culture, with a particular focus on the concept of genius and even more particularly "natural genius", something which Burns was quick to utilise to good effect. In the specific field of song, there were moves towards publications which sought to preserve songs believed to be ancient, or to be from rural traditions, the most significant early publication in this line being Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765).²⁰ Though the editorial values of this volume were questionable even by eighteenth-century standards, it had a profound influence, including on Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) and through him the next generation of German folksong researchers. To Herder is often attributed the establishment of the term "*Volkslied*" or "folksong", and his *Stimmen der Völker in ihren Liedern* (1778–1779) is one of the most important early scholarly collections, containing song texts from many countries and earlier collections. These include his translations of Scots songs and ballads, such as the well-known *Waly, Waly* (*O Weh, O Weh*, no. 10, taken from the version published by Percy). An important motivation for the volume was Herder's frustration at the lack of comparable collections of German song. "*Volkslied*", as the full title of his work indicates, is generally but not absolutely translatable by the term "folksong": "*Volk*" carries the strong implication of the entire people of a particular country, not just the lower or rural classes, although many researchers nevertheless regarded the urban population as inherently more degraded, in every way, than countryfolk. In Britain the term "folksong" only came into common parlance much later, in the nineteenth century, and in connection with the songs of a particular region or shire as opposed to the "national songs"—mostly Scottish and Irish—which dominate the title pages of earlier publications.²¹ One important difference is that "national" songs need not be ancient, though it is significant that it was the "ancient" Gaelic tradition of Ossian, as packaged and purveyed by James Macpherson, which initially won the hearts and minds of European intellectuals.²²

19 Beattie 1778, 163. See also the first verse of a drinking song published in 1783 in a volume owned by Burns (Bib. II/1783):

PHO! pox o' this nonsense, I prithee give o'er,
And talk of your Phillis and Chloe no more;
Their face, and their airm and their mien—what a rout!
Here's to thee, my lad!—push the bottle about!

20 For more on the genesis and impact of this publication, see Groom 1999.

21 Gregory 2010, Gelbart 2007.

22 James Macpherson's Ossian publications of the 1760s claimed to be direct translations of ancient poetry from a bard called Ossian, but from very soon after their publication their authenticity was

The upturn in interest in song collections in the last decades of the eighteenth century in Scotland was not, however, purely antiquarian. Edinburgh's music publishing trade was booming. Songs and other short vocal items were a frequent feature of the concerts put on in Edinburgh and elsewhere, and Scotch songs received a particular boost around this time from what may appear to be an unusual source—the renditions of them by Italian singers, notably Domenico Corri and the famous castrato Giusto Fernando Tenducci. Even William Tytler, who otherwise insisted that only a Scottish voice could do justice to Scots song, succumbed to Signor Corri's interpretations, and it was the experience of hearing Tenducci sing that inspired George Thomson to begin publishing Scots songs in a project that would accompany him, in his free time, for the rest of his life, and which will be discussed in full later.²³

Into this climate waltzed Burns. Often working together with the composer and organist Stephen Clarke, who assisted Burns in those musical matters that were beyond his own capabilities (for example, Clarke provided simple bass accompaniments for Johnson's volumes, and assisted Burns with noting down previously unrecorded melodies), Burns set about gathering together hundreds of songs, often expanding those that were mere fragments, or modifying those that were not quite right for polite society. Burns is less likely than others to be criticized for changing the texts of the songs he collected, simply because the texts Burns left us are so beautifully crafted: we regard him as a poet and songwriter in the first instance, and only secondly—if at all—as a collector. That he was so successful, however, is probably due not only to his talents as a writer but to the fact that he understood what made songs so important in human social life, and, in consequence, how to make songs important for generations to come.

2.2 *Auld Lang Syne* before Burns

The predecessors of the lyric which we now know as *Auld Lang Syne* have been traced back as far as a fifteenth-century poem, *Auld Kyndnes Foryet* (or *Foryett*) found in the sixteenth-century Bannatyne Manuscript (National Library of Scotland, MS Adv.1.1.6), compiled by a merchant named George Bannatyne and one of the most important sources of medieval Scottish poetry. The relationship of the fifteenth-century poem to the modern song is one of general sentiment rather than any direct textual similarity (the connection only becomes clear when we compare it to other versions of *Auld Lang Syne* than Burns's), though James Dick argued that the phrase "auld lang syne" itself originally meant "auld kindness". In Dick's description, this poem is "the soliloquy of one in straitened circumstances, whose condition is much aggravated by reflections on the ingratitude of those who professed themselves friends in his former prosperous

called into question. This debate has continued ever since, though it is now generally held that Macpherson was at least drawing on a very long-standing, oral Gaelic tradition. For more on this topic, see, e.g., Moore (ed.) 2017.

23 Tytler 1825, 284; McCue 1993.

days".²⁴ As Dick noted, there is at least one print source for this poem in Burns's time, an edition of the full manuscript published in 1770: I have quoted from this edition below. The poem itself, which is eight verses long, is rather more to the point than Dick's description, as the second verse makes clear:

Quhill I had ony thing to spend,
 And stuffit weill with warldis wrak [worldly goods],
 Among my freinds [*sic*] I wes weill kend:
 Quhen I wes proud, and had a pak [wealth/fortune],
 Thay wald me be the oxtar tak
 And at the hé buird [high table] I wes set;
 Bot now thay latt me stand abak
 Sen auld kyndnes is quyt foryett.²⁵

This sentiment (and fate) is one of two strands which lie at the heart of a group of eighteenth-century songs associated with *Auld Lang Syne*—songs which either describe rejection, bitterness, and loss of the old friendship when hard times are encountered, or on the other hand fulfilment and the re-establishment of old ties. The sentiments of "auld kindness" and "auld lang syne" are closely related throughout the history of the song, though the link between financial status and friendship is rarely stated as explicitly as here.

Dick also cites one of the earliest mentions in print of the phrase "auld lang syne", from *Scotch Presbyterian Eloquence Display'd* (1690s): "The good God said, Jonah, now billy Jonah, wilt though go to Nineveh, for *Auld lang syne* (old kindness)";²⁶ he notes that the conflation of the temporal and emotional elements of the phrase here captures the sense of what *Auld Lang Syne* is all about, and suggests that the italicization of the relevant phrase may be a reference to a popular song of the day. Many commentators have maintained that there was an earlier popular song with the title, and the earliest printed source we do have does indeed talk of the song it contains as being amended and enlarged. The song contained on the broadside concerned, *Old Long Syne*—with the instruction "To be sung With its own proper Musical sweet Tune"—and a slightly different version of basically the same text which was published in James Watson's *Choice Collection* in 1711, are given in Figures 2.1 and 2.2 respectively. These are the earliest known, extant texts to demonstrate a clear relationship to the modern song through the shared, key phrases "Should auld acquaintance be forgot" and "auld lang syne". The text concerned, variously attributed to Robert Aytoun (1570–1638) and Francis Sempill (d. 1682), is a learned lyric, offering us a quite affected response to the removal of a loved one's affections. The text of the broadside version is slightly longer than that published by Watson, and the verses are in a different order. There is, however, a more important difference, for the early broadside version is printed with a refrain, and as far as the text goes, it is much the same refrain as the one we sing today.

24 Dick: 1892, 380.

25 Taken here from Bannatyne 1770, 184–186. Translations of terms drawn from the Dictionary of the Scots Language, <https://dsl.ac.uk/>.

26 Quoted in Dick 1908, 435.



An Excellent and proper New Ballad, Entitled,

OLD LONG SYNE,

Newly corrected and amended, with a large and new
Edition of several excellent Love Lines.

To be sung with its own proper Musical Sweet Tune.

Should Old Acquaintance be forgot, Which Madam Nature doth impart,
And never thought upon; to your black Eyes and Browes:
The flames of Love extinguished, With honour it doth not consist,
and fully past and gone: to hold thy Slave in pain:
Is thy sweet Heart now grown so cold, Pray let thy rigour then resist,
that loving Breath of thine; for Old long syne.
That thou canst never once reflect, for Old long syne my Jo,
on Old long syne; for Old long syne;
That thou canst never once reflect, That thou canst never once reflect,
on Old long syne. on Old long syne.

My Heart is ravish'd with delight, Since libertie ye will not give,
when thee I think upon; who glories in his Ch'in:
All Grief and Sorrow takes the flight, But yet I with the gods to move
and speedily is gone: that noble Heart of thine;
The bright resemblance of thy Face, To pity since ye cannot love,
so fills this Heart of mine; for Old long syne.
That Force nor Fate can me displease, For Old long syne my Jo,
for Old long syne; for Old long syne;
For Old long syne my Jo, That thou may ever once reflect,
for Old long syne, on Old long syne.
That thou canst never once reflect, on Old long syne.

Since thoughts of thee doth banish grief, Dear will ye give me back my Heart,
when from thee I am gone; since I cannot have thine;
Will not thy presence yield relief, For since with yours ye will not part,
to this sad Heart of mine: no reason you have mine:
Why doth thy presence me defeat, But yet I think 't is let it ly,
with excellence divine; within that breast of thine,
Especially when I reflect, Who ha's a Thief in every Eye,
on Old long syne. to make me live in pain.
On Old long syne my Jo, for Old long syne;
on Old long syne; Wilt thou not ever once reflect,
That thou canst never once reflect, on Old long syne.

Oh then Clerinde pray prove more kind, THE SECOND PART.
be not ungrateful still: W Here are thy Protections,
Since that my Heart ye have so ty'd, thy Vows and Oaths my Dear;
why should ye then it kill: Thon made to me and I to thee,
Sure Faith and Hope depends on thee, Is Faith and Truth so violent, in Register yet clear:
kill me not with disdain, to immortal Gods divine,
Or else I swear I'll still reflect, As never once for to reflect,
on Old long syne. on Old long syne;
On Old long syne my Jo, On Old long syne my Jo,
on Old long syne; on Old long syne;
I pray you do but once reflect, That thou canst never once reflect,
on Old long syne. on Old long syne.

Since you have rob'd me of my Heart, It's Cupid's Feats or Frowie Cares
that reason I have yours; that makes thy Spirit decay:

Or it's an Object of more worth, bath stoll my Heart away?
Or some desert makes thee neglect her, so much once was thine
That thou canst never once reflect, on Old long syne.
On Old long syne my Jo, on Old long syne;
on Old long syne; That thou canst never once reflect,
on Old long syne.

Is Worldly cares so desperat, that makes thee to despair?
Is that that thee exasperates, and makes thee to forbear?
If thou art Ty, were free as I, Thon truly should be mine,
If this were true we should renew kind Old long syne.
For Old long syne my Jo, for Old long syne,
for Old long syne, That thou canst never once reflect,
on Old long syne.

But since that nothing can prevail and all hopes are in vain;
From these rejected Eyes of mine, still showers of Tears shall rain:
Although thou hast me now forgot, yet I'll continue thine;
And ne'r neglect for to reflect, on Old long syne.
On Old long syne my Jo, on Old long syne;
on Old long syne; That thou canst never once reflect,
on Old long syne.

If ever I have a house my Dear, that's truly called mine;
That can afford but Countrey cheer, or ought that's good therein:
Though thou wert Rebel to the King and beat with Wind and Rain,
Assure thy self of welcome Love, for Old long syne.
For Old long syne my Jo, for Old long syne,
for Old long syne, Assure thy self of welcome Love,
for Old long syne.

F I N I S.

Fig. 2.1 *Old Long Syne*, facsimile of broadside published ca. 1701 and held in the National Library of Scotland, shelfmark Ry.III.a.10(070), CC BY 4.0. The image can also be viewed online at <https://digital.nls.uk/broadsides/view/?id=14548>, where a transcription can also be found.

Fig. 2.2: *Old-Long-Syne* from James Watson (ed.), *A Choice Collection of Comic and Serious Scots Poems*, III (Edinburgh: James Watson, 1711), 71–74.

FIRST PART

Should old Acquaintance be forgot,
And never thought upon,
The Flames of Love extinguished,
And freely past and gone?
Is thy kind Heart now grown so cold
In that Loving Breast of thine,
That thou canst never once reflect
On Old-long-syne?

Where are thy Protestations,
Thy Vows and Oaths, my Dear,
Thou made to me, and I to thee,
In Register yet clear?
Is Faith and Truth so violate
To the Immortal Gods Divine,
That thou canst never once reflect
On Old-long-syne?

Is't *Cupid's* Fears, or frosty Cares,
That makes thy Sp'rits decay?
Or is't some Object of more Worth,
That's stoll'n thy Heart away?
Or some Desert, makes thee neglect
Him, so much once was thine,
That thou canst never once reflect
On Old-long-syne?

Is't Worldly Cares so desperate,
That makes thee to despair?
Is't that makes thee exasperate,
And makes thee to forbear?
If thou of that were free as I,
Thou surely should be Mine:
If this were true, we should renew
Kind Old-long-syne.

But since that nothing can prevail,
And all Hope is in vain,
From these rejected Eyes of mine,
Still Showers of Tears shall rain:
Although thou hast me now forgot,
Yet I'll continue Thine;
And ne'er forget for to reflect
On Old-long-syne.

If e'er I have a House, my Dear,
That truly is call'd mine,
And can afford but Country Cheer,
Or ought that's good therein;
Tho' thou were Rebel to the King,
And beat with Wind and Rain,
Assure thy self of Welcome Love,
For Old-long-syne.

SECOND PART

My Soul is ravish'd with Delight
When you I think upon;
All Griefs and Sorrows take the Flight,
And hastily are gone;
The fair Resemblance of your Face
So fills this Breast of mine,
No Fate nor Force can it displace,
For Old-long-syne.

Since Thoughts of you doth banish Grief,
When I'm from you removed;
And if in them I find Relief,
When with sad Cares I'm moved,
How doth your Presence me affect
With Ecstasies Divine,
Especially when I reflect
On Old-long-syne.

Since thou has rob'd me of my Heart
By those resistless Powers,
Which Madam *Nature* doth impart
To those fair Eyes of yours;
With Honour it doth not consist
To hold a Slave in Pyne,
Pray let your Rigour then desist,
For Old-long-syne.

'Tis not my freedom I do crave
By deprecating Pains;
Sure Liberty he would not have
Who glories in his Chains:
But this I wish, the Gods would move
That Noble Soul of thine
To pity, since thou cannot love
For Old-long-syne.

Both the medium of distribution—the broadside, accessible to all but the very poorest, as long as they could read or knew someone who could read or sing it to them—and the presence of the refrain make it plausible that elements of the song in Figure 2.1 were picked up and distributed. A refrain, after all, is an invitation to join in, and could also be used to connect people to a newer parody or contrafactum based on an older song. But if Burns did base his version in whole or part on a song extant only in oral tradition, his is still a song with significant differences in structure and sentiment to these earlier eighteenth-century versions. By the time Burns was working, however, another *Auld Lang Syne* was well-established: the version written by Allan Ramsay and published first in the *Tea-Table Miscellany*, thereafter in many eighteenth-century sources including the first volume of the *Scots Musical Museum* (discussed further in Chapter 3). The text of Ramsay's version is given as Figure 2.3. From Ramsay's song onwards, most songs on the theme of "auld lang syne" give as context the return of one of the acquaintances after a long sojourn abroad. Ramsay's version—in which the old acquaintances are lovers who had been separated by war—is the only known version previous to Burns's to have so positive an outcome: the lovers consequently marry and are therefore put out of *pine* (Ramsay's rhyme) or *pain* (according to some popular printings). The more pessimistic sentiment—exile followed by estrangement—was much more prevalent, though, and continued to be circulated and reinvented throughout the nineteenth century, as I shall discuss in more depth at the end of this chapter.²⁷

Fig. 2.3 Allan Ramsay's *Auld Lang Syne*, as printed in *The Tea-Table Miscellany* (Edinburgh: Thomas Ruddiman, 1724), 97–99.

Should auld Acquaintance be forgot,
 Tho they return with Scars?
 These are the noblest Heroe's Lot,
 Obtain'd in glorious Wars:
 Welcome, my Varo, to my Breast,
 Thy Arms about me twine,
 And make me once again as blest,
 As I was lang syne.

Methinks around us on each Bough,
 A thousand *Cupids* play,
 Whilst thro' the Groves I walk with you,
 Each Object makes me gay:
 Since your Return the Sun and Moon
 With brighter Beams do shine,

27 Even a song immediately following Ramsay's version in a songbook called *The Scots Nightingale* (Bib. II/1778), and to be sung to the "Same Tune", is, for all its affected pastoralism, just as tragic as its other predecessors: it tells of Chloe, who swore undying love, only to then run off with another swain. Apart from the tune, the song does not have any reference to either "auld lang syne" or "Should auld acquaintance be forgot", though the sentiment of faithful and unfaithful love marks both *Old Long Syne* and Ramsay's poem.

Streams murmur soft Notes while they run,
As they did lang syne.

Despise the Court and Din of State,
Let that to their Share fall,
Who can esteem such Slav'ry great,
While bounded like a Ball;
But sunk in Love, upon my Arms
Let your brave Head recline,
We'll please our selves with mutual Charms,
As we did lang syne.

O'er Moor and Dale, with your gay Friend,
You may pursue the Chase,
And, after a blyth Bottle, end
All Cares in my Embrace:
And in a vacant rainy Day
You shall be wholly mine;
We'll make the Hours run smooth away,
And laugh at lang syne.

The Heroe pleas'd with the sweet Air,
And Signs of gen'rous Love,
Which had been utter'd by the Fair,
Bow'd to the Pow'rs above.
Next Day, with Consent and glad Haste
Th' approach'd the sacred Shrine,
Where the good Priest the Couple blest,
And put them out of Pine.

What about the music? Again, the earliest extant sources come from the late seventeenth century, and again there are both more exclusive and more popular sources. The earliest source for a tune known then as *Old Long Syne* is an elaborate arrangement contained in the Balcarres Lute Book, a manuscript dating from the late seventeenth century which contains music from a number of national sources. Some of the arrangements in the Balcarres manuscript, including this one, may be by a German musician called Mr Beck, who was active in Edinburgh around this time and transcribed or supervised many of the tunes that appear in the manuscript.²⁸ The opening of the arrangement wavers between the major and minor keys, which is not untypical for Scottish music of this time, particularly when arranged by non-Scots.²⁹ In the version of M-1 included in

28 David Johnson (1984) believed Beck had been a music tutor at Balcarres House, but more recently Evelyn Stell has suggested that Beck's involvement in the manuscript was probably limited to transcribing melodies in Edinburgh which were then sent to Balcarres, where they were copied into the manuscript by an amateur, but competent, lute player (Stell 1999, I, 20–37). Kenneth Elliott drew my attention to Stell's findings.

29 Lute variations of this kind on popular songs of the day were common throughout Europe at this time. Nehlsen (1990) refers to a similar source in his discussion of a late seventeenth-century song, *Est-ce Mars*, the tune of which reappeared with German words in the later nineteenth century. As

this source, the contour of the melody is recognisable although highly ornamented in the style typical of lute variations. The basic tune is very similar to an unnamed tune found in a music book known as the Sinkler Manuscript (National Library of Scotland, MS 3296 (Glen 143 (i))), written around 1710; the tune from the Sinkler Manuscript is given as Figure 2.4.



Fig. 2.4 M-1 as it appears in the Sinkler Manuscript, early eighteenth century. Set by author using MuseScore (2021).



Audio example 4.

<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12434/3fc220ff>



Just as there is speculation regarding an earlier popular song on the theme of “auld lang syne”, the tune on which Mr Beck based his variations was also very possibly a popular tune, even a song tune, of the day. There is really no way of knowing for sure: the scarce number of sources we have from this period is no true reflection of the music actually in circulation. There are, however, indications that the basic tune M-1 was more widely distributed, since the other early source for the tune is Henry Playford’s *A Collection of Original Scotch Tunes, (Full of the Highland Humours) for the Violin*, published in 1700 with an expanded second edition in 1701 (Fig. 2.5). The tune transmitted there, and called “For old long Gine my Joe” is closer to that which appeared with Ramsay’s text in the 1720s. This volume came at a time when Playford was struggling to maintain the successful publishing trade begun by his father John, since advances in printing meant that other, newer publishers were stealing much of his market; other attempts at improving sales included the earlier editions of *Pills to Purge Melancholy*, discussed earlier.³⁰

regards the harmony, filling out the notes of the pentatonic scale could make it either major or minor in character; also, in Scottish fiddle music of the earlier eighteenth century, Johnson has noted the frequent use of two Italian chord progressions, one of which is characterized by alteration between major and minor chords; see Johnson 1984. Kenneth Elliott has suggested that this interpretation of the opening melodic motif as in a minor key may indicate that Beck, who as a German was less familiar with the vagaries of Scottish tune structures, was the arranger in this case; most of the arrangements in the manuscript seem on the other hand to be the work of somebody with an in-depth understanding of the Scottish tradition. See Elliott (ed.) 2008.

30 Smith & Temperley 2001.



Fig. 2.5 “For old long Gine my Joe” (M-1), in Henry Playford’s *A Collection of Scotch Tunes* (London: Henry Playford, 1700), 11, <https://digital.nls.uk/94577928>, CC BY 4.0.



Audio example 5.

<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12434/5ea3e4e1>



The tune M-1, introduced as “Air XV. Auld Lang Syne” also appeared in Act I, Scene II of Joseph Mitchell’s ballad opera *The Highland Fair, or, Union of the Clans* (1731). It is used for a single verse of text, the contents of which are not out of keeping with the general sentiment, and the close of which seems to preempt, in uncanny fashion, the ritual uses of Burns’s song that emerged in the nineteenth century, and which are discussed in Chapter 5:

Tho’ rosy Lips and lovely Cheeks
In Time’s small Compass come,
Love alters not with Days and Weeks,
But bears it out till Doom.
True Minds, unshaken as the Stars,
Their Constancy maintain:
Their Joys no Turn of Fortune mars,
Nor breaks their golden Chain.

We will return to M-1 in the context of the tunes that replaced it, in the next chapter. Between the sources just discussed and the appearance of Burns's song, however, more than half a century elapsed. Given Burns's claim to have noted his version of the song from oral tradition, it becomes important to know what happened to these elements in the intervening period. And it is far from irrelevant that the period in question was one of great political and social upheaval triggered by the Act of Union between England and Scotland of 1707, which marked—in the words spoken by the Chancellor of the old Scottish Parliament at its last session—"the end of an old sang."

2.3 The Jacobite Songs

The movement known as Jacobitism sought to reinstate the House of Stuart to the monarchy of England and Scotland:³¹ the name derives from the would-be monarchs concerned, James II and VII—who was exiled after being defeated by William of Orange in 1688—and then his son, James Francis Edward. Although Jacobitism was not explicitly linked to the Act of Union of 1707, which saw Scotland and England enter into a political union as well as a royal one, it did give Jacobitism an extra boost in Scotland. Both the Act of Union and the removal of the House of Stuart, ultimately as a result of the religious upheaval of the Reformation, posed fundamental challenges to the Scots' view of themselves and their place in the world. As Donaldson writes, Scots in the early eighteenth century had

an alternative history, quite different from our own, and it expressed who they thought they were, where they thought they had been, and where they thought they were going to. It was made up of a tissue of myth and legend stretching back into the remotest antiquity, and provided a heroic backdrop against which they viewed themselves, a frame for their thinking, and the driving force behind their politics. They called it "*Guid Auld Lang Syne*".³²

One of the central tenets of this version of history was the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings, which was seen to stretch right back to Adam. Although many of the kings through whom Scots traced this history never existed, the framework was powerful, particularly since it meant that Scots could claim that "their country, by virtue of the succession, was the most ancient political fabric in Europe".³³ It was this belief which was so firmly and definitively flouted, in the eyes of the Jacobites, when the terms of the English Act of Settlement of 1701 laid down strict guidelines for the line of succession, the most important being that a Catholic could never become monarch. The eventual result was that the crown passed over to the House of Hanover, and

31 James VI, Scottish King of the House of Stuart, had acceded to the English throne following the death of Elizabeth I in 1603.

32 Donaldson 1988, 5. See also MacKenzie 1998 on the relationship between myth-building and the emergence of specifically national consciousness.

33 Donaldson 1988, 7.

the first Jacobite Uprising of 1715 came in the aftermath of the accession of George, Elector of Hanover. The Jacobite cause became a focus for resistance to political union with England, a union which was viewed by some as the definitive death-blow to Scotland as an independent nation with a distinct identity. According to Donaldson, "It was during these years that the theme of 'Guid Auld Lang Syne' began to make its appearance in political poetry, recalling golden ages of political independence, social autonomy, and pure uncomplicated heroism tragically compromised and lost".³⁴

Given a dire financial situation (Scotland, which had suffered severe famine, and was barred from England's trading routes to its new colonies) and political uncertainty (England, afraid that James VII and II's Catholic son James Francis Edward Stuart would attempt to regain power with help from Scotland's old ally France), the Act of Union which united the Parliaments of Scotland and England in 1707 seemed, for those that sanctioned it, not only a logical but also an unavoidable response. The decision, taken when the majority of Scots were disenfranchised, was controversial among the nobility as well, including among those who saw the previous capital of an independent nation, Edinburgh, turned into a provincial centre with no real standing in Europe. For many Scots, the Act of Union was nothing less than the bartering of their own identity, their sense of who they were, and their sense of their own history, a sentiment later captured (and mythologized) by Burns in the song *A Parcel Of Rogues In A Nation*: "We are bought and sold for English gold".³⁵

The Jacobite Uprisings of 1715 and, more famously, 1745 demonstrated that hopes for a peaceful political settlement were optimistic. It was the population of the Highlands which paid the biggest price for the Jacobite Uprisings, not so much terms of the lives lost on the field of Culloden, but in the ensuing measures brought into place to suppress and to humiliate them, including a ban for a time on most outward signs of their culture, including their language and their dress: repeated violations of the ban were punished by transportation. The lasting irony is that, less than a hundred years later, these symbols would be firmly in place as hallmarks of a unified Scottish culture, with the image of the fearless Highlander rehabilitated in the service of a different King. The cultural consequences of the Union and the resistance to it were not, in the end, all negative; if Scotland was afraid of losing her political influence in Europe, she quickly regained it in the fields of art and science. By the end of the eighteenth century, Scotland had re-established itself as a major force in European intellectual, cultural, and scientific life; in the following century this influence became global due to the key role played by Scots in the British Empire. A common national (Celtic) identity was in the process of being forged, and thus Scotland, in her race

³⁴ Donaldson 1988, 11–12.

³⁵ As Christopher A. Whatley has shown, this song—another to have been based on earlier fragments and sentiments—has played no small part in cementing certain misunderstandings regarding the Act of Union and the political context. "A Parcel of Rogues: Politicians, Poets and Proselytisers and the Invention of Scottish Political Identity", lecture given at the Burns International Conference, Glasgow, 13 January 2007; see also Whatley 2006.

to hang onto her identity, had a definitive impact on other nations' concepts of their own identity and origins as well. This process was assisted by the modernization and renewal that swept Scotland in this period, including new agricultural methods and improvements in communication; these sped up the rate of change in Scottish society, though at the expense of many rural communities. By the end of the century Scottish society was in general more affluent and more urban; some have argued that it was also more clearly socially stratified, with less direct interchange between the landed gentry and the lower classes than previously.³⁶

The lasting cultural impact of the Jacobite period can be traced in other, more specific areas as well. One of its most significant musical legacies is the British national anthem *God Save the King*, which began to be played in London theatres in 1745 just after the start of the second Uprising, and which famously included the lines "May he sedition hush / And like a torrent rush / Rebellious Scots to crush"; along with *La Marseillaise*, it became a prototype for national anthems the world over. The signature tune of the BBC World Service was until recently *Lillibulero*, an Irish song which formed the basis for countless parodies and contrafacta in the eighteenth century, and was (and is) closely associated with the Protestant, Unionist cause. Songs also played a highly significant role in conveying and consolidating Jacobite sentiment, and the sentiment and tune of *Auld Lang Syne* found its way into a number of Jacobite contrafacta.

Appendix 1 gives the full text of a grand total of eight "Jacobite" songs related to *Auld Lang Syne*. All post-date either the first Jacobite Uprising or the second; many Jacobite songs still in common currency have been shown to be more modern inventions. Moreover, Jacobitism and the general sentimental view of Scotland prevalent around the turn of the nineteenth century can only be separated one from the other with great difficulty, particularly since Jacobitism was "rehabilitated" as a topic for the drawing room at this time. The eighth song given here is entirely the creation of a later day, by the writer and anthropologist Andrew Lang, but this too is based on earlier versions. By the time Lang wrote it, the association of an older *Auld Lang Syne* with the Jacobite cause had been documented in at least two important collections, R. A. Smith's *The Scottish Minstrel* (*sic*, 1820–1824; Appendix 1, song 7) and James Hogg's *Jacobite Relics of Scotland* (1819; Appendix 1, song 3). The tune which appears with the song in Hogg's edition is M2, but we need not read more into this than that by the time of Hogg's publication, the older tune had been practically eclipsed in the common consciousness.³⁷ Of the other eighteenth-century contrafacta, the song *O Caledon* (Appendix 1, song 2) is specifically "To the tune of AULD LANG SYNE": there is otherwise little obvious connection to the earlier or later songs. The other texts, however, end more or less each verse unit with the phrase "auld lang syne" and open it with some plea regarding a thing that shall be forgot or lost for evermore. It would have been normal practice for these songs to be sung to other

36 See Graham 1937 (1899); Smout 1998 (1969).

37 See Chapter 4, below.

tunes as well—unless the tune was well enough known to be synonymous with the phrase “auld lang syne”.

How close or specific the connection between the older songs of *Auld Lang Syne* and the Jacobite tradition was, is difficult to establish with any degree of certainty. The general interest in Jacobitism as a whole means that contrafacta and parodies on this topic were more likely to be snapped up, bound, referenced and archived than other popular sources. In the absence of other evidence to the contrary, though, we are left with these Jacobite contrafacta, and only these contrafacta, to bridge the gap between the earlier eighteenth century and the time when Burns got his hands on the “glorious fragment”, as he himself termed it. More recent histories have suggested Jacobitism was much more widespread and more culturally significant than is generally suggested, and if popular song really was its most important vademecum, the case of *Auld Lang Syne* and its potential links to Jacobitism becomes even more complex—because in order to function at all, and to avoid prosecution, much of Jacobite culture operated via symbol, allegory and allusion.³⁸ The main features of Jacobite song—particularly, the use of familiar tunes, and the appeal to popular sentiments and ideas of heritage and community—are also the main features of group political song *per se*.

The older tune of *Auld Lang Syne*, M-1, is not well-suited to collective singing, as we will explore more closely in the next chapter. On the other hand, much Jacobite song in this early period could have been solo song, arguing for the Jacobite position rather than cementing group ties. It has been suggested that there were ballad hawkers who were, in effect, political campaigners: their job was to ensure the spread of Jacobite texts. Political ballad hawkers followed in a long tradition—so effective were they that street balladeers were banned in England during Cromwell’s Commonwealth; after the Restoration they had to be licensed. From the 1680s onwards, women were favoured for this role as they were less likely to suffer serious prosecution.³⁹ Jacobite culture was not limited to popular forms, however: Allan Ramsay was a Jacobite, and in his edition of Jacobite songs James Hogg suggested that many of Ramsay’s new texts to old songs were written in order to preserve the tunes of songs currently sung with Jacobite texts: *Here’s A Health To Them That’s Awa*, for example, has according to Hogg

always been a popular air, and one of those songs that Allan Ramsay altered into a love song for the sake of preserving the old chorus, which he has done in many instances, and for which he can scarcely be blamed; because to have published any of the Jacobite songs at that day, was risking as much as his neck was worth.⁴⁰

It is worth at least considering whether this applies to Ramsay’s version of *Auld Lang Syne*. It is not hard to find hints at a Jacobite subtext—we have already noted that his version introduces the separation of the two lovers, a common Jacobite metaphor for

38 See, e.g., Pittock 1998.

39 See Pittock’s introduction to Hogg 2002 (1819).

40 Hogg 2002 (1819), 217.

the exiled King; when the male protagonist does return, the marriage ceremony is carried out by a (Catholic) priest rather than a (Protestant) minister. The unabashed pastoralism of Ramsay's text can also be read in Jacobite terms, since the pastoral tone was a favoured way of expressing Jacobite sentiments of renewal. We should be wary of reading too much into this, however (though, incidentally or not, a verse of *Here's A Health To Them That's Awa* immediately preceded Burns's *Auld Lang Syne* in volume V of the *Scots Musical Museum*).

Quite apart from the overtones of the key phrase "auld lang syne", it is very easy to understand how the words of the early eighteenth-century *Old Long Syne* (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2, above) could be read politically, and Thomas Crawford goes so far as to include this text in his survey of Jacobite songs.⁴¹ If we take Scotland or her true King to be the jilted lover, there is little in *Old Long Syne* that cannot be interpreted in this way. Indeed, it is somewhat surprising that the specifically Jacobite versions maintain very little material from this text—not necessarily an indication that the old broadside song was not or no longer well-known, but it is a possibility we must bear in mind. Also, although many of the features of this and later versions of *Auld Lang Syne* share ideas common to many Jacobite songs—many were framed as songs of love and exile, the lover in question often being specifically named as "Jamie"—these were hardly uniquely Jacobite sentiments.

It is difficult, therefore, to establish what connections there may be between the songs in Appendix 1 and other versions of *Auld Lang Syne*, but a few observations can be made. Most of them keep to the eight-line verse structure familiar from the other pre-Burns versions we have looked at. None has a chorus, though the earliest, with the recurrent "on old long sine &c" closing each eight-line unit, suggests that here a commonly known chorus is to be sung. In some respects, the most interesting of these songs is number 4: it is the only one with a four-line verse, and although there is a passage also found in another version, it is also quite different in character to the other broadside versions. It is clearly not so much a polemical song as a social or communal song sung by soldiers, and is attributed to Lochiel's regiment, which made up a significant part of the forces that supported Charles Edward Stuart in 1745–1746: the remains of the decimated regiment fled to continental Europe after Culloden.⁴² Some of the textual references are very loosely related to Burns's version, a vague similarity recognized by Andrew Lang in his version of this Lochiel song. The chorus again reflects the principle of the Divine Right of Kings.

An implicit connection to the Jacobite cause did not necessarily mean that a song would always have that taint. The tune "The White Cockade", for example, the name of which references the dress code of the Jacobites, became so popular in its own right that it occurs frequently with completely unassociated texts in songbooks of the later

41 Crawford 1970.

42 Taken here from Clan Cameron Archives, <http://www.lochiel.net/archives/arch124.html>. I have been unable to check the authenticity of the source.

eighteenth century.⁴³ It is probably a lucky coincidence that the ballad opera based on Walter Scott's novel set just before the first uprising, *Rob Roy*, was subtitled "*or, Auld Lang Syne*".⁴⁴ On the occasion of George IV's famous visit to Scotland in 1822—he was the first Hanoverian monarch to set foot in Scotland—Scott presented the King with a snuff-box made of the wood of old and historical Scottish trees, and which was inscribed with the first verse and chorus of Burns's *Auld Langsyne*, as it is called in this case.⁴⁵ The box was the idea of Lord John Campbell, second son of the Duke of Argyll, whose forebears protected the real Rob Roy. The King also visited the theatre to see the opera *Rob Roy Macgregor, or, Auld Lang Syne* during his visit (on which opera see Chapter 4, below). But it is hard not to see the snuff-box as something more than a memento of a night at the opera, and the inscription of *Auld Lang Syne* is at the very least a suitable metaphor for the symbolic and clever cultural transfer of legitimation from the House of Stuart to the House of Hanover.

Burns's Jacobite sympathies, and his Radical leanings, are well established, though it is also true that he knew when to play these sympathies up or down depending on the company he was in. Burns's father had left the north-east of Scotland immediately after the Uprising of 1745, the last in a long line of Episcopalian tenant farmers, while his grandfather on his mother's side was a servant on the estate of the Earl of Marischal, a leading Jacobite. The circumstances which necessitated the move may have made Burns sensitive to the injustice of the way the Stuart cause continued to be treated.⁴⁶ His own reworkings of Jacobite songs helped establish the modern genre, not to mention significantly influencing later perceptions of the Jacobite cause up to the present day. According to Donaldson, Burns "effectively mythologised Jacobitism by accommodating it to the heroic legendary past in a way that was entirely traditional".⁴⁷ By the time he did so, the Jacobite Uprisings were long past, though the movement was by no means dead—the last Jacobite riots in England took place in the 1770s. Though Jacobitism was much less of an imminent threat, tirades against the Jacobites did still occur. Burns himself published a letter condemning this tendency—albeit anonymously, and not insignificantly signed "A Briton"—in the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* in 1788, around the time of the centenary celebrations of the "Glorious Revolution" which overthrew the House of Stuart, and at the end of the year in which Charles Edward Stuart, the "Young Pretender", had died. William Donaldson

43 Though Pittock also notes an incident which took place in Ireland in 1793, when the MP Arthur Cole-Hamilton threw a glass at a blind fiddler who was playing it. See his introduction to Hogg 2002 (1819).

44 The detailed discussion of this in the next chapter will show, however, that the song was probably included for another reason.

45 According to Brown 1893, the box was made by Daniel Craig, a member of the Paisley Burns Club, on the request of Lord John Campbell, second son of the Duke of Argyll. I am grateful to the curators of the Decorative Arts section of the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle for providing pictures of the box and the engraving (see Fig. 4.1 in Chapter 4).

46 Donaldson 1988, Chapter 8.

47 Donaldson 1988, 89.

notes that this letter is much milder in manner than the comments Burns made in a private letter to his correspondent and friend Frances Dunlop soon afterwards. In the newspaper letter, Burns says that he “cannot join in the ridicule” against the Stuarts, and suggests that it is time to draw a veil over it—“let every man, who has a tear for many miseries incident to humanity, feel for a family, illustrious as any in Europe, and unfortunate beyond historic precedent”. In the letter to Mrs Dunlop, on the other hand, he admits to have been slightly carried away when writing the letter, but not in “the tarantula-frenzy of insulting Whigism [...] mine is the madness of an enraged Scorpion shut up in a thumb-vial”.⁴⁸

What Donaldson doesn’t mention in his comparison of these passages is that this particular letter to Mrs Dunlop is more famous for another reason.⁴⁹ In response to her recent letter to him, the oft-cited passage, which comes at a later and unconnected point, is as follows:

Your meeting which you so well describe with your old Schoolfellow & friend was truly interesting.—Out upon the ways of the World! They spoil these “Social offspring of the heart.” Two old veterans of the “Men of the World” would have met with little more heart-workings than two old Hacks worn out on the road.—Apropos, is not the Scots phrase, “Auld lang syne”, exceedingly expressive.—There is an old song & tune which has often thrilled thro’ my soul. You know that I am an enthusiast in old Scots songs.—I shall give you the verses on the other sheet, as I suppose Mr Ker will save you the Postage.⁵⁰

The song which Burns includes is only slightly different from the version of *Auld Lang Syne* published some eight years later in the *Scots Musical Museum*.

48 Burns, *Letters*, no. 290.

49 Crawford (2009, 308) also makes this connection.

50 Burns, *Letters*, no. 290.