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AULD LANG SYNE

A Song and its Culture

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3. Burns's Song

3.1 Mrs Dunlop's Song

"My friend, come in this sacred mansion know,
A secret few are ever taught below
(Though Cupid always like a child appears);
Friendship can live to more than forty years."
Fair Stuart's secret I to you impart,
And thank the friendly hand that warm'd my heart.[1]

The correspondence between Robert Burns and Frances Anna Dunlop, née Wallace, has been commented on widely, not least since Burns's letters to Mrs Dunlop reveal much about his life, views, and method of working. His remarks to her on *Auld Lang Syne,* quoted at the end of the previous chapter, are well-known, but practically no attention has been paid in previous accounts of the genesis of *Auld Lang Syne* to the incident related by Mrs Dunlop to which Burns was responding, even though their correspondence was published in 1898.[2]

Mrs Dunlop's account of the meeting with her "old school friend" is spread across a long letter written over several days, starting on 26 November 1788, while she was staying at the estate of Morham Mains in East Lothian.[3] A long narrative poem from her own pen introduces the subject, and describes in moving if derivative lines her state of mind at the time. Mrs Dunlop had been suffering from illness and depression since the death of her husband in 1785; at the time this letter was written, she had been, in her own words, "almost blind and wholly deaf for a fortnight past".[4] Burns was alarmed enough by this statement for her to be moved to reassure him, in a subsequent letter, that she had no plans to die just yet (in fact, she outlived him by nearly twenty years). She also repeatedly asked him to comment on her poem; Burns was civil enough not

1 Frances Anna Dunlop, from the poem included in her letter to Burns, 26 November 1788; Wallace (ed.) 1898, 118.
2 Wallace (ed.) 1898.
3 Occasionally, Dunlop gives the name as "Morhame Mains". After Burns's death, her son would offer Burns's brother Gilbert the management of Morham West Mains farm. In 1803, the estate was sold off and Gilbert moved to Grants Braes on the Lennoxlove estate, and began working for Katherine, Lady Blantyre, the sister-in-law of the old friend to whom Mrs Dunlop refers in the letter under discussion. Anon. 1896.
4 Wallace (ed.) 1898, 177.

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to. The poem describes her walking out from Morham Mains one inclement day, only to find herself almost overwhelmed by the black, looming trees and the threatening sky; she is duly pelted with rain. She seeks refuge from the storm, and finds it in the shape of nearby Lennoxlove House, and in the renewal of an old acquaintance. A subsequent prose section of the letter explains this incident, and its significance for her, more fully:

> That you may understand the former pages of this, I must tell you in plain prose that I found in Miss Stuart of Blantyre the companion of my childhood. We met as we parted after an interval of forty-five years. She showed me my name sewed at that time in her sampler, inclosed in a heart, and amid those of her parents and seven brothers and sisters, most of whom are now dead—and so small and finely wrought that I could not perceive it without glasses. Our dialogue on this occasion was much as follows. Indeed the only poetic fiction is the thunder, for the incident of the letter was real, as it supplied the place of a wet stomacher to a very clay-cold, shivering, lifeless heart, after the only shower I have seen in this country in seven months.
>
> *She*. Behold the pledge of Innocence and Youth;
> Work'd in true blue, the emblem of pure truth,
> Your name there stands!
> *I.* That little name that fills so small a space
> Stands highly honoured midst your royal race.
> *She.* Mark where it stands: my fondness fixt your part,
> Just in the centre of my inmost heart.
> My father, mother, brothers, sisters round;
> Alas! How many strew the fatal ground!
> *I.* Alas! How vain for past events to mourn,
> Then let us welcome what we cannot shun,
> To her your moral, you her kindness I disclose,
> And bless in dreams each friend of my repose.[5]

Miss Stuart of Blantyre was probably Margaret Stuart (1732–1794), of whom little is known other than her family connections. She did not marry, and lived at Lennoxlove until her death.[6] The house, previously named Lethington, was renamed when bought by Frances Teresa Stewart, Duchess of Richmond and Lennox: the mistress of Charles II, she was the model for the original image of "Britannia" on coins of the period. The house was a gift for her nephew Lord Blantyre, given on condition that it be renamed "Lennox's Love to Blantyre".[7] His son, Robert Stuart, was Margaret's father. There is no information to account for the years of separation of Frances and Margaret, though

5 Frances Dunlop, letter to Robert Burns, begun 26 November 1788, from Wallace (ed.) 1898, 118–119.

6 Sources: http://www.thepeerage.com/p12643.htm; www.lennoxlove.com/estate/history-of-the-house, last accessed November 2007, page no longer available.

7 In a touching irony, there is also a tune known as "Lenox love to Blantyre", which is taken to be the tune to which Burns composed one of his last ever songs, *Oh Wert Thou In The Cauld Blast.* The song was written for Jessie Lewars, who nursed him through his final illness. According to Carol McGuirk, he asked her to sing her favourite tune, and then wrote the verses to suit. See McGuirk 1985, 142–144.

it must have occurred around the time that Frances's education was coming to a close, and also around the time of Margaret's father's death in November 1743, leaving his wife with ten children under the age of seventeen.[8]

The Stuarts of Lennoxlove were related to the Royal House of Stuart; Mrs Dunlop own's lineage could be traced back to the family of William Wallace. The dialogue passage from Mrs Dunlop's letter, cited above, mentions the "royal race" of Stuarts, and Margaret has embroidered Frances' name in "true blue, the emblem of pure truth"—and of the Jacobites. It is tempting to speculate on whether Burns made the connection between this historical legacy and the Jacobite legacy of *Auld Lang Syne*, but there is no evidence to back this up even given the wider context of his letter to her, discussed at the end of the previous chapter. Burns was likely aware of at least part of the Jacobite heritage of the song, however, since one of the Jacobite songs discussed in the previous chapter was printed in *The True Loyalist*, which Burns used.[9] However, most of the songs in *The True Loyalist* are set to tunes which were among the most well-known of the day, so that no explicit connection could be inferred from this source alone. All we do know for certain, then, is that this meeting of two school friends after a period of some forty-five years provides the context, and perhaps the inspiration, for the first version of *Auld Lang Syne* in Burns's hand.

3.2 Burns's Text

Appendix 2 gives the text of five versions of Burns's *Auld Lang Syne,* most from existing autograph sources.[10] These include the version sent to Mrs Dunlop, the version published in vol. V of the *Scots Musical Museum* (presumably the same as the version he sent to James Johnson, which is no longer extant); the version Burns wrote into a copy of vol. I of the *Scots Musical Museum* (known as the *Interleaved Scots Musical Museum*); the version he sent to George Thomson and which was published in the *Select Collection*; and finally, what may have been a working copy, now held in the Burns Cottage museum in Alloway.

The first two lines of the version Burns sent to Mrs Dunlop (B1) correspond to the older text of *Old Long Syne* (see Figs 2.1, 2.2); more significant, perhaps, is that Burns includes a refrain of the same type as the broadside version (Fig. 2.1). Refrains are

8 Source: http://www.lennoxlove.com/estate/history-of-the-house, accessed October 2007; the current version of the website no longer holds this information.

9 Donaldson 1988, 79.

10 A further autograph source, mentioned by Davidson Cook (1927) in his discussion of A. J. Law's collection of Burns manuscripts—often referred to as the Law Manuscript—is not currently available to researchers. Cook mentions *Auld Lang Syne* only in passing as consisting, in this source, of four verses (verses 2–5, in the order of B2/K240), but does not provide any further detail. Since the article containing this information focuses on discrepancies between the autographs in this collection and published sources, it might be presumed that this source did not diverge in any significant way from other known sources. My thanks to Patrick Scott for alerting me to this, and for his speedy response to my enquiries on the various manuscript sources of the song.

very important in terms of the social functions of song: they are generally the easiest part of a song to remember, being repetitive and often simple in structure; they are also the part of any song that most clearly invites people to join in, which is why the word "chorus" is now often used as a synonym for "refrain". Indeed, the refrain of *Auld Lang Syne* was specifically described as a "chorus" in the *Scots Musical Museum*, and it is set for three voices in Leopold Koželuch's arrangement for George Thomson (discussed later). Many nineteenth-century sources for *Auld Lang Syne* indicate that often, the verses would be sung by one singer or a small group of singers, with the audience joining in only at the refrain.

In songs of this period, refrains often reiterated the closing lines of the verse just sung. This can be clearly seen in the verse of B1, which reiterates the invitation to a slug of Malaga with which the first verse concludes. In the reworkings of the song, however, Burns changes the older "never thought upon" to "never brought to mind", thus creating an approximate rhyme with "syne"; he also replaces the "Malaga" line with a reiteration of the new first line. The chorus then given would, in the first version, have been the version sung after the second verse, the third line of which introduces the phrase "we'll tak a cup o' kindness yet".

This second version (B2) is broadly the same as the version Burns wrote into the "Interleaved" copy of the first volume of the *Scots Musical Museum* (B3). The only significant changes are alterations to the last line of the first verse, which now reads "And days o' auld lang syne" (this also appears in B4), and the introduction of the word "And" at the beginning of the chorus. In the interleaved *Scots Musical Museum*, Burns introduces "his" version as a comment to Ramsay's version, noting that "Ramsay here, as usual with him, has taken the idea of the song, and the first line, from the old fragment, which may be seen in 'The Museum', vol. v."[11] He then introduces the version given as B3.

It is possible, indeed likely, that Burns in fact did exactly what Ramsay had done, and what he often openly did on other occasions: reworked or expanded elements of an existing song. This would explain the changes to the first verse between the letter to Mrs Dunlop and the version published in 1796, even if the material used is clearly derived from earlier sources. Otherwise, though, the changes between all the existing versions in Burns's hand are minimal—the most significant is the change in the order of the verses in B4. Throughout the nineteenth century, the song would be published almost exclusively in this order, though more recent editors have reverted to the order of the previous version. Some have been quick to assume that Thomson wilfully changed the order, but he was only going by what Burns had sent him.

From a very early stage in its reception, most Burns scholars have agreed that, at the very least, the two verses which recount the childhood exploits of the protagonists

11 Dick regarded this comment as "spurious", as it was missing from the edition of the interleaved *Scots Musical Museum* he was working with, but it was later confirmed by Davidson Cook in an article in *The Burns Chronicle* in 1922, and reproduced in the 1991 Scolar Press edition of the *Scots Musical Museum;* Cook 1991 [1922], 12.

are his alone. These are, indeed, very new elements compared to the earlier songs we have discussed above. As regards the pint-stoups and the cups o' kindness, Jacobite songs on *Auld Lang Syne* often invoke a toast, and the later Jacobite versions, discussed in Chapter 2, are also more clearly songs for the social round rather than propaganda songs. The song Burns based his version on may therefore have developed through these Jacobite usages—it certainly would help explain the difference in sentiment and function from other *Auld Lang Synes*.[12] Finally, the protagonists of Burns's song are more generalized than the earlier eighteenth-century versions: although the chorus still bears the reference to "my jo", generally taken to refer to a lover (though it can also simply mean "my dear", which is how it appears in B4), the remainder of the text is not specifically romantic. The result is a song in which the opening, rhetorical question is answered by the sentiment which Mrs Dunlop provided: "Friendship can live to more than forty years".

3.3 Burns's Tune

The tune that Burns had Johnson publish in vol. V of the *Scots Musical Museum* is related to, but not identical with, the tune to which Ramsay's text was published in vol. I.[13] Both are reproduced in Figure 3.1; Ramsay's song is taken here as representative of M-1 as it appeared in a number of sources through the eighteenth and very early nineteenth centuries.[14]

Since Burns himself was a poet and lyricist, and did not actually compose the tunes of his songs, the difference between the tune given in other earlier and contemporary sources as "Auld Lang Syne" and the tune which appeared in volume V of the *Scots Musical Museum* has not received much consideration in discussions of the song's genesis. These differences are significant, however: even readers without a good knowledge of musical notation should be able to see some of them at a glance, or to hear the difference from the audio examples.

12 Crawford 1970 also traces the song *Go Fetch to Me a Pint O' Wine*, which Burns also included in this letter to Mrs Dunlop, to Jacobite sources.

13 Johnson 1787, 1796.

14 Songbooks and tunebooks consulted that feature M-1 include the following, listed in the bibliography: Bib. II/1730 contains Ramsay's song, entitled *The Soldier's Welcome Home* and with the note "To the tune of Auld Lang Syne" (now digitized at https://digital.nls.uk/special-collections-of-printed-music/archive/90374349); McGibbon's *A Select Collection of Scots Tunes*, two editions of which were consulted (1746 and 1762), has the tune and chorus of M-1 followed by an ornamented variation (the 1762 edition is digitized at https://digital.nls.uk/special-collections-of-printed-music/archive/105869988); Bib. II/ca. 1802 has Ramsay's text, and the tune has many similarities to McGibbon's version (now digitized by the British Library, Digital Store E.1709, http://access.bl.uk/item/viewer/ark:/81055/vdc_100049557049.0x000001); Dale ca. 1795 (now digitized at https://digital.nls.uk/105809261) is also based on Ramsay; Smith 1820–24, III has M-1 as the tune for the song *Shall Monarchy Be Quite Forgot;* the title is given in the index as *The Days of Yore*, suggesting that by this point, *Auld Lang Syne* was increasingly associated with M2 (now digitized at https://digital.nls.uk/special-collections-of-printed-music/archive/91354851).

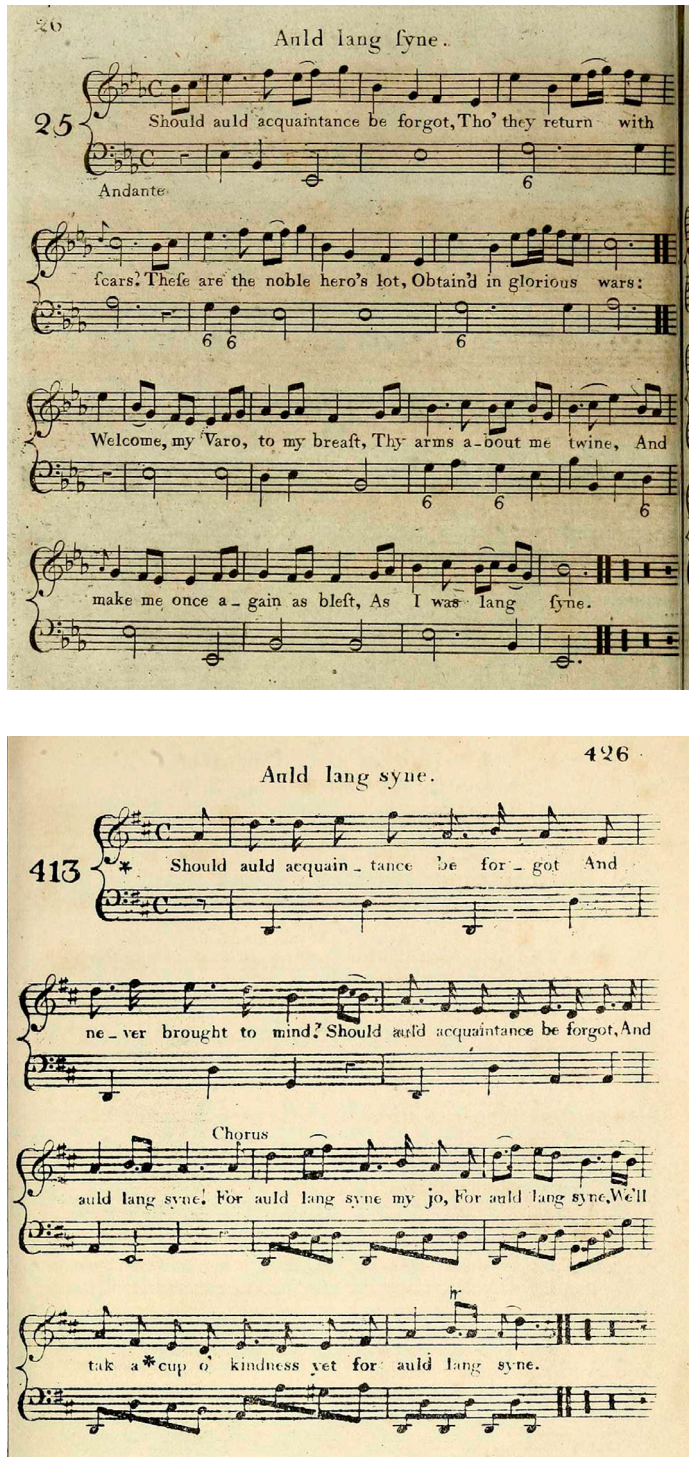

Fig. 3.1 The tunes published with (a) Ramsay's and (b) Burns's texts in vols I and V respectively of Johnson's *Scots Musical Museum*. Reproduced here from the National Library of Scotland's digitization of the 1787 and 1839 editions: Glen Collection of Printed Music. Shelfmarks Glen.201 and Glen.201d, https://digital.nls.uk/87794113, https://digital.nls.uk/87802617. CC BY 4.0.

Audio example 6 gives the tune only for (a): the faulty rhythm of the second-last bar, which as notated is short one half beat, has been corrected in the audio example; the tune for (b) has already being introduced as Audio example 1, in Chapter 1.

Audio example 6.

https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12434/671c2f96

To further aid the comparison, in Figure 3.2 I have overlaid both tunes and transposed M-1 into the same key as M1; the rhythmic values of M1 are doubled relative to the version in Figure 3.1. I have also added some arrows and boxes to highlight points of correspondence between the two tunes, which are explained in the next paragraph.

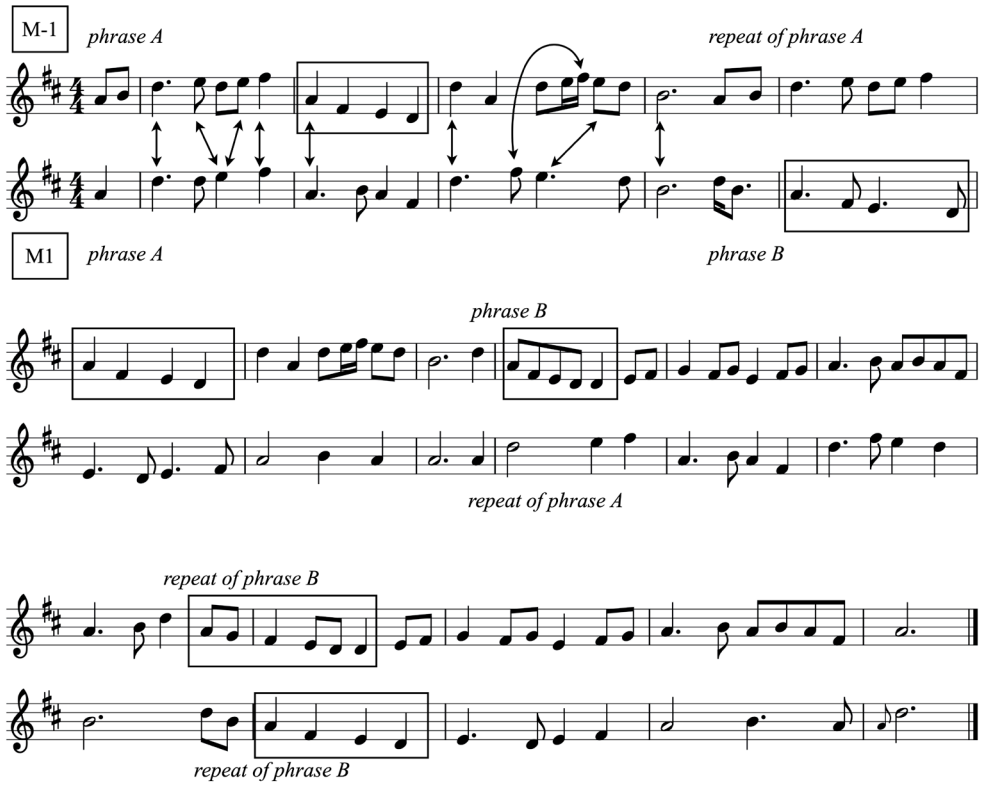

Fig. 3.2 Comparison of M-1 and M1. Set by author using MuseScore (2021).

The first thing to note is that M1 is much shorter. Burns's verses are only half the length of Ramsay's, and both the verse and refrain in Burns's song have the same music, with only slight differences in the rhythm reflecting the way the text falls. Thus, while both M-1 and M1 can be described as made up of two basic phrases, how they are organized is different: M-1's phrase A repeats before moving on to phrase B, therefore giving the impression that the tune has two distinct strains: A-A-B-B. M1 on the other hand consists of a simple alteration of the two phrases, thus giving the impression of a much more compact lyrical unit: the two phrases make up one strain, repeated (A-B-A-B).

M1 is thus not merely a curtailed version of M-1: despite other structural connections between the two tunes and the fact that they share much of the same motivic material, it appears in slightly different ways. For example, one of the hallmarks of both tunes—and other related tunes to be discussed later—is the pentatonic descent (5-3-2-1 or soh-me-re-doh) marked by rectangles in the example. M-1 includes versions of this in both phrases and thus both strains, greatly elaborated and rhythmically diminished in the second strain.

There are other significant differences as well. M-1 is much more elaborate in terms of the many inflections of the basic melodic line, and it also features some very wide leaps for the voice. Elaborate tunes, which flex the voice in all directions, are far from unusual in Scottish singing traditions. However, they still require a particular kind of strength in the voice and a particular type of context. M-1 was as likely to appear in instrumental collections as in vocal collections, and is one of many Scottish melodies that demonstrate the fruitful, reciprocal relationship between the vocal and instrumental traditions (not to mention between "traditional" and "classical" music). M1, on the other hand, more easily recalls the simple melodic structure of many narrative ballads. In fact, one wonders if Burns called this version of *Auld Lang Syne* a "glorious fragment" because the tune seemed to belong to a longer ballad rather than the short lyric it became.

M1, then, is a good deal simpler in every way. Whether M1 was, as Burns himself believed, the original version of the tune M-1, or a variant of M-1 from oral tradition, or derived from an unknown predecessor that also formed the basis for M-1, will almost certainly never be ascertained. What is more important is that the tunes also point to different social contexts. If a song is to be sung by a random group of people, some of whom may not have the strongest of voices, it follows that the tune cannot be too complicated. Furthermore, the more adaptable and memorable the tune, the more likely it is to be distributed across a wide area and a wide cross-section of the community. It is not an exclusive rule: a song which is extremely popular and therefore very often sung, played, or printed, has more chance of becoming well known even if the tune is quite complex. Some researchers have suggested that the tunes of Scots songs became much simpler as the nineteenth century progressed; earlier researchers, including those writing in the eighteenth century, conversely thought that the simpler melodies were more ancient, believing that older vocal melodies had only one strain, and that the second strains of many eighteenth-century tunes were a product of instrumental variation at a later stage.[15] What is important for us is that the relative complexity or simplicity of a tune is one of the most important factors in indicating how it was likely used. M1, for example, is almost completely syllabic: in other words, each syllable is sung to only one note rather than being stretched over several notes. Songs which are suitable for general and collective singing tend to be syllabic; solo songs, particularly those sung by better singers, can afford to allow the voice to show

15 See, for example, Tytler 1825.

off a little more. To return to examples introduced in Chapters 1 and 2—*Happy Birthday*, *God Save the Queen*, and *On Top Of Old Smokey* (or *Spaghetti*, depending)—the first and third are totally syllabic, and the second is almost totally syllabic. When songs are not completely syllabic, the extra notes often take the form of gentle ornamentations, fluctuations of the vocal line which add interest and colour to it, and which show off the flexibility and the tone of the voice. In many Scots songs, there is the added issue of the interchange between vocal and instrumental traditions, the latter being much more given to elaborations on a basic pattern. But the more inflections in a tune, the longer and more elaborate they become, and in some cases all the more difficult to remember.

However, just as additional syllables may make a song more syllabic, additional notes can also make a song easier to sing. Extra notes sometimes sneak into tunes to allow less able singers to master tricky leaps, or to add variety in the case of note repetitions.[16] The tendency to syllabic singing also means that extra words can slip in: a case in point is the singing of "for the sake of auld lang syne" rather than just "for auld lang syne", over the same number of notes, when Burns's song is sung with M2.

The simplicity of M1 compared to M-1 makes it much easier to believe that it was known in oral tradition, though how old this tradition was is another question entirely. Also, although most eighteenth-century sources consistently link the name "Auld Lang Syne" with the tune M-1, it is difficult to imagine this tune being used for the kind of social songs suggested by later Jacobite sources.

One final comment on M1 as presented in volume V of *The Scots Musical Museum*: it concerns the simple bass accompaniment. This switches from crotchets to quavers as we reach the chorus, clearly differentiating this from the verse, and adding emphasis to it—making it, in many ways, livelier (as, indeed, a chorus should be). This may be an indication of the way the tune was perceived by those responsible for its appearance here; and it should be borne in mind that Burns and Stephen Clarke, who was responsible for most of the accompaniments in the *Museum*, collaborated closely.

Burns would not live to see the publication of this *Auld Lang Syne*. Although he still oversaw the production of the fifth volume of the *Scots Musical Museum*, he died a few months before it appeared. It is unclear why there was such a long gap between Burns's first reference to the song and its publication in *The Scots Musical Museum*. In the meantime, Burns had set about having it published elsewhere, by sending it to his other publisher, one who would prove to be a pickier editor than Johnson, but who would also leave his mark on world history by changing the tune of the song to the one it is most commonly sung with today.

16 See, e.g., Klusen et al. 1978 for an empirical discussion of this phenomenon.

3.4 What Thomson Did

> I am far from undervaluing your taste for the strathspey music; on the contrary, I think it highly animating and agreeable, and that some of the strathspeys, when graced with such verses as yours, will make very pleasing songs, in the same way that rough Christians are tempered and softened by lovely women, without whom, you know, they had been brutes.[17]

Burns's first mention of the song *Auld Lang Syne* to George Thomson comes in response to a long list of queries from Thomson on songs which the latter appears to have been interested in publishing.[18] Burns's often detailed answers demonstrate his familiarity with the song repertoire: he gives sometimes more, sometimes less information on a total of seventy-four song titles—occasionally he writes only "nothing". The following, longer quotation gives a flavour of this, and also indicates that Thomson himself does not seem to have asked about *Auld Lang Syne*: rather, Burns simply takes the opportunity to mention it:

> Nos. 72 & 73. Nothing—
>
> No. 74 & last—Tranent Muir—I am altogether averse to.—The song is fine, & eke the tune, but it is not of a piece with the rest of your pieces. Instead of it allow me to mention a particular favorite of mine, which you will find, in the Museum—"I had a horse, & I had nae mair"—It is a charming song, & I know the story of the Ballad.—
>
> One more song, and I have done.—Auld lang syne—The air is but mediocre; but the following song, the old Song of the olden times, & which has never been in print, nor even in manuscript, untill I took it down from an old man's singing, is enough to recommend any air.[19]

The cynic may wonder how on earth Burns, even with his great knowledge of printed sources, could be so sure that the song had never been written down or printed before; but he certainly would have got Thomson's attention by saying so (what publisher can resist an exclusive?). More interesting is Burns's apparent indifference towards the tune, an indifference which Thomson would also come to share, particularly after *Auld Lang Syne* had become established with the tune to which it was published in his *Select Collection*, M2.

Song lyrics and song tunes—or songs and airs, to give them their eighteenth-century designations—only infrequently enjoyed a monogamous relationship. Thomson often changed the tunes to which songs were to be sung, something for which he has been almost universally condemned by Burns scholars. From an eighteenth-century perspective, however, this was hardly a misdemeanour. Before Burns's death, Thomson often consulted him before he set the words of a song to a different air. A passage from

17 Letter from George Thomson to Robert Burns, ca. November 1794, quoted in Hogg & Motherwell (eds) 1834–36, III, 167.

18 For a detailed discussion on Thomson, his relationship with Burns and his work as a publisher and editor, see Kirsteen McCue's introduction to McCue (ed.) 2021, xvii-xcvi.

19 Burns, *Letters*, no. 586.

a letter of 19 November 1794, in which Burns responds to one such query, has been taken as proof that Burns was either consulted in the case of *Auld Lang Syne*, or that the song was in any case being sung to both tunes:

> The two songs you saw in Clarke's, are, neither of them, worth your attention.—The words of, Auld lang syne, are good: but the music is an old air, the rudiments of the modern tune of that name.—The other tune, you may hear as a common Scotish [*sic*] country dance.[20]

There is, however, little corroborating evidence to suggest that the "other tune" is M2. Burns specifically talks of "two songs", which in eighteenth-century terms implies either two sets of words intended for music, or those words *with* the music. It is just possible that the other *song* was to the tune of M2, but again, difficult to prove, and probably unlikely when we look at the larger context.

The "Clarke" mentioned by Burns is almost certainly Stephen Clarke, the organist and composer who collaborated with Burns on musical matters for the *Scots Musical Museum*.[21] In a letter to Thomson written in October 1794, Burns had mentioned that Stephen Clarke "goes to your town by today's Fly, & I wish you would call on him & take his opinion in general: you know his taste is a standard".[22] It is possible, therefore, that the "two songs" were shown to Thomson by Clarke during this visit. In his exchanges with Thomson, Burns frequently referred to Clarke's expertise as a professional musician to back up his own preferences.

Clarke and Burns's cooperation also played another role in the story of *Auld Lang Syne*. It was first published with the new tune in the third set of Thomson's very first, 1799 edition, and thereafter appeared as number 68 in the second volume of the later editions. Number 91 in the same collection was an air accompanied by two song lyrics—something which Thomson did very frequently, the first set of words generally being Scots and the second English. The first song printed with air number 91, *Now Spring Has Clad Her Groves In Green*, had been written by Burns at the request of Clarke, who intended to compose music to it.[23] Clarke, however, barely outlived Burns, and Thomson seems to have taken the opportunity to publish the song as a Burns original. The air to which he set it he called "The Hopeless Lover", but it is none other than M1 (see Fig. 3.3).

20 Burns, *Letters*, no. 647.

21 For detailed biographical information on Clarke, see Campbell & Lyle 2020, Chapter 7.

22 Burns, *Letters*, no. 644.

23 The song was one of two that Burns enclosed, on a separate sheet, in a letter to George Thomson in August 1795, with a request to pass the sheet on to Alexander Cunningham; in the letter to Thomson, Burns states: "Do you know that you have roused the torpidity of Clarke at last? He has requested me to write three or four songs for him, which he is to set to music himself.—The inclosed sheet contains two songs for him: the sheet please present to my very much valued friend whose name is at the bottom of the sheet." *Letters*, 676.

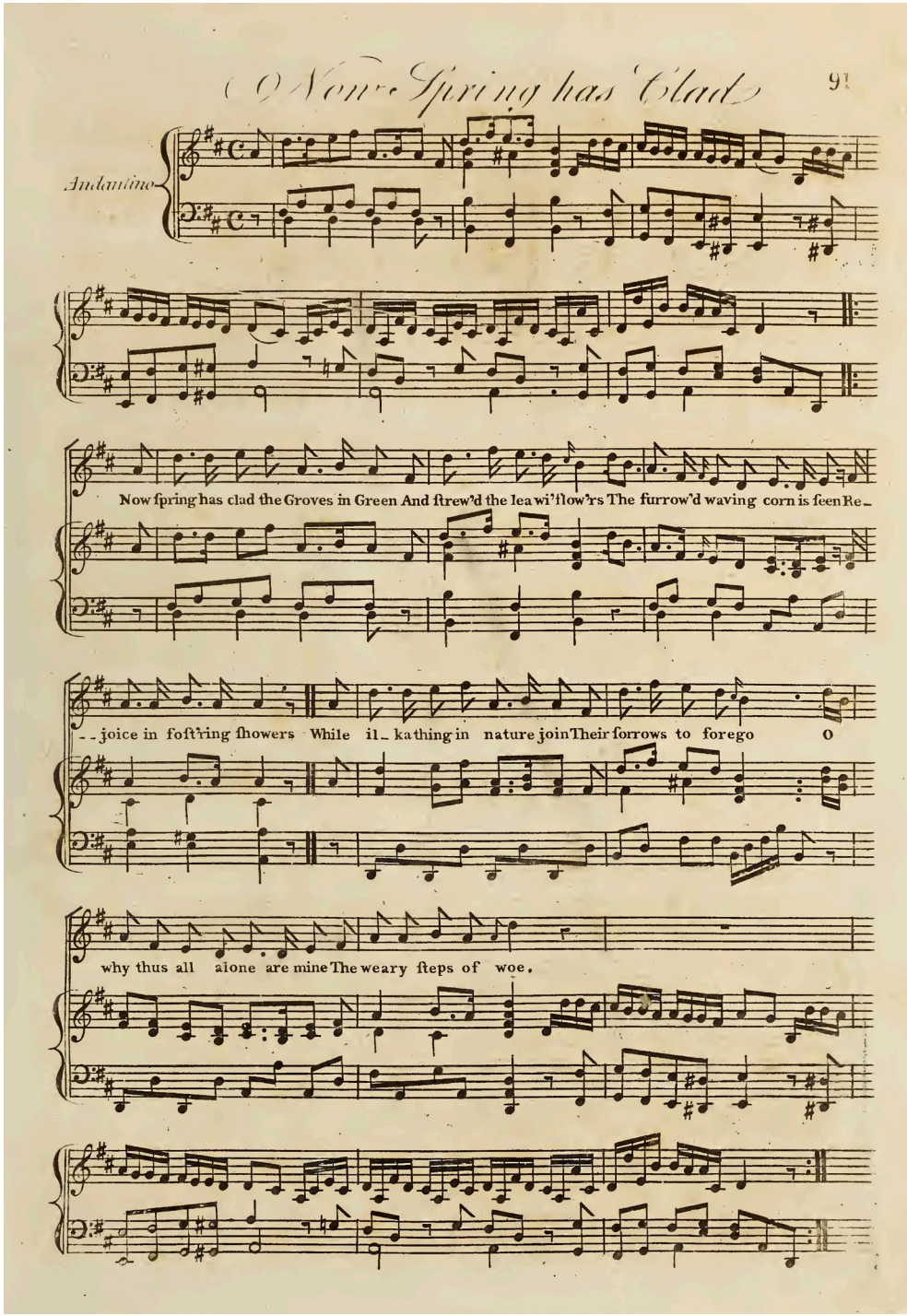

Fig. 3.3 Burns's *Now Spring Has Clad Her Groves in Green*, set to M1 as Thomson's song No. 91 arranged by Koželuch; first published 1799, taken here from the edition published as *Fifty Scottish Songs*, vol. II (Edinburgh: Printed for G. Thomson by J. Moir, 1801). Digitized by Western University, Ontario—University of Toronto Libraries.[24] CC BY-SA 4.0.

24 Available at https://archive.org/details/selectcollection00pley/page/n7/mode/2up?view=theater+

Thus, Thomson did not *not* publish Burns's tune M1, but rather used it for two new sets of words. Piecing together his motives for doing so is difficult. Having employed the German composer Ignace Pleyel to provide "Symphonies [i.e., introductions and codas] and Accompanyments" to his first volume of songs, Thomson enlisted the help of the Bohemian composer Leopold Koželuch for the second volume. Thomson seems to have much admired Koželuch, who was then working at the Imperial Court in Vienna, and agreed to the sum Koželuch demanded even though it was much higher than expected. He employed Koželuch to produce six sonatas, the latter movements of which were to introduce Scots airs which Koželuch himself was to choose from a large batch sent by Thomson. Koželuch was also to provide the symphonies and accompaniments to all the airs Thomson sent.

Problems soon arose, however. Thomson originally wanted the symphonies and accompaniments to a total of seventy airs by September 1797, since he had the poetry and embellishments all ready for publication.[25] In August 1797, however, Robert Stratton, the Scottish diplomat who was Thomson's go-between in Vienna, was told by Koželuch that it was impossible for him to continue since there were so many copyists' errors in the airs he had been sent.[26] He disagreed with Stratton's typically diplomatic suggestion that such a great musician as Koželuch could certainly rectify the errors, and consequently wrote to Thomson asking for a corrected set to be sent.[27] This put Thomson into some difficulty, as he himself described to Stratton:

> I had not kept a copy of the 50 songs sent to Mr. Kozeluch, so that it has cost me a fortnights [*sic*] labour to select & write from memory those not sent 64 in number: but I have bestowed such particular care & attention on every one of this number as to be certain they are perfectly what they ought to be. If Mr. K should still find any little defects in some of the modulations, he must impute such to the peculiar nature of the compositions, and make as much of them as he can.[28]

Unfortunately, Thomson did not note what airs had been sent to Koželuch in his own file copies of the correspondence, so that it is unclear if the airs M1 and M2 were among those sent in this first batch, or in a second smaller batch sent from May 1798. Likewise, it is difficult to know just how much Thomson had to recreate from memory, always presuming that he could at least remember what tunes he had intended. M1, for example, he would have had readily available via the *Scots Musical Museum*. M2 is a different thing entirely, since the version of this tune which appeared as "Auld Lang Syne" in the *Select Collection* in 1799 is slightly different from any of the known printed sources for this tune. We shall return to this issue below.

The fact that Thomson published M2 with the name "Auld Lang Syne", and M1 as "The Hopeless Lover", could suggest at least some sort of mix-up, or change of mind.

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25 Copy of letter to from Thomson to Koželuch, April 1797, BL manuscript Add. 35263.
26 Letter from Stratton to Thomson, 16 August 1797, BL manuscript Add. 35263.
27 Letter from Koželuch to Thomson, August 1797, BL manuscript Add. 35263.
28 Copy of letter from Thomson to Stratton, 18 September 1797, BL manuscript Add. 35263.

He stated in his letter of 1797 that the poetry was all ready for publication: it could be that he changed his mind about the tunes for each set of words, but did not change the titles originally intended. This explanation is lent credence by the fact that when, in a later edition published in the early 1820s, he printed *Now Spring Has Clad* to a different tune, he did not change the name of the air—it is still given as "The Hopeless Lover". He does however add a note to the effect that "The Air here united to the following beautiful Verses is substituted for the one in the former Editions, as being, in the opinion of the Editor, much superior to it, and better suited to the poetry".[29]

Alas, poor M1! No-one, it seems, liked it. Burns was indifferent to it, Thomson printed it and then removed it in favour of a "superior" tune. In his own notes on the tunes he sent to Beethoven in June 1822, Thomson goes even further in describing this newer tune as a "Manuscript Air of the Strathspey kind, to be attach'd to Burns's beautiful Verses 'Now Spring has clad the groves in green' [in] Vol. 2. instead of the meagre Air to which [they] are at present set".[30] And this is the last we are to hear of M1 for almost two hundred years, as it was soon eclipsed by the tune Thomson chose to accompany the words of M2. We now need to look at the background to that tune.

3.5 From M1 to M2

In an essay on *Auld Lang Syne* published in 1898, James Dick argued that the most common tune of the song—M2—is derived from a group of tunes which he gathers under the name "The Miller's Wedding" after its name in the earliest of the publications he surveys.[31] This group also includes the tune best known nowadays as *Coming Through The Rye*, one of the most popular Scottish songs (particularly in America).[32] There are certainly strong similarities between the tunes of *Coming Through The Rye* and *Auld Lang Syne*, and also some evidence—introduced below and in later chapters—that the two tunes were occasionally mistaken for one another. Despite their close relationship, however, the two tunes are distinct in other ways, and were regarded as separate tunes by a number of key figures in musical Scotland at this time. (The main contenders discussed in this section are collated and compared in Figure 3.5, below.) Why, then, was Dick so insistent? And why did John Glen, in his study *Early Scottish Melodies*,[33] reiterate much of Dick's argument? Perhaps both were keen to refute the assertion that the tune of *Auld Lang Syne*, by then one of the most iconic of all Scottish songs, was written by an Englishman.[34]

29 Thomson 1822, note to song 91.
30 BL MS Add.35268, folio 24 verso.
31 Specifically, Bremner 1757–1761.
32 As indicated not least by the key role played by the song in J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951).
33 Glen 1900, 188–191.
34 This reading is certainly supported by the fact that, in the introductory chapters to his collection *Early Scottish Melodies* (1900), Glen expends considerable effort on refuting many of William Chappell's claims regarding the English origins of many tunes considered Scottish. With regards to M2, Glen lays the blame for attributing the tune to Shield on William Stenhouse (Glen 1900, 189).

William Shield was one of the most successful English composers of the later eighteenth century. Born near Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 1748, he led theatre bands at Scarborough and Durham before gravitating to London in the 1770s, where he played in the orchestra of the King's Theatre. By the time he became house composer to the Theatre Royal Covent Garden in 1784, he had already chalked up two operatic successes with *The Flitch of Bacon* (1778), and, more importantly, the comic afterpiece *Rosina* (1782). Shield was also the musical advisor to the song collector Joseph Ritson, and travelled on the continent with Ritson in the early 1790s. Shield seems to have been enthusiastic about this undertaking, his methods becoming more rigorous as time progressed. His work with Ritson, his interest in folk tunes and his knowledge of their style, would have put him in good stead to satisfy contemporary audiences at the time of a revival of operas integrating popular and folk-style tunes. Shield's operas, particularly *Rosina*, helped instigate this revival, though *Rosina* is most well known nowadays for being the first known source in print for what is basically M2.

Rosina, to a libretto by Frances Brooke, was first performed at Covent Garden on—ironically, with hindsight—31 December 1782. The action takes place in northern England and is the unspectacular tale of a country girl of concealed noble birth, of the local lord who takes a fancy to her (the feeling is mutual, but unspoken), and of his dastardly brother, who has Rosina kidnapped in order to have his wicked way with her. All turns out well when a rustic Irishman, complete with rustic Irish accent, saves Rosina from this fate; the story is complete when the lord hears of her noble origins, and therefore feels in a position to marry her.

The music of *Rosina*, recently published in a modern version, consists for the most part of straightforward arrangements of the songs.[35] M2 appears only in the last movement of the overture (see Fig. 3.4), but has a prominent position there, both in terms of its position and the orchestration, which is clearly designed to mimic bagpipes: the first oboe, which has the tune, is supported by a C drone consisting of a second oboe, two bassoons and two horns; the repeated notes of the tune are carefully prefixed by a grace note in the style of Highland bagpipe playing.

Why did Shield use this tune at exactly this point in the overture, with an instrumentation clearly suggestive of the bagpipe, considering that, although the setting is given only as "A village in the north" it is actually Northumberland and not Scotland? There are several possible explanations, one being that the Northumbrian pipes, and not the Highland bagpipes, are to be evoked. This is the explanation favoured by John Glen, and by Roger Fiske, who refutes Dick's assertion that the source of the tune is Robert Bremner's book of reels, and suggests that Shield may have remembered the tune from his younger days in the north of England.[36] This does not in itself settle the issue of whether the tune is Scottish or English, since Northumbrian pipers often incorporated Scots tunes into their repertoires (and the region of Northumbria was

35 Shield 1998 (1782).
36 Fiske 1973, 457–458.

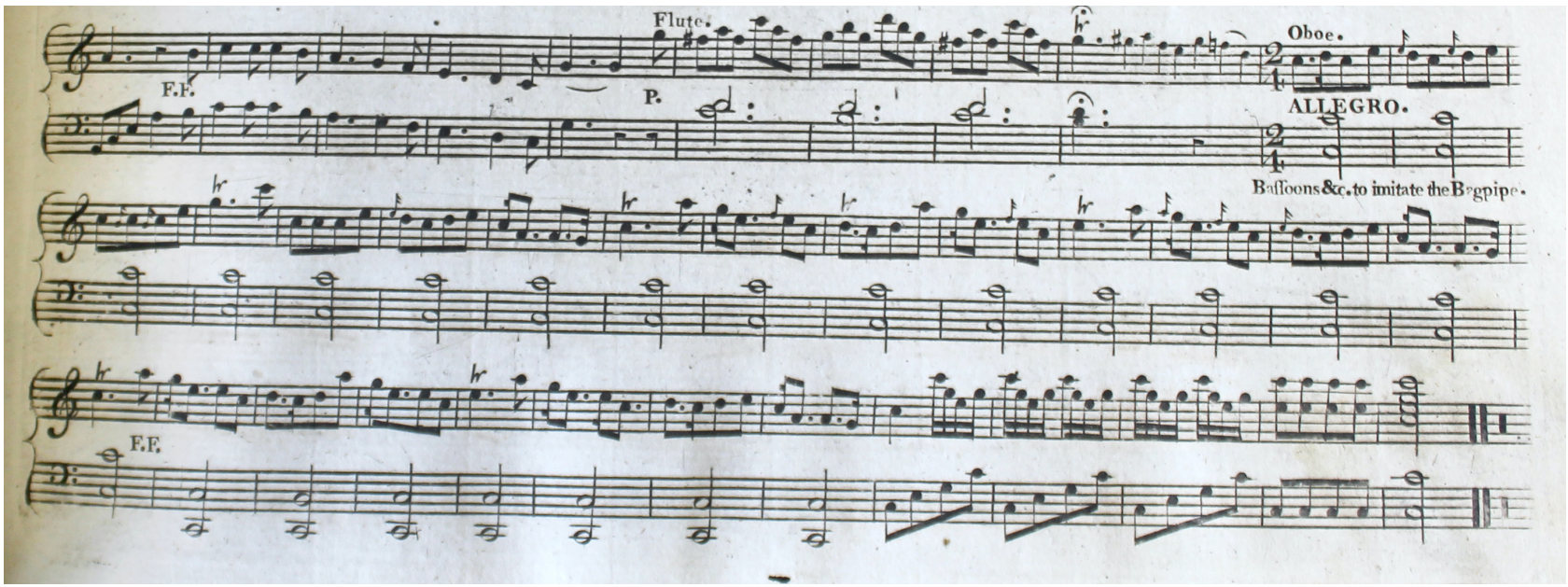

Fig. 3.4 M2 as given by William Shield in the overture to *Rosina*, from an edition for keyboard instrument published by J. Dale, ca. 1786–1791; EUL Special Collections, shelfmark Mus.s.624/3. Image by author (2021), with permission from Edinburgh University Library.

Audio example 7, based on the edition shown, with the instrumentation indicated.

https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12434/3da3fc3f

in any case at times Scottish, at time English: the distinction is many ways pointless). Another suggestion is that the tune may only have been added to the overture at a later date, on the occasion of the Edinburgh premiere.[37] However, the tune's appearance may be due solely to the general popularity of "Scotch" tunes at this time: Shield's first opera, *The Flitch of Bacon*, also includes a Scottish tune in the overture even though it is set in a village in Essex; the habit of including Scottish tunes in English operas may go back to the great success of the "Scotch Gavotte" which closed the overture to Thomas Arne's *Thomas and Sally* (1760).

Rosina was enormously successful, being performed seventy times in its first two seasons in London alone. Along with Sheridan's *The Duenna*, it helped kick-start the ballad opera tradition, as George Thomson noted in the same letter to Burns quoted at the beginning of this section:

> Here let me ask you, whether you never seriously turned your thoughts upon dramatic writing? That is a field worthy of your genius, in which it might shine forth in all its splendour. One or two successful pieces upon the London stage would make your fortune. The rage at present is for musical dramas: few or none of those which have appeared since the "Duenna" possess much poetic merit; there is little in the conduct of the fable, or in the dialogue, to interest the audience. They are chiefly vehicles for music and pageantry. I think you might produce a comic opera in three acts, which would live by the poetry, at the same time that it would be proper to take every assistance from her tuneful sister. Part of the songs would be to our favourite Scottish airs; the rest might be left to the London composers—Storace for Drury-Lane, or Shield for Covent-garden: both of them very able and popular musicians. I believe that interest and manoeuvring are often necessary to have a drama brought on: so it may be with the namby pamby tribe of flowery scribblers: but were you to address Mr Sheridan himself by letter, and send him a dramatic piece, I am persuaded he would, for the honour of genius, give it a fair and candid trial. Excuse me for obtruding these hints upon your consideration.[38]

An opera as popular as *Rosina* always sent ripples through the popular song culture of the day. A songbook published in Glasgow in 1786, for example, contains lyrics of several songs from *Rosina*, though it does not attribute them to this source.[39] In the case of a tune from the overture, it is more difficult to establish what impact the opera would have had, but it is worth noticing that the second instance in print of a tune very directly related to M2 comes less than two years after the opera's premiere, and in the same year as its Edinburgh premiere. This tune comes in Niel Gow's *A Collection of Strathspey Reels*, where it is called "Sir Alexander Don's Strathspey"—a name still used for M2 to this day.[40] Niel Gow is probably the most famous fiddler Scotland has ever produced, and his family—particularly his son Nathaniel, who was actually responsible for publishing many of the volumes bearing Niel Gow's name—continued

37 A conjecture introducecd by Glen 1900, 190, and picked up by Farmer 1947, 205.
38 Letter from George Thomson to Robert Burns, ca. November 1794, quoted in Hogg & Motherwell (eds) 1834–36, vol. III, 167–68.
39 Bib. II/1786/1. Several lyrics from *Rosina* also appear in Bib. II/1780s.
40 Gow 1784.

to play a very important role in Scottish music until well into the nineteenth century.[41] Glen argues that Gow published the tune "as slightly altered by Shield" from parts of "The Miller's Daughter" as published by Angus Cumming ca. 1780. Glen's comparative table is reproduced as Figure 3.5.[42]

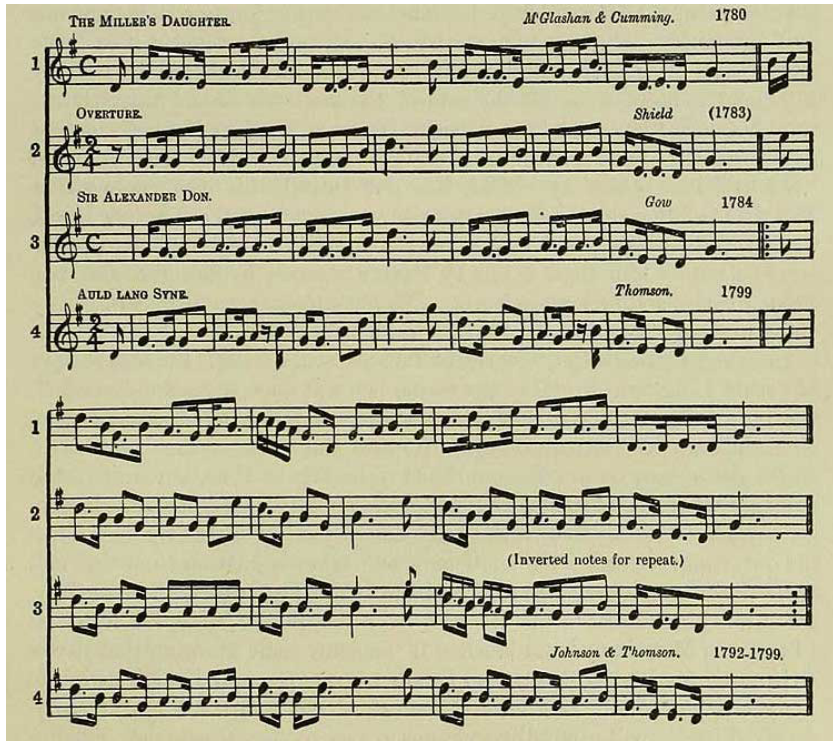

Fig. 3.5 Comparison of possible sources for M2 according to Glen's *Early Scottish Melodies* (Edinburgh: J. & R. Glen, 1900), https://digital.nls.uk/special-collections-of-printed-music/archive/94645804, CC BY 4.0. Note that Glen gives 1780 as the date of Cumming's volume, although in his own bibliography it is undated: the National Library of Scotland, which now owns Glen's of Cummings, dates that volume as 1782; Glasgow University Library has an earlier edition, dated 1780.[43]

The term "strathspey" refers to a type of dance tune from the Highlands which became popular in the central and southern parts of the country in the mid-eighteenth century.[44] The personal names often attributed to tunes in collections of this time could indicate

41 Farmer (1947, 341ff.) argued that the fame of the Gow family eclipsed many other musicians whom he personally believed to have been better or at least more consistent composers. These include Robert Mackintosh, who also published a tune called "Sir Alexander Don's Strathspey". Farmer implies that this is the same tune, but the only tune with this name that I have located in available sources of Mackintosh's music is a different one. It appears in Mackintosh 1793; Don subscribed for two copies.

42 Glen 1900, 189.

43 The Glasgow University Library's edition of Cummings has been digitized and is available at https://hms.scot/prints/copy/3/

44 On the contested origins and the spread of the strathspey, see Lamb 2013, 2014; Newton 2014; Macdonald n.d.

that it was composed by the person named, or that it was a particular favourite, but in many cases it was simply a way of getting the person concerned (or their parents in the case of many tunes named for young ladies) to buy copies of the publication. Tunes therefore often went through a number of names in different publications. Sir Alexander Don (1751–1815) was himself reputed to have been a fine fiddler (another tune in Gow's 1784 collection is titled "The Caledonian Hunt by Sir Alexander Don"—not to be confused with "The Caledonian Hunt's Delight", to which Burns wrote the song *Ye Banks And Braes*.) Don subscribed for three copies of Gow's 1784 collection, which also includes "The Miller's Daughter"—one of the tunes Dick listed in his analysis—in what it specifically refers to as the "Old Setting" (a common way of distinguishing an older tune or variant associated with a particular name and dance).

The tune published as "Sir Alexander Don's Strathspey" in 1784 is slightly different from both the tune in *Rosina* and that later published as *Auld Lang Syne*. No composer is named initially, but this changes in later volumes. In *The Beauties of Niel Gow,* which was published in several editions from ca. 1819 onwards, "Sir Alexr. Don's Strathspey" is said to be "From the Opera of Rosina by Mr. Shield". This volume also comments that "The Song Auld Langsyne is taken from this Tune". In Part II of *The Vocal Melodies of Scotland*, a collection of airs from well-known songs, M2 is published as "Auld Langsyne" and accredited "Modern. by Shield".[45] It is also placed at the end of the volume—one of the earliest instances of this, but quite possibly coincidental.[46]

Returning to the time of Burns, the story of M2 is about to get even more complicated. The fourth volume of the *Scots Musical Museum*, published in 1792, contained a song by Burns called *O Can Ye Labour Lea, Young Man* (hereafter: *Can Ye Labour Lea*; also known as *I Fee'd A Lad At Martinmas*, K382).[47] According to Burns, it was currently very popular in the Nithsdale district where he then lived, but its only obvious claim to fame in print before or since is that the tune given in the *Museum* is M2: the chorus is sung to the first part of the tune, and the verse is sung to what would become the chorus tune of *Auld Lang Syne*.[48] This is not the only *Can Ye Labour Lea* that Burns left us with: a bawdy version is included in *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*, a collection Burns made in honour of the Crochallan Fencibles and which was eventually published in an unexpurgated version in the 1950s.[49] However, to add further to the general confusion, the version of *Can Ye Labour Lea* included in *The Merry Muses* is not to be sung to

45 Gow 1820.

46 See Chapter 4, below.

47 Johnson 1792, 407 (song 394).

48 Stenhouse 1853 says that "This old tune [that of *Can Ye Labour Lea*] was modelled into a strathspey, called the 'Miller's Daughter,' which Shield selected for one of his airs in the overture to *Rosina*; and Gow afterwards printed the air from that overture, under the name of 'Sir Alexander Don's Strathspey.' It is now called 'Auld Lang Syne'", 358. However, it is just as likely that the song tune derived from Shield or Gow's usage.

49 Low, in his commentary to Low (ed.) 1993, notes that there has long been a tradition that Burns himself wrote very few of the lyrics in *The Merry Muses*, but that this misconception is due to the early editor James Currie altering one of Burns's letters to this effect.

"Sir Alexander Don's Strathspey" but to a tune known as "Sir Archibald Grant's Strathspey" (which may be the same tune also known today as "Moneymusk"), while another bawdy song again, *Errock Brae*, is indeed to be sung to a tune referred to as "Sir Alexander Don's Strathspey".

Can Ye Labour Lea is one of the couple of hundred of songs contributed by Burns to the publications of the day which seems never to have enjoyed widespread popularity. Again, this makes it difficult to gauge the actual age of the song and its elements. We need not presume, just because the song was apparently established in a local oral tradition, that the air to which it was sung had a long history. The tune could equally well have come to the area fairly recently, either as a dance tune, or through a local performance of *Rosina.* There is a dearth of documentary sources on theatrical life in Scotland outside the metropolis, but we know that *Rosina* was available in a vocal score, which would have made possible its performance even by smaller travelling groups, and there was a vibrant theatre culture in Dumfries even before the opening of its Theatre Royal, with Burns's patronage, in 1792.

As mentioned, M2 and the tune of *Coming Through The Rye*, which Dick protested were one and the same, were occasionally confused, and there is at least one documented instance of confusion between the latter song and *Can Ye Labour Lea*. Burns's version of *Coming Through The Rye*, together with another version which may have been his model, were like *Auld Lang Syne* both published in the fifth volume of *The Scots Musical Museum*. A songbook published just a few years later in Glasgow, called *The Musical Repository,* also gives two versions of the words, with the second pertaining to be the "Original words of the foregoing tune". In actual fact, the first three verses derive from Burns's version, but *The Musical Repository* adds a fourth verse, which is also the last verse of *Can Ye Labour Lea*:

> Kissin is the key of love,
> And clappin is the lock,
> And makin o's the best thing
> That e'er a young thing got.
> *Oh Jenny's a' weet, &c.*[50]

Many years before the publication of *Can Ye Labour Lea*, Burns had introduced this verse into a letter, stating it was from "An auld Sang o' my Mither's", though there is no further context.[51] The date of publication of *The Musical Repository* makes it impossible to determine whether this verse reflected an existing tradition (or an existing mix-up between the two songs) or whether it is a more recent confabulation of the two songs published by Burns. In any case, the similarity of the two tunes seems the most logical explanation for this to have happened.

50 Bib. II/1799.

51 Burns, *Letters*, no. 85. Mackay also quotes this verse and states that the ballad it came from was "His mother's favourite—and Robert's too"; he notes also that it is strange to think that she would have sung this song in his presence, given the sexual overtones. Mackay 1992, 31–32.

Thus, the most direct predecessor of the tune that would soon go down in history as "Auld Lang Syne" would have been fairly widely circulated across Britain, and not just in southern Scotland, in the 1780s and 1790s. Despite the wide number of sources he cited, Dick could not find an earlier printed version than Shield's that demonstrates the key difference that distinguishes the tune from *Rosina*, the tune Gow published as "Sir Alexander Don's Strathspey", and the tune of *Can Ye Labour Lea* from the earlier tunes and from the common tune of *Coming Through The Rye*. A particular characteristic of that tune is the recurrent return to the motif on which, nowadays, the key phrase "coming through the rye" is always sung. The tunes following *Rosina* are none of them identical, but they are marked off by not returning to this low register, and the tonic, at the mid-point of the first strain; instead, they ascend to the fifth or—in the cases of *Can Ye Labour Lea* and the tune that Thomson published as *Auld Lang Syne*—sixth degrees of the scale.

All that remains is to ask why Thomson chose this tune, where he got it from, and who was responsible for a number of small yet significant changes to the melodic structure of M2 when compared with the tune of *Can Ye Labour Lea*. These changes make the tune easier to sing by replacing most of the larger leaps with more gradual progressions. For example, *Can Ye Labour Lea* expects singers to make an octave leap from the highest note of the melody at the end of the first half of the strain. In the tune as published by Thomson, the singer instead trips lightly down in the most obvious way possible—via a major triad arpeggio. This is similar to what happens at the same point of the second strain of *Can Ye Labour Lea* and the other tunes most closely related to it. However, that second strain also contains a descent to the tonic and then an upwards leap of a fifth just before the tune's highest point: in Thomson's tune, instead of descending to the tonic, the tune rests on the third, from where it is a mere skip back up to the dominant and beyond. These changes may appear minor, but they give M2 its final shape, character, and potential. Given that Thomson normally took his tunes from available sources, and that no other source for this version of the tune has yet been traced, the question that then arises is whether he had another source, or whether he or somebody else consciously or unconciously made these final tiny changes which are so significant for the overall character of the melody.

When it comes to providing very, very speculative answers to both this question and the general question of why Thomson came up with this tune for *Auld Lang Syne*, we should bear in mind the type of circles that our poets and publishers moved in. Although contemporary fiddle music—the type played for dances—was and is generally monodic (in other words, where there is more than one fiddler they all play the same tune) with perhaps a simple bass accompaniment, many of the musicians someone like Thomson would have contact with were primarily at home in the European classical tradition, as indeed was Thomson himself. Earlier, it was mentioned that Koželuch, who provided the first accompaniment for *Auld Lang Syne* in the *Select Collection*, demanded a second copy of the tunes and that Thomson claimed he had often to resort to his own memory to recreate them, though it is not entirely clear whether this meant he had no copy of the tunes themselves, or simply no record of

which air was to go with which song. If he had to recreate a tune he knew from *Can Ye Labour Lea* from memory, it's very possible that his classical brain or inclination smoothed out some of the more jagged Scots corners. It is also possible that it was Koželuch's attempt to tame the *musique barbare* he had complained about to Stratton.

And why this tune? There are some motivic and structural similarities between M1 and M2, which become obvious if we simplify the rhythm in both cases so that both tunes proceed at exactly the same rate (see Fig. 3.6) The opening bar is different by only one pitch—in M1, we rise stepwise from D to F via E, whereas in M2 we jump from D to F; the music for the third line of the verse, however, is basically the same, although an octave higher in M2: this is also one of the points in M2 that differentiates it from the related tunes discussed in this section. Moreover, if we add a basic harmonic arrangement, both tunes can be played together. There is a method in this madness: in German folksong research, the idea of *Übersingen* (literally "over-singing") posits that some tunes may start off being second voices sung to a well-known tune which then become independent of it. While this is not the case here, it is certainly possible to imagine a situation in which, at some informal musical gathering in Edinburgh's new town in the late eighteenth century, someone came up with the idea that these tunes could be played as complementary voices. This is wild conjecture—though perhaps not wilder than the idea that Thomson merely got the two tunes mixed up, something that seems unlikely for someone as musical as he was, especially considering the difference in character between the tunes as they are generally performed.

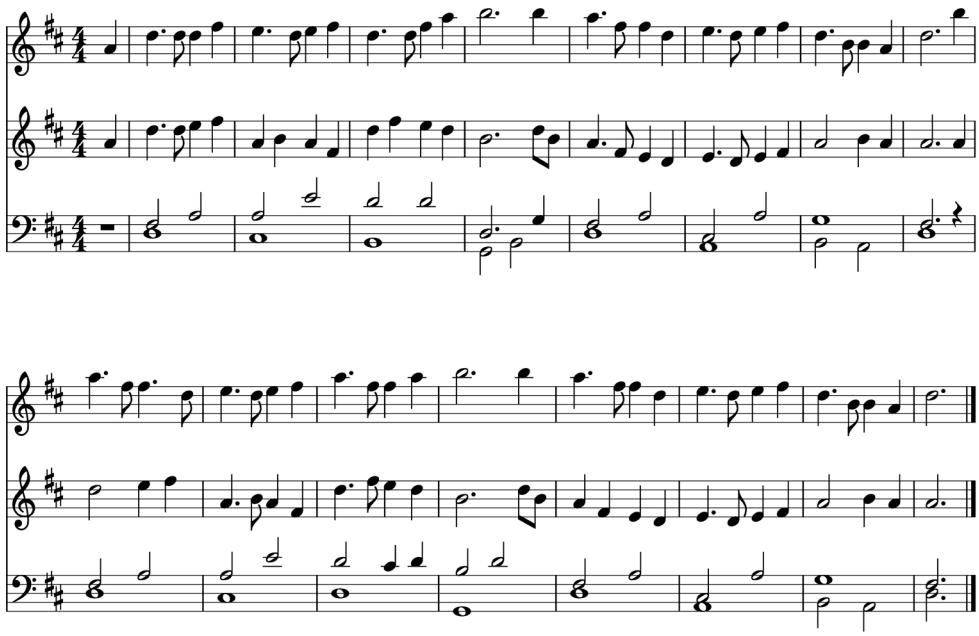

Fig. 3.6 M1 and M2, combined, with the rhythm synchronized, and harmonized. Set by author using MuseScore (2021).

Audio example 8.

https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12434/50ddb0cd

It should also be borne in mind that Thomson's principal interest was in publishing the airs with appropriate words. Rather than seeking a tune for *Auld Lang Syne*, then, he may simply have been looking for a text for M2, and realised that *Auld Lang Syne* not only fitted rather well, but that this tune gave the song a whole new potential. Whether or not he intended the arrangement to become quite as upbeat as Koželuch and others after him made it, is another story. Strathspeys, for all that they are dance tunes, are generally to be taken at quite a steady pace, as witness the tempo indications for the tunes in the *Scots Musical Museum*: "Slow" for *Can Ye Labour Lea* and "Very Slow" for *Coming Through The Rye*.[52]

Whatever the real reasons why this tune was chosen, and how it ended up in this precise form, one thing is clear: Thomson did not merely change the tune of *Auld Lang Syne*—he changed the whole future course of the song's history. M2 is structurally even more simple than M1. Though it introduces a second strain for the chorus, so that it is longer than M1, M2 has much more internal repetition. If we break M2 down into units made up of a single bar, and disregard minor rhythmic changes, we find that one bar appears four times (in other words, it accounts for a quarter of the tune), and always as the second bar of each four-bar phrase; another bar appears three times (twice in the chorus). By comparison, each corresponding unit of M1 is featured twice—once in the verse, once in the chorus. Also, the repeated bars of M2 are in themselves very, very simple: one is a turn around the second degree of the scale ("be forgot and") and the other is a descent through a major triad (as sung at the first chorus occurrence of "auld lang": the "syne" that follows is again on the turn around the second degree).

The contour of the melody is also quite different. It was noted previously that one of the most distinctive features of M-1 and M1 is the stepwise descent which pulls the melody down from the high, bright pitches on which it started.[53] The dramatic changes in tone colour we know from both M-1 and M1 now give way to a fine melodic curve which reaches gradually upwards and then back downwards, both in the verse on its own, and in the verse and chorus treated as a unit. Although it reaches just as high as the other tunes, it is, on the whole, set in a much more grounded register. In the years and decades to follow—years in which its typical strathspey rhythms and style would gradually fall away, or become less obvious—M2 would reveal itself to be a remarkably pliable tune, suitable for interpretation in a whole range of different styles, and for adoption in a whole world of cultures. Thomson thus matched the universal sentiment

52 Johnson 1792, 407; 1796, 430.

53 In Ramsay's version of *Auld Lang Syne*, the low and resonant beginning of the second strain of M1, which contrasts so starkly with the previous strain, more than matches the text of the first version of the song: "Welcome my Varo to my breast" sings the faithful woman, just as her voice also descends into the chest range.

which lies at the heart of Burns's song to a tune that itself had universal qualities, though to what extent he himself was aware of this remains a moot point.

3.6 The Legacy of the Old Songs and Two Contemporaries of the New

Two groups of songs in the Greig-Duncan Folk Song Collection, one of the most important documentary sources for Scottish songs in use in the early twentieth century, show that the legacy of older versions of *Auld Lang Syne* continued for quite some time after Burns's version (with the tune M2) began its ascent in the early nineteenth century. These song groups are No. 538, *The Nabob* (Volume III), and No. 1143, *Auld Lang Syne* (Volume VI). The four song versions in the latter group have the titles *Aul' Langsyne* (tune and text), *Langsyne* (tune only), *On Longside Road* and *Old Long Syne* (both text only). The first tune is clearly related to M-1/M1, as is the opening of the second section of the second tune, which is also related to a tune used for the other group of songs, those given the collective title *The Nabob*: the tunes for the *Auld Lang Syne* group are reproduced in Figure 3.7. The texts of the songs in this group, like the old text of *Old Long Syne* (discussed in Chapter 2), tell of a jilted lover; two have a chorus of the same structure as that in the old broadside and in the modern song, and all end with a verse which recalls the earliest known version of *Auld Lang Syne* (this one is taken from the first song in the group, collected by Duncan from a man called Robert Alexander):

> But if I ever do hae a hoose
> That I can call it mine
> Ye aye's be welcome into it
> For aul' langsyne.[54]

While these songs seem to indicate the further existence of the oldest known text of *Old Long Syne*, the source of the other group—No. 538—is exactly contemporary with Burns's song. *The Nabob* was written by Susanna Blamire (1747–1794),[55] and takes as its title a common eighteenth-century term for a European who became wealthy in the east. Blamire's other songs include *The Chelsea Pensioners*, a song which, to a tune known as "The Days o' Langsyne", was popular in songbooks of the Napoleonic period.[56] The first collected edition of her works, published in 1842, names the tune of *The Nabob* as "Traveller's Return", and the song is also known under this title. Most nineteenth-century songbooks I have seen which print the song do so with M-1 as the tune, though the tunes in the Greig-Duncan collection are all versions of one also used

54 Shuldam-Shaw et al. (eds) 1981-, VI, 184 (song 1143/A).

55 The figure of the nabob appears in several literary guises around this period, including in Samuel Foote's play *The Nabob* (1772). It is worth bearing this broader cultural aspect in mind given the lure of finding Jacobite double-meaning in songs dealing with travellers' returns.

56 See also Chapter 6, below.

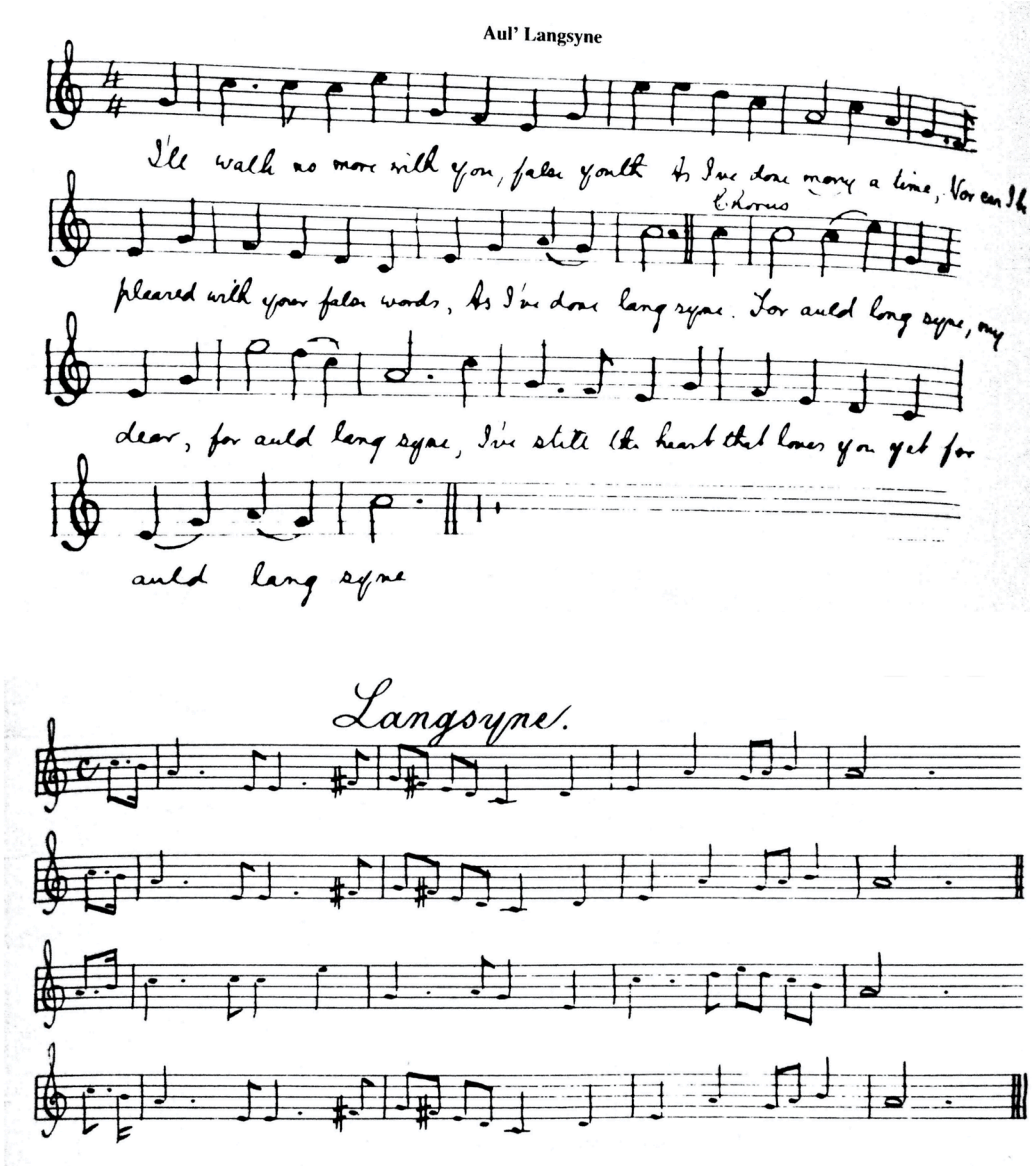

Fig. 3.7 The tunes of (a) "Aul' Langsyne", collected from Robert Alexander, and (b) "Langsyne", collected from John Johnstone, as published in *The Greig-Duncan Folk Song Collection*, VI (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1981ff.), 184–185. © University of Aberdeen; reproduced by permission. All rights reserved.

Audio example 9, Audio example 10.

https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12434/db715dff

https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12434/85a8a5c4

in a volume called *The Select Songs of Scotland*, published in 1848.[57] Two of the songs in Greig-Duncan also include a chorus, which Blamire's song does not.

Blamire's song is almost exactly contemporary with Burns's, being written with great probability in 1788, but only published in 1802.[58] According to her half-sister, the song was based on "a real incident", probably the experience of another sister's husband, Thomas Graeme, who spent thirty years abroad with the Black Watch before returning to Duchray Castle in the Trossachs—which, Blamire's biographer believes, may be the delapidated stately home mentioned in the poem.[59] Blamire's nabob is disturbed to find almost none of his old acquaintances there; the poem finishes with the observation that, perhaps, the old songs alone can take us back to days lang syne:

> In vain I sought in music's sound
> To find that magic art,
> Which oft in Scotland's ancient lays
> Has thrill'd through a' my heart:
> The sang had mony an artfu' turn;
> My ear confess'd 'twas fine;
> But miss'd the simple melody
> I listen'd to langsyne.
>
> Ye sons to comrades o' my youth,
> Forgie an auld man's spleen,
> Wha' midst your gayest scenes still mourns
> The days he ance has seen:
> When time has past, and seasons fled,
> Your hearts will feel like mine;
> And aye the sang will maist delight
> That minds ye o' langsyne!

Blamire's published poem is derived from several different autograph sources, and the editor notes the number of different verses in contemporary sources and the difference even between the song's 1802 publication in *The Scots Magazine* and its 1803 publication in the same journal. Patrick Maxwell, in his notes to the 1842 edition of Blamire's collected works, describes *The Nabob* as a song that "has so long clung to the affections of the lovers of song on both sides of the Border—which has charmed the social meetings of all classes in the community, and claimed for its simple beauties, and touching imagery, the willing tear from both old and young. I have heard it sung in the south of Scotland, when both singer and auditors were weeping".[60] In

57 Bib. II/1848.

58 The editor of the 1842 edition states that one of the early versions in Blamire's own hand is found on the same sheet of paper that contains her *Song for The Carlisle Hunt, November, 1788*, leading him to suggest this as a possible dating for the early version of *The Nabob* as well.

59 Maycock 2003, 46–47.

60 Quoted in Lonsdale (ed.) 1842, 198. A digital edition created by the British Women Romantic Poets Project at the University of California at Davis, can now be found at http://name.umdl.umich.edu/

another publication from the 1840s, we read that "This simple, natural, and affecting production is to be found in almost every Scottish song-book of the present century".[61]

Another *Auld Lang Syne*, which appears to have been written ca. 1801, was for a time attributed to John Skinner (1721–1807), whose *Tullochgorum* Burns believed to be the best of all Scots songs. An article published in the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* in 1921, however, made a convincing argument that this song, the text of which is given in Figure 3.8, was in fact the work of Anna Brown, the source of many an old song recorded by Walter Scott and others. The 1921 article argues that the locations mentioned in the last verse of the poem correspond exactly to Brown's places of residence as a young girl and since her marriage, and that the poem was written for John Harper, a musician and friend of her youth.[62] A letter published in a later issue of the same newspaper confirmed this theory, reproducing a letter from Brown's cousin Robert Scott to Harper which, on her request, includes a "poetic remembrance" she had written for him; the letter was dated 12 November 1801.[63]

Fig. 3.8 The text of the "Aberdeenshire" version, quoted here from Anon., 1921, "'Auld Lang Syne': The Authorship of the Old Aberdeenshire Version'", *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 16 July, 3–7.

Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
Or friendship ere grow cauld?
Should we not tighter draw the knot;
Aye, as we're growing auld?
How comes it then, my worthy friend,
Wha used to be sae kin'.
We dinna for each other speer,
As we did lang syne?

Tho' many a day be past and gane
Sin' we did ither see;
Yet gin the heart be just the same,
It matters not a flee.
Gin ye hae not forgot the art
To sound your harp divine,
Ye'll find still I can bear my part,
And sing as lang syne.

I think upon the mony days
When I, in youthfu' pride,
Wi' you aft rambled o'er the braes
On bonny Bogie side.

BlamSPoeti. The note in question is given is linked as "superscript 1" from the page containing *The Nabob*.

61 Whitelaw 1848, 104. A misremembered quotation from the song appears in a speech given by Mr. Leckie at a Conservative soirée in Paisley, as reported in *The Times*, 30 October 1839.

62 Anon. 1921.

63 Letter in the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* in response to Anon. 1921; copies of the article and the letter are held at NLS shelfmark 5.1002.

The birdies frae the Arn tree,
Wha mixt their notes wi' mind,
Were not mair blyth, nor fu' o' glee
Than we were lang syne.

I think upo' the bonny springs,
Ye used to me to play;
And how we used to dance and sing,
The live-lang simmer day.
Nae fairies on the haunted green,
Where moonbeams twinkling shine,
Mair blythly brisked around their Queen,
Than we did lang syne.

What tho' I be some aulder grown,
And ablins not so gay;
What tho' my locks o' hazel brown
Be now well mixed wi' grey;
I'm sure my heart's nae caulder grown,
But as my years decline,
Still friendship's flame mair kindly glows
Than it did lang syne.

Tho' ye live on the banks of Don,
And I besouth the Tay,
Well might ye ride to Falklan's Town
Some bonny simmer's day.
And in that place where Scotland's Kings
Aft birl'd baith Beer and Wine,
Let's meet, an' laugh, an' dance, an' sing,
And crack of lang syne.

Unlike the other songs and ballads which Brown transmitted or created, her own very personal *Auld Lang Syne* does not seem to have filtered into common usage, though it is very occasionally referred to in connection with the more famous version of the song (and then often as "Skinner's" *Auld Lang Syne*). Taken along with Blamire's version, however, and bearing in mind again the circumstances of Burns's letter to Mrs Dunlop, it further indicates that the ideas of the older songs discussed in this and the previous chapter were still present among, at the very least, literary persons with a keen interest in Scots tradition. Brown may have been inspired to her version by the recent publications of the modern song, but the structure and sentiment of her own version are more closely related to earlier versions, some of which at least she would almost certainly have known. Furthermore, the *Auld Lang Syne* songs in the Greig-Duncan collection suggest that elements of the oldest known version of *Old Long Syne* continued to be transmitted until late in the nineteenth century, though it is impossible to say if this was a continuous oral tradition or one revived or refreshed by printed sources.

Such myriad connections, such multiple lines of influence as become apparent through all these different versions, are testimony to the pliability of songs, and the vivacious nature of human social connections and interconnections. If we regard this as the rule rather than the exception, then what becomes truly interesting is how some of these ephemeral cultural artefacts can solidify into something more stable, more universal, and ultimately more significant. The following chapter will ask just what were the catalysts for the establishment of the song and the customs we now associate with *Auld Lang Syne* as one of the most widely recognized musical phenomena in the world today.