

M. J. GRANT

AULD LANG SYNE

A Song and its Culture





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4. *Auld Lang Syne* in the Early Nineteenth Century

4.1 “We’ll toom the cup to friendship’s growth”

George Thomson’s new version of *Auld Lang Syne* was first published in 1799, and then in a slightly altered edition in 1801, in which the accompaniment provided by Leopold Koželuch was simplified.¹ Providing arrangements which did not scare off amateurs with a surfeit of little black notes was a recurring issue for Thomson. His constant harrying on the subject must have been frustrating for the composers he worked with, but alongside his respect for the music of the composers he commissioned, Thomson was equally concerned that their music be appreciated and played by British amateurs. He dared suggest to Ludwig van Beethoven that he write music that was easier to perform, since even music professors in Britain would not play his music because it seemed too much effort.² The same letter commissioned Beethoven to provide an arrangement of *Auld Lang Syne*, and Beethoven in this case seems to have followed Thomson’s meticulous description of how to keep the music simple enough for “la Chanteuse” to sing with pleasure, and possibly accompany herself at the same time.³

The exact role of Thomson’s publications in the spread of Robert Burns’s songs is not clear. His earlier editions were elaborate and expensive, and their circulation relatively small, but the influence of the various editions of the *Select Collection* stretched far beyond the physical volumes themselves. They formed the basis for several other publications, including at least two published in Philadelphia—Benjamin Warner’s *The Scottish Minstrel* (1818) and J. Dobson’s *A Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs for the Voice [...] The Whole Collected by George Thomson F.A.S. Edinburgh in Five Volumes* (1842?).⁴ Not all publications acknowledged their debt in this way: Thomson complained bitterly of plagiarism, and had procured a signed statement from Burns to the effect that Thomson alone had sole copyright for the songs Burns submitted to his collections.

1 Thomson 1799, 1801.

2 Letter from Thomson to Beethoven, 22 June 1818, copy in BL MS Add.35268, folio 22 verso ff. Thomson and Beethoven corresponded in French.

3 See also Chapters 6, 9, below.

4 McCue 1993, Chapter 2.

When Thomson first published *Auld Lang Syne* in 1799, he merely stated that it was “From an old ms. in the editor’s possession”, apparently only changing this position in the edition published from 1815.⁵ The idea that the song had actually been written by Burns began to be propagated earlier, however. James Currie, whose multi-volume edition of the life, works, and correspondence of Burns first appeared only a matter of years after the poet’s death, only includes *Auld Lang Syne* in the context of Burns’s correspondence with Thomson, but notes that “This song, of the olden time, is excellent—It is worthy of our bard”.⁶ Robert H. Cromek, writing in 1810, was more decisive:

Burns sometimes wrote poems in the old ballad style, which, for reasons best known to himself, he gave the public as songs of the *olden time*. That famous Soldier’s song in particular, printed in this Collection, vol. ii. p. 98, beginning

“Go fetch to me a pint o’wine,
An’ fill it in a silver tassie,
That I may drink before I go,
A service to my bonnie lassie;”

has been pronounced by some of our best living Poets an *inimitable relique* of some *ancient Minstrel*! Yet the Editor discovered it to be the actual production of *Burns* himself. This ballad of *Auld lang syne* was also introduced in an ambiguous manner, though there exist proofs that the two best stanzas of it are indisputably his. He delighted to imitate and muse on the customs and opinions of his ancestors. He wished to warm his mind with those ideas of felicity which perhaps, at all times, are more boasted of than enjoyed. The happiness of rustic society in its approach to modern refinement—his delight in the society and converse of the aged, all tended to confer on him that powerful gift of imitating the ancient ballads of his country with the ease and simplicity of his models. This ballad of “*Auld lang syne*” would have been esteemed a beautiful modern in the days of Ramsay: its sentiments and language are admirably mixed with the sweet recollections of boyish pranks and endearments.⁷

The “evidence” for the attribution of the verses was supposedly a letter from Burns to James Johnson, now lost.

That both Currie and Cromek picked out *Auld Lang Syne* for commentary in this way suggests that the song had, for some reason, attracted their attention. This corroborates other surviving evidence for the circulation and use of Burns’s *Auld Lang Syne* in the first two decades of the nineteenth century. The evidence includes both chapbooks and also more elaborate song collections with music, coupled with occasional appearances in theatre listings which will be discussed later. Thomson’s edition, and not Johnson’s,

5 The quoted text appears above the song in early editions; references to Burns being the (probable) author appear from Thomson 1815–1817.

6 Currie 1800, IV, 124. This notice is repeated in later editions; I have not been able to consult earlier editions.

7 Cromek (ed.) 1810, 128–129. The other song Cromek mentions here is also included in the same letter to Mrs Dunlop which contains the first Burns holograph of *Auld Lang Syne*.

seems to have provided the original model for these versions, as can be surmised from the fact that those with music all use M2, and some of the sources without music name the tune as “Sir Alexander Don’s Strathspey”. They also present the verses in the same order as the *Select Collection*, which naturally is also the order printed by Currie, based on the same letter from Burns.

There is one slight snag, however. The chapbooks in particular indicate that the song being distributed in early nineteenth-century Scotland often differed very slightly, but very consistently, from any of Burns’s versions. In each case, two lines are completely different. The first of these is line 3 of the second childhood verse, in the Kinsley edition,

We twa hae paidl’d in the burn
Frae morning sun till dine

which in these versions takes the following basic form:

We twa hae paidl’d in the burn
When simmer days were prime

or sometimes:

When simmer days were fine.

The second is the third line of the subsequent verse:

And there’s a hand my trusty fiere!
And gie’s a hand o’ thine!
And we’ll tak a right gude-willie-waught
For auld lang syne.

which becomes a variant of the following:

And there’s a hand, my trusty frien’
And gie’s a hand o’ thine
And we’ll **toom the cup** [or: **toom the stowp/stoup**] to friendship’s
growth
For auld lang syne.

In all these versions—which I will term the “toom the cup” versions—the reference to “a gude-willie-waught” still appears, but as the third line of the second (B2) or last (B4) verse, replacing the line “And we’ll tak a cup o’ kindness yet”.⁸ Some chapbooks

8 This, of course, is aside from the usual, minor differences in punctuation and in the spelling or rendering of Scots words. Sources consulted which are based on the “toom the cup” version include Bib. II/1805/3, Bib. II/ca. 1815, Bib. II/1810/2, Bib. II/1810/3, Bib. II/ca. 1810/4, Bib. II/1817, Bib. II/1819/4, Bib. II/1819/5, Bib. II/ca. 1820/2, Bib. II/ca. 1820/3, Bib. II/ca. 1820/4, Bib. II/ca. 1820/5, Bib. II/ca. 1820/6. The post-1818 publications (which may include those only approximately dated to 1816) may have been influenced by the song as it appeared in the musical drama *Rob Roy Macgregor*, or, *Auld Lang Syne* (see Chapter 4.4, below). This also helps explain why the “toom the cup” version

from this period do include the song with the “original” form of these lines, but these seem to be in the minority.⁹ There are comparatively few sources which include Allan Ramsay’s *Auld Lang Syne*, and at least one of these is drawn directly from a publication which predates the relevant volumes of the *Select Collection* and possibly also the *Scots Musical Museum*.¹⁰

There are also a few parodies or contrafacta which seem to take Burns’s song as the basis. One of these, *Come Auld Acquaintance, Stop Awee*, contained in a chapbook that has been dated to around 1820, is a harbinger of the use of the phrase “auld lang syne” to invoke a more wholesome rural past which occurs frequently in the later nineteenth century:

The folk were cautious o’ their ways,
And never dressed our [*sic*; = “ower/over”] fine;
Substantial were the hamespun claes,
They wore in langsyne,
 They wore in langsyne, my friend,
 They wore in langsyne,
 Th’ were unco sweer to rin in debt,
 In days o’ langsyne.¹¹

Another and possibly slightly later contrafactum is advertised as the “new way” of *Auld Lang Syne*, and is more closely modelled on the sentiment of Burns’s song: the first verse is the same, and the others describe the childhood pleasures of the now elderly friends. This song appeared in at least two chapbooks from the Peterhead publisher Peter Buchan, who became more famous for his collection *Ancient Ballads and Songs of the North of Scotland*, published in 1828.¹² A chapbook published in Falkirk, on the other hand, also advertises a “new way” of *Auld Lang Syne* which turns out to be Susanna Blamire’s *The Traveller’s Return*, with the tune listed as “Auld Lang Syne”.¹³ We cannot be absolutely sure whether the “old way” in this case was presumed to be Ramsay’s text, or Burns’s.

pops up in some later English publications as well, e.g. Bib. II/1825, Smart 1875. Very occasionally, there are versions which include either the “When summer days were prime” variant or the “toom the cup” variant, but not the other.

9 Those consulted which come into this category are Bib. II/ca. 1800/2, Bib. II/ca. 1810/1.

10 One of these is included in Bib. II/ca. 1800/1, which contains seven songs linked by the themes of returning from sea, war, parting, and faithful/unfaithful lovers; Ramsay’s song fits well in this context. The other publications are Bib. II/1806, Bib. II/ca. 1812–22. The catalogue of Oxford University Library also lists an example using Ramsay’s text and M1, reprinted from book 2 of Dale’s *Collection of Sixty Favorite Scotch Songs*, the first edition of which appeared ca. 1795.

11 Second verse; Bib. II/ca. 1820/1; this publication also includes a version of *Coming Through The Rye*.

12 Bib. II/ca. 1831 (estimate by NLS based on the Scottish Book Trade Index); Bib. II/ca. 1820/ *The Sorrowful Husband. To which are added, The New way of Auld Langsyne, and Tarry oh the Grinder* (Peterhead: P. Buchan, ca.1815–1831; the earlier date is from the BL, the later from the NLS, which bases its estimate on the Scottish Book Trade Index).

13 Bib. II/ca. 1810.

Chapbooks and broadsides are notoriously difficult to date. Most do not give a year of publication, often so that they could be reprinted several years running and not appear out of date. The estimates given by libraries—generally to the nearest five or ten years, and based on what is known of the printer’s activity—can vary quite radically even for the same volume. Those discussed here can be dated to some point in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, but it is difficult to establish from these sources alone if there was a particular point at which the song became more established. *Auld Lang Syne* is not particularly prominent in those existing sources where it does appear—it is rarely the “headline song” as it were (it differs in this respect from big hits of the day like *Crazy Jane* and *Poor Jack*).¹⁴ Also, with the exception of those chapbooks that name the tune as “Sir Alexander Don’s Strathspey”, none can give us hard and fast knowledge of the tune to which they were to be sung. The picture becomes a little fuller if we look, first, at publications including music from the same period, and second, at that other useful source for gauging a song’s popularity, the theatre and concert listings of the day.

4.2 The Establishment of M2

The tune M-1 was well-enough known by the name “Auld Lang Syne” in at least some quarters of Scottish society for it to seem surprising that another tune could supplant it so easily, but this is exactly what M2 did. Within the first two decades of the nineteenth century, *Auld Lang Syne* came to mean M2, and not M-1. This process-in-motion can be seen from a collection called *The Caledonian Museum* [...], published in three volumes in Edinburgh around 1810.¹⁵ Book 1 contains “Auld Lang Syne”, the tune in question being M2, while Book 3 contains “Auld Langsyne (Old Sett.)”, this being M-1. Another publication, volume I of the similarly titled *Caledonian Musical Museum* (London, 1809), and two Paisley chapbooks published around 1810 called *The Canary* and *The Robin*, state that *Auld Lang Syne* is to be sung to “Sir Alexander Don’s Strathspey”.¹⁶ Volume III of the *Caledonian Musical Museum* (which claims to be edited by Burns’s son) also contains a completely new set of words for the song, stating that the tune to which they are to be sung is “Auld Langsyne”.¹⁷

Printed music books and songsheets were intended for a very different market than chapbooks, and would have made use of different channels of communication. This could be one reason why the few early printed sources after Thomson that include both text and music do not have the “toom the cup” versions of the song. Arguably the most significant is the setting by Joseph Haydn, which was published by William Whyte in volume I of *A Collection of Scottish Airs* [...] in 1806. This volume contained

14 On the former, see Grant 2011/1.

15 Bib. II/ca. 1810/2. There are several publications with very similar titles.

16 Bib. II/1810/1, Bib. II/1810/2.

17 Bib. II/1809.

exclusively settings by Haydn (and is thus generally catalogued under his name), not long after George Thomson had issued Volume III of his own collection which likewise contained only Haydn settings.¹⁸ What little is known of the history of Whyte's collaboration with Haydn suggests that Whyte initially tried to publish tunes which had not already been set by Haydn in Thomson's collection—*Auld Lang Syne* falls into this category. The setting probably dates from late 1802 to early 1804.¹⁹

Another setting is found in John [Joseph] Elouis's *First Volume of a Selection of Favorite Scots Songs* [...], which appeared in Edinburgh and London in 1807; Henry Farmer suggests that this volume was quite widely sold.²⁰ Elouis was a harpist, originally from Switzerland, and probably the same listed in 1802 as "Harp Master to Her Royal Highness, Princess Sophia of Gloucester and several of the Royal Family";²¹ later he was active in Dublin and Scotland, and died in Edinburgh around 1817. A third early *Auld Lang Syne* with music is William Knyvett's four-voice, glee-style version, dated by the British Library at 1813. Knyvett belonged to one of the most important musical families in London, succeeding his father Charles as composer to the Chapel Royal in 1808; he was a well-known singer in both London and the provinces. Charles Knyvett had started the popular Vocal Concerts in London in 1791 and they continued until his death in 1822. The title page of William Knyvett's arrangement of *Auld Lang Syne* announces that it was "Sung by Mrs Vaughan, Messrs. W. Knyvett, Vaughan & J. B. Sale at the Vocal Concerts". This arrangement was also performed in Edinburgh no later than 1815, at the fourth vocal concert of the season held at the Assembly Rooms on George Street, sung by "Messrs. Elliotts, King, and Evans".²²

It is one indication of the gradual rise in popularity of the song that three such prominent musicians, all active across a broad geographical area, published versions of it at such an early stage, and that it was well enough received in London for Knyvett to publish his glee version. Another source of a slightly different kind is T. C. Wilson's *A Companion to the Ball Room* (1816). It includes a large selection of tunes for dancing, along with descriptions of how the dances go. *Auld Lang Syne*, listed as "Old Scotch", is included in the section on "Scotch tunes", and while there is nothing to indicate a particular significance attached to this tune, the preface tells us that "care has been taken to select [...] the greatest National Favorites, for the gratification of lovers of Scotch Music".²³ That M2 would be included here seems more a nod to its current popularity than to its being based on a dance tune, given that the book also includes other popular Scottish song tunes not normally immediately associated with dancing, such as *There's Nae Luck About The House* and *Ca' The Ewes*. What is interesting, however,

18 Thomson 1802. Thomson's previously published volumes had also included Haydn settings.

19 Friesenhagen 2004, 2005. See also Chapter 9, below.

20 Farmer 1947, 355–356.

21 Source: notice first published 23 August 1802 and reprinted in the *Worcester News*, 23 August 2002.

22 Source: *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, Thursday 9 February 1815; the concert was to take place the next day.

23 Wilson 1816, v.

is that while the first strain in the version published here takes the basic form of M2 as now known, the second strain or chorus is reminiscent of the version in the overture to *Rosina*—specifically, the second bar of the chorus is the same as in *Rosina*. Similarly, the melodic line of an arrangement of *Auld Lang Syne* for voice and piano or harp by John Gildon probably published in the second decade of the nineteenth century is reminiscent of the older versions of the tune, particularly *Rosina*, at one point in the chorus—it includes the leap down of an octave which is missing in the version of the tune published by Thomson (it also features the “toom the cup” version of the text).²⁴ While later arrangements and settings of *Auld Lang Syne* certainly also present small melodic variations on the tune, these tend to take the form of chromatic inflections, particularly in the first two bars, and differences at the highpoint of the tune: some peak on the sixth degree, some on the tonic. The two examples just mentioned may indicate that the overture to *Rosina*, and possibly Niel Gow’s version of the strathspey tune, were still having an oblique influence on the reception of the song at this point.

4.3 Performance and Periodicals

Like chapbooks and other publications, theatre and concert listings can only give us an imperfect picture of the songs in circulation and use at any given point, but a useful picture nonetheless. For logistical reasons, most of the information in this section relates to Edinburgh, and particularly the advertisements which appeared in the thrice-weekly *Edinburgh Evening Courant*. These sources have their drawbacks: when the singer and impresario Mr Corri advertised one of his vocal concerts, for example, he would not necessarily list all of the items to be performed by name. We are often told merely that a certain singer will sing “A Scotch song” or perhaps “A favourite song”. These would be interspersed in a programme also featuring items from, for example, Handel’s oratorios, and instrumental interludes. These interludes themselves could well have featured *Auld Lang Syne*, since they often took the form of improvisations on a popular song or tune. One of the most famous flute virtuosos of the day, Charles Nicholson, is cited as a composer of many an instrumental piece performed in Edinburgh in the early nineteenth century, and he also composed a set of variations on *Auld Lang Syne*.²⁵ Whether the tune was also introduced in his own appearances in Edinburgh and elsewhere in the early nineteenth century is harder to establish.

When they do name individual items, theatre and concert listings provide not only definite references to (planned) public performances of the song, but also the contexts in which this happened. This is information that we simply do not have for more informal and private uses of the song in this period. Concerts would only have been accessible to a certain sector of the population; theatre’s audience was wider,

24 Gildon ca. 1815. There are two copies of the song in the BL, one dated roughly as ca. 1810, the watermark on the other is from 1815.

25 For more on variations on the theme of *Auld Lang Syne*, see Chapter 7, below.

however, particularly since after about nine o'clock tickets were generally sold at a greatly reduced price, so that the afterpiece at least (and generally, a part of the main billing, particularly if it was quite long) would have been experienced by a broader cross-section of the community. The relevance of this is that *Rosina* is an afterpiece. It was performed at least a couple of times a year at the Theatre Royal in Edinburgh in the first two decades of the nineteenth century—not enough to contribute substantially to the establishment of M2, perhaps, but still a steady trickle.

The first clear reference to a song called *Auld Lang Syne* in the Edinburgh press that I have found comes in 1805: it is one of the songs listed for Mrs Ashe's benefit concert at Corri's Rooms on 8 February.²⁶ Advertised as a "Scots Song, 'Auld Lang Syne'", she herself would sing it at the end of the first half of the concert, which apart from other songs and instrumental pieces would also include a "Grand Finale" by Haydn. In 1806, another benefit concert featured *Auld Lang Syne*: this time the proceeds would go to Mr MacGregor, the Edinburgh Theatre Royal's box book-keeper and treasurer; *Auld Lang Syne* was to be sung by Miss Jones.²⁷ In the same year, an advert for another benefit in the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* provides a further clue: on Saturday, 15 March 1806, "MR SCHETKY most respectfully informs his Friends and the Public, That his THIRTY-TH ANNUAL CONCERT is fixed for Friday [22 March], when he trusts that Auld Lang Syne will not be forgot." *Auld Lang Syne* is not, however, listed on the programme, which includes a glee, several instrumental pieces (including a sonata for pianoforte introducing a Scots air), a vocal piece by Handel, and "the well-known Free Masons Anthem, with variations".²⁸ And on March 12 1807, the following advertisement appeared on the front page of the *Edinburgh Evening Courant*:

"AULD LANG SYNE"

GENTLEMEN educated in GEORGE HERIOT'S HOSPITAL, who may wish to assist in forming the plan of a Respectable Club, and Anniversary Dinner at Oman's Hotel, in honour of their ILLUSTRIOUS TOWNSMAN and BENEFACTOR; also to contribute as much as possible to the present and future Prosperity [*sic*] of that NOBLE INSTITUTION, will learn some particulars already digested by personal application to DR JOHN BORTHWICK GILCHRIST, at NO. 22, Prince's [*sic*] Street, or NO. 7, Hunter's Square.

In the same edition of the newspaper, we learn that Mrs Kemble will sing: "By Desire, End of Act III. 'Auld Lang Syne,'" at a performance of *Belle's Stratagem* at the Edinburgh Theatre Royal, for the benefit of the Edinburgh Charity Workhouse.

Two important points emerge here. Firstly, these listings correspond almost exactly to the earliest post-Thomson publications of the song that can be dated with accuracy. Secondly, all these examples specifically link the phrase and, by implication, the song,

²⁶ *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, February 7 1805. Mrs Ashe was probably Mary Ashe née Comer, who was the principal singer at the Bath concerts: she was a pupil of their director, Venzazio Rauzzini, and then married his successor, Andrew Ashe.

²⁷ *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 13 April 1806.

²⁸ *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 15 March 1806.

to charitable events. The principle of honouring auld acquaintances was a sentiment that featured strongly in some eighteenth-century versions of *Auld Lang Syne*, and the connotations of the phrase “for auld lang syne” have always included this aspect as well as the more limited implication of times long past or “the good old days”. There is clearly no way of knowing whether the *Auld Lang Syne* sung on these occasions was Burns’s song with M2, though it seems likely given the larger context of other publications in this period. Caution is called for, however, particularly since the song was not well-enough established at this point to guarantee that it might not get mixed up with other songs with different titles. In January 1807, for example, a concert given by Mr Kelly at the King’s Arms Assembly Rooms in Edinburgh “will conclude with the Days of Langsyne, and Fitzmaurice’s Ramble to Scotland, as played by him with the greatest applause in Edinburgh”.²⁹ This is, in all probability, a reference to Blamire’s *The Chelsea Pensioners*, to the tune “Days of Langsyne”, which was also very popular at this time, but we cannot be completely certain.

There is one more channel to be considered. In 1813, a new theatrical source for the distribution of the song enters, thanks to the great flexibility demonstrated by theatre companies when it came to chopping and changing a score according to fashion or the whims of a favourite singer. This was the popular burletta *Midas* by Kane O’Hara, which dates back to the 1760s, and was, like John Gay’s *Beggar’s Opera*, a whimsical piece (this one in verse throughout) incorporating songs to well-known tunes. According to the preface to an 1825 London edition of the libretto, “Liston is very great in *Midas*; and Madame Vestris’s Apollo is exquisite. Sinclair sung ‘Pray Goody’ much better than she can do; but in every other respect he was far inferior”.³⁰ The Sinclair referred to here is the tenor John Sinclair, engaged at the Theatre Royal in Covent Garden from 1811, and who also regularly appeared at the Theatre Royal in Edinburgh from 1813 onwards. The role of Apollo in *Midas* seems always to have been a great favourite during his engagements in Edinburgh, and the advertisements for these performances from 1813 and 1818 list not only *Pray Goody* but also *Auld Lang Syne* amongst the songs featured in the performance. Indeed, the Midas touch which may have started the acceleration of *Auld Lang Syne* from just another popular song to world classic may have had everything to do with this particular Apollo.

4.4 Mr Sinclair’s Song

One night, during Sinclair’s performance in Edinburgh, a curious incident occurred. After the crowd of coaches at the box-door had diminished, and left the portal clear, an old woman from the causeway-side, dressed in a clean mutch, a red cloak, and white apron, after the fashion of poor Scottish women on gala occasions, moved slowly and decently up to the box-keeper, whom it appears she took for an elder “herd in the penny,”

²⁹ *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 19 January 1807.

³⁰ Anon. 1825/1, vi-vii.

and thus addressed him—"Oh, Sir, is there ane John Sinclair sings here?" "Ay, ay," quoth Cerberus. "Aweel, aweel, I'm glad I've fund him at last, after sic a lang tramp. But, Sir, whare's your brode? I dinna see't here, and troth I maun put in a bawbee or a penny, for auld acquaintance sake wi' John: for ye see, Sir, I kend John langsyne, when he was just a bit callant, rinnin' skirlin' about the doors amang our ain bairns! Deed, Sir, I was at John's kirsinning!" So saying, she rummaged the "guld profound" of a pouch hung by her side, which resembled in shape and size Mr. Hunter's violoncello, and was about to affront the box-keeper with the offer of a *douceur*, when that worthy gruffly told her to be gone about her business, and directed a police-officer to turn her out of doors. The poor woman of course exclaimed loudly against this treatment, and said something about seeing "John himsel;" but the harsh order was rigorously enforced. However, a gentleman, who was then entering the theatre, and heard the whole proceeding, interested himself in her cause, and though he could not in etiquette introduce her to the boxes, generously made her happy by a ticket to the lower gallery.³¹

In 1811, John Sinclair, who was originally from Edinburgh and who had bought himself free of military service with a view to pursuing a musical career, tread the boards at the Theatre Royal in Covent Garden for the first time, having made his London debut at the Haymarket Theatre a year earlier.³² It was the start of almost a decade of appearances not only at Covent Garden, but also at the Theatres Royal in Bath and in Edinburgh, and most probably elsewhere.

Opera in Britain in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century was a very different affair to what we are used to today. A typical evening's entertainment would consist of at least two separate productions, generally a more serious play or opera followed by a shorter ballad opera or musical farce. Occasionally, additional songs would be sung in the course of the evening which did not officially belong in either of the main pieces performed, and generally these were very popular songs sung by the stars of the day with whom they were particularly associated: for example, in the era when Sinclair began singing at Covent Garden, an enormous number of playbills tell us of the success of Mr (Charles?) Inclendon's rendition of the song *Black-Eyed Susan*.³³ Scottish songs were also popular additions, including one which might seem a surprising choice for a predominantly English audience—Burns's *Scots Wha Hae*. Sinclair himself would often sing a favourite duet, William Boyce's *Together Let Us Range The Fields*, and also seems to have become associated with the song *The Death of Nelson*. In 1815, however, Sinclair also sang *Auld Lang Syne* at a number of Covent Garden benefits, including his own. The first programme in which he is recorded as doing so was the benefit for Mr Broadhurst (presumably William Broadhurst), who would himself become closely associated with the song a few years later. In the next two years, Sinclair sang *Auld Lang Syne* at each of his own benefit nights, but not at any of the others—at least as far as the documentary evidence of the playbills shows us.

31 *The Times*, 9 October 1824, quoting from a report in the *Edinburgh Observer*.

32 Husk & Warrack 2001; Farmer 1947, 443–444.

33 Originally titled *Sweet William's Farewell To Black-Ey'd Susan*, and taken from John Gay's *The Wife of Bath*.

Sinclair moved from Scotland to England at around the time when *Auld Lang Syne* was becoming established in Scotland. He may have heard the song performed at Knyvett's local concerts or at other events in London, but the evidence points to him having sung a "toom the cup" or rather: "toop the stowp" version of the song, which suggests that he picked it up in Scotland.³⁴ He probably began introducing the song at benefit concerts for the same reason that this had happened some years earlier in Scotland, though the fact that he sang it so often in *Midas* in Edinburgh (and possibly elsewhere) suggests an affection for the song which went beyond this. The connection between Sinclair and the song almost certainly led to its inclusion in John Davy's score for the opera *Rob Roy Macgregor, or, Auld Lang Syne* (1818), which contributed in no small measure to the song's firm establishment both nationally and internationally.

It is the nature of research into these events that the surviving documentary evidence can only tell us so much, but it is possible to make some surmises from theatre playbills. For example, from around 1810 until 1818, that perennial favourite *Rosina* was performed several times a year at Covent Garden and elsewhere. In the period immediately before the premiere of *Rob Roy Macgregor, or, Auld Lang Syne*, however, *Rosina* seemed on its way to a mini-revival at Covent Garden, with the playbills boasting of an entirely new set, and a number of performances in a very short space of time. It may be pure coincidence that this happened just as *Auld Lang Syne* was becoming a London theatre song, but it is equally possible that either Sinclair or one of the composers associated with the theatre recognized the melodic connection and realised that the song had theatrical potential.

Contemporary reviews of *Rob Roy Macgregor, or, Auld Lang Syne* testify to the immediate popularity of the piece amongst critics and punters alike. It was based on the novel *Rob Roy* by Sir Walter Scott, adapted by Isaac Pocock. Though Scott has never enjoyed anything like the kind of cult status afforded Burns, his influence on contemporary ideas of Scottish history, identity, and culture, not to mention on nineteenth-century literature as a whole, cannot be overstated. In his own time, Scott's novels were a publishing sensation, and his stories of Highland intrigue and Jacobite bravado frequently triggered what we nowadays would call spin-offs—in particular, theatrical versions, including music dramas and operas. In this way, his works and his image of Scottish culture reached a much larger audience than even the novels themselves would allow for, and these dramatic representations were also the vehicle for presenting other hallmarks of "Scots" culture, including Scots songs. In Scotland, they triggered a new genre, the "National Drama", which satisfied contemporary yearning for theatre on Scottish themes; in Europe, they would inspire operas, ballets, and symphonic works to an extent not even achieved by Ossian.³⁵

34 See the text as given in the libretto of *Rob Roy Macgregor, or, Auld Lang Syne*, quoted below. Several, though not all, of the many editions of the song which specifically refer to it being sung by Sinclair in the opera, likewise give a "toom the stowp" version of the words: these include the arrangements by Dieter (ca. 1820) and Bishop, as well as the version published by G. Shade (Bib. II ca. 1820/9), which is based on Dieter but with some differences.

35 See Bell 1998.

Scott himself was no stranger to the art of staging culture. A committed Unionist, he was largely responsible for the pomp and circumstance surrounding George IV's visit to Scotland in 1822.³⁶ A published record of the event unfortunately gives little information on the music played at the various celebrations, though it notes that three bands—a vocal band, a military band, and [Nathaniel] Gow's band—were stationed at different points of the room at the banquet held in the King's honour by the Lord Provost.³⁷ As already noted in Chapter 2, the King attended an Edinburgh performance of *Rob Roy Macgregor, or, Auld Lang Syne*, and was later presented with a snuff-box engraved with the words and music of *Auld Lang Syne*: specifically, M2 underlaid with the first verse and chorus (Figure 4.1). Apart from a rhythmic deviation in one bar, the music as engraved on the box is typical of early publications of the song and seems most closely modelled on Thomson's 1801 edition. It is encircled by a wreath of Scottish thistles.³⁸

Rob Roy Macgregor, or, Auld Lang Syne was staged at Covent Garden immediately following the success of another Scott adaptation, *Guy Mannering* (later productions of *Guy Mannering* are sometimes advertised as including *Auld Lang Syne*). The reference to *Auld Lang Syne* in the subtitle may have been introduced solely to distinguish the piece from other dramatizations of the same novel. A melodrama called *Rob Roy, or, The Traveller's Portmanteau* had been produced at the Olympic Theatre in London

36 In his much-cited essay on this topic, Hugh Trevor-Roper said that the pageantry surrounding this visit was "a bizarre travesty of Scottish history, Scottish reality. Imprisoned by his own fanatical Celtic friends, carried away by his own romantic Celtic fantasies, Scott seemed determined to forget historic Scotland, his own Lowland Scotland, altogether". Trevor-Roper, "The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland" in Hobsbawm & Ranger (eds) 1983, 15–41 (30). Two contemporary comments from other leading figures in Edinburgh in the years immediately preceding this event can however be taken as evidence that, far from being swallowed up in some mist-swathed Ossianic dream sequence, Scott and others were being extremely canny (see also Grant 2010, where I discuss these examples). In *Peter's Letters to His Kinsfolk*, published in 1818 and actually written by John Gibson Lockhart, one of the founders of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, "Peter" describes a visit to Scott's home of Abbotsford in the Scottish Borders, and how, as the great man of letters recited one of the many ballads he had collected, his own personal piper could be heard playing outside. As Peter (Lockhart's alias) describes, "It is true, that it was in the Lowlands—and that there are other streams upon which the shadow of the tartans might fall with more of the propriety of mere antiquarianism than on the Tweed. But the Scotch are right in not now-a-days splitting too much the symbols of their nationality; as they have ceased to be an independent people, they do wisely in striving to be as much as possible a united people", Morris [Lockhart] 1819, 304–305. The second example is a letter from George Thomson to Scott written in November 1821, asking Scott to provide some lyrics for a new collection of airs: "You know that the present taste for Tartan, or the admiration of the prowess, enthusiasm, and fidelity of the Highlanders in the cause of Prince Charlie, is prodigious. No lyric production seems now to be more acceptable than a Jacobiteish ballad, which I am told finds especial favour among the Royal family. I should be extremely glad therefore if you were pleased to select any thing connected with the wandering, concealment, or escape of the unfortunate Prince for the themes of the two Sons; or any incident during the tide of his success, or a convivial Clan meeting, such as may have taken place in the Highlands on the Exiles [*sic*] return to their respective estates." BL MS Add. 35268, folio 69 recto. For the record, Scott declined to write the songs.

37 Anon. 1822, 18.

38 Bar 7 starts with two quavers instead of a dotted quaver and a semiquaver.



Fig. 4.1 A snuff-box presented to King George IV on his trip to Scotland in 1822, engraved with the first verse and music of Burns's *Auld Lang Syne*. Royal Collection Trust / © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2021.

in February 1818,³⁹ and *Rob Roy, The Gregarach* was premiered at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane on March 25 1818, only a fortnight after the premiere of Pocock and Davy's version at Covent Garden. In Edinburgh, the Pantheon had announced a new "spectacle" called *Rob Roy* in January 1818.⁴⁰

Of all these productions, however, it was *Rob Roy Macgregor, or, Auld Lang Syne* which would generate the most success, even if the review of the premiere in *The Times* was lukewarm:

It was received throughout with scarcely a dissentient voice, and is a remarkable instance of theatrical success on the smallest possible stock of original materials: not only has the author (if he may be called so) borrowed his chief incidents from the novel, but he has derived nearly all his dialogue from the same source; the poetry of the songs is made up in great measure from BURNS and WORDSWORTH; and the musician, as if unwilling to disgrace his colleague by any gratuitous labour, has formed out of Scotch airs, selected and harmonized, it must be confessed, with great taste, the chief music of the opera. Notwithstanding this, we are disposed to think that the piece will be a favourite, though it now and then languishes dreadfully for two or three scenes together. SINCLAIR, on account of the absence of BRAHAM, is its principal male singer; he was much applauded, and would have been more so had his taste been equal to his execution.⁴¹

³⁹ Nicoll 1955, 92.

⁴⁰ Source: *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 27 January 1818.

⁴¹ *The Times*, March 13 1818.

This review suggests that John Sinclair took on the role of Francis Osbaldistone merely because of the absence of Covent Garden's real star, John Braham. However, since Braham was the same week appearing regularly in the theatre's Lent oratorio season, it seems likely that he was never intended for the role of Osbaldistone. It is somewhat ironic that the Scottish tenor played the only main character in the whole story who is English, particularly since, according to Covent Garden oboeist William Parke, Sinclair's Scottish accent was unmistakeable.⁴²

The manner in which *Auld Lang Syne* is introduced into the opera is rather incongruous—but then, seamless dramatic logic was hardly the point in such productions. The setting is a tavern scene which takes place at the end of Act II. Francis Osbaldistone and Bailie Nicol Jarvie have arrived at an inn at Aberfoyle, and disturbed the meeting of two Highlanders. The discussion gets heated, quite literally—Bailie Jarvie grabs a red-hot poker at one point. In the very much distilled stage version, the conflict is resolved largely due to this intervention from Osbaldistone (in the novel, it is not Osbaldistone, but another Highlander, who calms the waters—without bursting into song):

Bailie. Let Glasgow flourish!—I'll hear no language offensive to the duke of Argyle, and the name of Campbell—remember the poker—my conscience!—I say, he's a credit to the country, and a friend to our town and trade! (*they all rise*)

Galbraith. Ah! there'll be a new world soon. We shall have no Campbells cocking their bonnets so high, and protecting thieves and murderers, to harry and spoil better men, and more loyal clans!

Bailie. More loyal clans, I grant you—but no better men.

Galb. No!—(*laying his hand on his sword*)

Frank. Pray, gentlemen, do not renew your quarrel—in a few moments we must part company.

McStuart. That's true; why should we make hot blood? but we are plagued and harried here, sir, with meetings, to put down Rob Roy! I have chased the McGregor, sir, like a red deer—him at bay—and still the duke of Argyle gives him shelter—it's enough to make one mad!—but I'd give something to be as near him as I have been.

Bailie. You'll forgive me for speaking my mind—but it's my thought, you'd ha' given the best button in your bonnet to have been as far away from Rob Roy, as you are now!—my conscience! my hot poker would have been nothing to his claymore.

McStuart. A word more o' the poker, and my soul, I'll make you eat your words, and a handful o' cold steel—

Frank. Come, come, gentlemen, let us all be friends here; and drink to all friends far away.

42 Parke 1830, vol. II, 14, 193: neither reference relates to this opera.

SONG—FRANK

(words by Burns)

Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
 And never brought to mind?
 Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
 And days o' lang syne?

For auld lang syne, my friends,
 For auld lang syne,
 We'll tak a cup o' kindness yet,
 For auld lang syne.

Chorus. For auld lang syne, &c.

An' here's a hand, my trusty friend,
 An' gie's a hand o' thine,
 An' we'll toom the stowp to friendship's growth,
 An' days o' lang syne.

Chorus. For auld lang syne, &c.

An' surely you'll be your pint stowp,
 An' surely I'll be mine;
 An' we'll take right gude willy-wacht,
 For auld lang syne.

Chorus. For auld lang syne, &c.

(a drum heard without)

JEAN McALPINE *enters in alarm.*

Jean. The red coats! The red coats!

Save adding to the drama of the entrance of the redcoats, there is little to explain why *Auld Lang Syne* should be sung here. Although the dialogue mentions that the quarrelling factions will soon part company, the song is not specifically sung as a song of parting (in any case, and as I will discuss in Chapter 6, this tradition was almost certainly established later) and little love has been lost between them. For the same reason, it is unclear why a group of men who otherwise have little to do with each other should feel the need to raise a glass together to absent friends. Everything points to the song's being included specifically so that Sinclair could sing it, and possibly to cash in on its increasing popularity. In this regard, it is worth noting that the compacted version sung in the opera is based on the "toom the cup" (or here: "stowp") version of the text. This is also the first version I have found in which the "childhood" verses are missing—not insignificant for the future reception and use of the song.

Auld Lang Syne is not the only popular Burns song to make an appearance in the opera: it also incorporates *A Red, Red Rose* (K453), and a song texted by Pocock, *We Part To Meet No More*, is sung to the tune to which Burns wrote *Ye Banks And Braes* (K328).

The *Times'* reviewer's prognosis proved correct. After Covent Garden, *Rob Roy Macgregor*, or, *Auld Lang Syne* had a successful run at the East London Theatre, with Mr

Webber in the role of Osbaldistone.⁴³ In 1819, it was a favourite choice for the end-of-season benefits at Covent Garden.⁴⁴ In 1819 and 1820, Mr (John?) Duruset took over from John Sinclair as Francis Osbaldistone, and Duruset also sang *Auld Lang Syne* in other contexts including at Miss Stephen's benefit night on 23 June 1820 and during an evening consisting of *Guy Mannering*, *Where Shall I Dine?* and *Bluebeard: or, Female Curiosity* on 18 June 1819.⁴⁵ As early as April 1818, *Rob Roy MacGregor* was performed in the theatre in Sunderland, as a benefit for Mrs Faulkner; this performance featured Mr and Mrs Darley, who would play the roles of Francis Osbaldistone and Diana Vernon in the first American production in New York in June of the same year.⁴⁶ It was also performed in Philadelphia, the premiere there being on New Year's Day 1819.⁴⁷

Following what by then was standard practice, both the British and American productions spawned sheet music editions of the most popular songs "as sung by Mr Sinclair" or "as sung by Mr Darley", both official and unofficial. An edition of *Auld Langsyne* [sic] published in Edinburgh, presumably within a short period of the opera's performance there, lists it "As sung with unbounded applause, by Mr Sinclair in Rob Roy MacGregor" but seems in fact to be based on one of Thomson's editions of the song, with the addition of a great deal of ornamentation in the top line of the last verse and chorus, possibly to mimic the way Sinclair sang.⁴⁸ Another edition of the song, arranged by I. Dieter, who worked at the King's Theatre in London, also mentions both the opera and Mr. Sinclair; there are at least three other editions bearing similar attributes, but all slightly different in the arrangement.⁴⁹ The song's popularity also explains why Henry Bishop, also composer at Covent Garden, made his own arrangement of it which is quite different from Davy's, and which was also advertised as "Sung by Mr. Sinclair, Mr. Taylor, Mr. Norris & Mr. Comer, in Rob Roy Macgregor, or Auld Lang Syne at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden".⁵⁰ It is possible that at some point, Bishop's version was substituted for Davy's in the Covent Garden production itself.⁵¹ *Auld Lang Syne* had not appeared in the collection of Scottish melodies arranged by Bishop published around 1812.⁵²

Performances at the Theatre Royal in Bath—to some extent an outpost of the London scene, where gentry from the metropolis went to take the waters—are recorded both

43 *The Times*, 28 September 1818 and thereafter.

44 It was presented for the benefits of Mr Taylor, the Misses Dennett, Mrs Gibbs and Mr Emery. Source: playbills held in the BL.

45 Source: British Library, General Reference Collection Playbills 97, UIN BLL01015176563.

46 Source: playbill held in the NLS, shelfmark APS.4.90.28.

47 Albrecht 1979.

48 Bib. II ca. 1830/1

49 Dieter ca. 1820; Bib. II/ca. 1830, Bib. II/ca. 1820/8.

50 Bishop n.d.

51 There is some confusion about the composition of the opera, with some sources attributing it at least in part to Bishop, who was the main house composer at Covent Garden at the time. The first edition of the original score implies, however, that the original production solely used music compiled or composed by Davy; Bishop's contributions may have been integrated later.

52 Bishop 1812.

in playbills and editions of the song. *Auld Lang Syne* was for example listed to appear in “The Festival of Apollo” which would follow a performance of *Love in a Village* for the benefit of Mrs Baker, held on 13 May 1820.⁵³ The singer in that instance could well have been Mr Broadhurst, who towards the end of that year would also star in a Bath production of *Guy Mannering* in which he would introduce *Auld Lang Syne*, *Green Grow The Rashes O* and *Scots Wha Hae* as well as an Irish song (13 November 1820).⁵⁴ The year after, Leoni Lee sang the part of Francis Osbaldistone in a performance of *Rob Roy MacGregor* for his own benefit. The arrangement he sang may well not have been that published by John Davy, but his own glee arrangement.⁵⁵

The first performance of the opera at the Edinburgh Theatre Royal came at the relatively late stage of February 1819, though it may have been produced at other theatres in Scotland, including provincial theatres, before then. As the *Scotsman* review of that performance put it:

He who is without local attachments is also without affections. He who is without affections does not deserve the name of man. But he who is at once a man and a *Scotsman*, must be delighted with “ROB ROY MACGREGOR, or AULD LANG SYNE.” This is our dramatic-syllogistic mode of reasoning. And why should not we indulge in some harmless peculiarities?—Why should not we be proud of our national genius, humour, music, kindness and fidelity—*Why not be national?*⁵⁶

The reviewer was particularly enamoured of Charles Mackay’s performance as Bailie Jarvie, and the scene at the inn: “In making up this brawl, Burns’s song, “Should Auld Acquaintance be Forgot,” was happily introduced, and sung and heard with enthusiasm”.

The piece was a roaring success in Edinburgh, and saved the Theatre Royal from financial ruin—and the same seems to have been true for other theatres thereafter.⁵⁷ Smaller-scale performances offered by travelling theatre troupes would oftentimes still be expected to present “all the well-loved music”, even if this meant casting a woman in the role of Osbaldistone if there was no decent male tenor in the company.⁵⁸

Not long after the success of *Rob Roy Macgregor*, John Sinclair left for the continent, in particular Italy, where he worked with the composer Gioachino Rossini—the role of Idreno in Rossini’s *Semiramide* (1823) was written for him. He returned to the British stage for brief periods in the 1820s, introducing *Auld Lang Syne* as well as *Scots Wha Hae* into an 1823 production of *Guy Mannering* at Covent Garden, and singing it at his own benefit at the same theatre the following year. After another absence, he sang the role of Osbaldistone at a performance in Bath in 1828 which also included *John Anderson My Jo* (the afterpiece in this case was *Midas*, with Sinclair again appearing

⁵³ Source: British Library, General Reference Collection Playbills 179/1.

⁵⁴ Source: British Library, General Reference Collection Playbills 179/1.

⁵⁵ Lee ca. 1820.

⁵⁶ *The Scotsman*, 20 February 1819.

⁵⁷ Bell 1998, 144.

⁵⁸ Bell 1998, 155, 162.

as Apollo). In 1830, he sang the song again, but listed as *Should Auld Acquaintance Be Forgot*, at a "Tribute of Friendship" which formed part of the farewell benefit night for Mr Fawcett.⁵⁹ Sinclair retired from the stage the same year, and moved to Margate to become director of the Tivoli Gardens.

4.5 After Rob Roy Macgregor

The most convincing argument for the role played by Davy and Pocock's *Rob Roy Macgregor* in the dissemination of the song is that by the mid- to late 1820s, *Auld Lang Syne* was firmly established on both sides of the Atlantic. The opera may not have been the only factor, and we should certainly not presume any kind of simple cause-effect relationship. However, research into other songs has demonstrated a link between theatrical usage and wider dissemination, in some cases leading to the lasting establishment of the song.⁶⁰ Sources for the use of *Auld Lang Syne* in this period are scant and scattered, and must be treated with caution, but they do testify to a sudden peak in references to the song in the period immediately following the opera's enormously successful runs. It is also noticeable that from around this period, collected editions of Burns's writings start to include *Auld Lang Syne* much more consistently.⁶¹ Thomson first did so in 1815, from which point the following text appeared with the song in his collections:

The following most beautiful Song was sent by BURNS to the Editor, with the information that "it is an old song of the olden times, which had never been in print, nor even in manuscript, until he took it down from an old man's singing". It seems not improbable, however, that he said this merely in a playful humour; for the Editor cannot help thinking that the Song affords evidence of our Bard himself being the author.⁶²

The opera's London premiere came only a few months before Thomson commissioned Beethoven to make an arrangement of *Auld Lang Syne* and other songs. That these were to be arrangements for three voices may suggest that Thomson was hoping to profit from the popularity of concert glees in this period: Davy's was the second such setting after Knyvett's in 1813.

Other sources from around this period in Scotland suggest the song was popular, but not yet consolidated as a song "by Burns" (and therefore sacrosanct).⁶³ In the second

⁵⁹ The song appears under this title on other occasions as well, including on the playbill of a 1826 benefit performance of *Rob Roy Macgregor* at Covent Garden.

⁶⁰ Grant 2011/2.

⁶¹ Those consulted which include the song are Bib. II/1815, Bib. II/1819/1, Bib. II/1819/2, Bib. II/1819/3. All these editions print the verses in the order of B4. By contrast, the following earlier editions do not contain the song: Bib. II/1801, Bib. II/1802/1, Bib. II/1802/2, Bib. II/1805/1, Bib. II/1805/2, Bib. II/1807, Bib. II/1808. Currie, as already noted, includes the song merely in the context of Burns's correspondence.

⁶² Thomson, *Select Collection*, vol. II, edition of 1818.

⁶³ Though see the review of the first Edinburgh Theatre Royal performance, cited above.

volume of R. A. Smith's *The Scottish Minstrel*, one of the most important collections of Scottish songs to appear in the 1820s,⁶⁴ *Auld Lang Syne* was published with additional verses which emphasize the underlying sentiment of the song: "*Blest be the pow'r that still has left / The frein's o' lang syne.*"⁶⁵ The second edition clearly attributes the first set of words to Burns and the second set to "B. B", but another edition, possibly the first, conflates these two texts and does not attribute either; the refrain is written according to the old formula whereby the last two lines of the verse are repeated at the end of the chorus.⁶⁶ A variant of one verse of the text published by Smith is also found in a much longer version of the song published ca. 1818 in the second volume of *The Miniature Museum of Scots Songs and Music* [...].⁶⁷ This version also introduces three new verses, one after the standard first verse, and two more after the childhood verses and before the two closing verses. All the new verses are modelled on the form of the "childhood" verses. The tune in this edition is named as "Sir Alexander Don's Strathspey" and the text as "Corrected by Burns". A note at the end also points out that the second, fifth and sixth verses have never before been published. There seem, then, to have been various elongated versions of the text in circulation around this time. If it was indeed the first edition of Smith's collection that included the additional and unattributed verses, this could suggest Smith then "cleaned up" the text on the basis of the gathering consensus on Burns's authorship. The third volume of Smith's collection also includes the Jacobite text *Shall Monarchy Be Quite Forgot* with the tune M-1, named "In Days of Yore".⁶⁸

Verses which expand a given song may or may not be attempting to capitalize on that song's existing popularity: parodies and contrafacta, on the other hand, are a fairly reliable indication of familiarity with the model song, since they rely on it for their effect. In volumes II and III of *The Universal Songster, or, Museum of Mirth*, published in 1829, there are no less than seven parodies and contrafacta on *Auld Lang Syne*. These could hardly be more different from each other in structure, subject and tone, and since they are also often very funny (sometimes unintentionally), they are reproduced in Appendix 3.⁶⁹ Evidence that the song was known and loved in Scotland can be found earlier than this, however. In 1822, for example, a letter from Andrew White was published and circulated in broadside form in Glasgow. White was one of sixteen men sentenced to transportation to Australia (three others were executed) for their part in an attempt to seize the Carron Iron Works in Falkirk during the so-called

64 Now digitized at <https://digital.nls.uk/91519874>

65 Smith 1820–1824, II, 82–83.

66 This edition is held in the NLS, shelfmark Glen 217. The second edition is held in Glasgow University Library. Neither has been dated. The first edition appeared from 1820–1824; the British Library estimates the date of the second edition as being 1825.

67 Bib. II/ca. 1818/2.

68 Another song in volume V of this collection, *O Cam Ye, Friend, Across The Hill (The Flower of Amochrie)* is also to a very different tune named "Days of Yore".

69 Bib. II/1829, vol. II, 309.

“Radical War” of 1820.⁷⁰ White’s letter home, at least as printed, is largely a description of life in Botany Bay, which by his own account seems rather better than the conditions he left behind. However, this does not stop him being homesick:

My sentence has been mitigated to seven years, and my master and mistress has [*sic*] promised to bring me home with them; so these things keep me in good spirits, and I flatter myself with the hope that I shall soon see you again, when we will spend another New-year’s day morning, singing, “Scots wha hae wi’ Wallace bled,” or “Auld lang syne,” or “Willie brew’d a peck o’ maut.”⁷¹

This is the first direct reference I have found to *Auld Lang Syne* being sung at New Year, though what is more significant is that it is classed among favourites sung in an informal and festive context. By 1826, the tune of *Auld Lang Syne* was one of those to which children sang their hymns at an institution set up by Robert Owen, founder of the cooperative movement, in Orbiston in Lanarkshire; the visiting reporter recognized it along with two other tunes used for this purpose, those of *God Save The Queen* and *Rule Britannia*.⁷²

These references provide a slight balance to the main source of evidence for the singing of *Auld Lang Syne* in this period, most of which comes from newspaper accounts of formal dinners and other public events. Again, these accounts start to creep in just after *Rob Roy Macgregor* began doing the rounds. Initially, the song’s link to Scotland and the Scots was still apparent, but it rapidly starts to lose this narrow association. In April 1818, Mr Broadhurst sang the song during the toasts at the Scottish Hospital Dinner held at the Freemason’s Tavern in London, in the presence of the Royal Family.⁷³ It was also sung at the Pitt Dinner held in the City of London Tavern in May 1821, following the toast to “Lord Kenyon and the Pitt Club of Wales” (*The Times* notes that singing a Scottish song here was a “strange arrangement”).⁷⁴ In 1822, it was again sung by Mr Broadhurst at a dinner to mark the anniversary of the accession of the King, again at the City of London Tavern, and following a toast to “The other Members of Parliament who have this day honoured us with their presence”; after *Auld Lang Syne*, a toast was then raised to “The Rose, the Shamrock, and the Thistle”.⁷⁵ The song’s appearance here may have been a matter of Broadhurst’s personal preference, but it also reflects later incidences of the song’s use at political gatherings. It became particularly prominent as a tribute to elder statesmen at public rallies and meetings, and as a sentiment invoked in gratitude by a politician who had been successfully returned to Parliament.⁷⁶ An early example comes in September 1822, at a dinner in Berwick celebrating the visit of

⁷⁰ For more on the context see, e.g., Smout 1998 (1969), 412–420.

⁷¹ White 1822.

⁷² Source: *Edinburgh Advertiser*, citing from the *Glasgow Free Press*, 17 November 1826. This is not the last time that this triumvirate appears: see Chapter 6, below.

⁷³ *The Times*, 27 April 1818.

⁷⁴ *The Times*, 29 May 1821.

⁷⁵ *The Times*, 30 January 1822.

⁷⁶ See also Chapter 7, below.

the radical politician John Hume: in the course of a series of toasts to, amongst others, “The Liberty of the Press, without its licentiousness” and “Civil and religious liberty all over the world”, the tune of *Auld Lang Syne* followed the toast to “The Burghs who had the good sense and good fortune to return Mr. Hume to parliament”.⁷⁷ On the other hand, when the Whig MP Charles Calvert lost his Southwark seat at the 1830 General Election, he “returned thanks to the electors for past favours conferred upon him, and expressed his disappointment at their not being renewed for the sake of ‘auld lang syne’”.⁷⁸

Not all of the renditions reported in the press took place in such ordered and salubrious surroundings. When Charles Capet, the ex-King of France, spent some time at Holyrood in 1830, some would-be supporters made use of the song as well, as *The Scotsman* reported with some disdain:

On Saturday night, a singular and foolish fracas took place, which originated in a change-house in the Abbey. “A mixty maxty motley squad,” congregated under the pretence of celebrating the return of the ex-patriated King to the place of his former residence. A number of “loyal and constitutional” speeches were delivered, a number of “patriotic” songs sung, and about midnight, when “hot with the Tuscan grape, and high in blood,” the whole party repaired to the palace square, and quite forgetful of the exhausted state of the strangers after their journey, and their great need of a night’s sound repose, and wholly regardless of the sanctity of the midnight hour, they sung that social old Scottish song, “Should auld acquaintance be forgot,” led, says the account, “by a gentleman from Sheffield.” (Shade of Burns! was your slumber sweet at the time?) The party concluded their nocturnal orgies in the square with three tremendously anti-christian yells. Had it not been for the lateness of the hour, there is a strong probability that the whole party would have been apprehended, and obliged to answer at the bar of the Police Court for disturbing the public peace.⁷⁹

Around this time, *Auld Lang Syne*—more specifically, M2—begins to appear as the subject of instrumental arrangements and variations.⁸⁰ Many of these have not been dated exactly, so that it is again difficult to establish if *Rob Roy Macgregor* was the sole factor pushing the song to prominence, or indeed how quickly this occurred. However, watermarks and other external evidence again point to an upsurge in the early 1820s, which is corroborated by American sources discussed in the next section. This was in addition to the various editions of the opera and arrangements of the song, with or without a direct reference to Mr Sinclair’s performance.

77 *The Times*, 1 October 1822. The report lists the “Tunes” played, so that it is unclear if the songs were actually sung.

78 *The Times*, 5 August 1830.

79 *The Scotsman*, 27 October 1830.

80 These are: Weidner 1810, Valentine ca. 1819, Burrowes ca. 1820, Viner ca. 1820, Wright 1820, Nicholson & Taylor 1811, Bochsa ca. 1820, Grossé ca. 1821, Newton ca. 1821, Holst 1822, Kalkbrenner 1822, Crouch ca. 1825, Reddie ca. 1825, Kiallmark 1825. There is a falling-off thereafter, though variations and other instrumental arrangements would continue to appear at intervals throughout the nineteenth century; see Chapter 7, below. Some sources have been dated from watermarks, which do not necessarily mean the item was published in that year, but certainly no sooner. These include Steil ca. 1816.

Within the space of a few years, *Auld Lang Syne* had become one of the songs most frequently produced whenever a Scots song was called for, the other being *Scots Wha Hae*. Both songs had by that point a track record of popularity on stages in London and elsewhere. It seems appropriate, then, that Walter Scott, who contributed so much to the success of Scottish themes at this time, was himself hailed with this song when recognized at a theatre in Dublin in 1825: in tribute to his presence, between the acts the clamouring crowds were treated to “‘Lord Moira’s Welome,’ ‘Scots wha ha’e,’ ‘Auld Lang Syne’ and other delightful Scottish airs”.⁸¹ A little over ten years later, Scott’s memory—he had died in 1832—was toasted with *Auld Lang Syne* at a festival banquet in the Edinburgh Theatre Royal to mark the fourth centenary of the invention of printing.⁸²

4.6 American Sources

Early sources for the reception of *Auld Lang Syne* in the USA consolidate what British sources reveal: that within a very short period, M2 became unequivocally associated with the name *Auld Lang Syne*; that the song’s enormous rise in popularity coincided with the opera *Rob Roy Macgregor, or, Auld Lang Syne*; and that by the 1830s, the song was common currency. The similarity in the fate of the song on both sides of the Atlantic is testimony to the constant cultural interchange between Britain and America at this time, due not merely to migration but more importantly to the trade in cultural goods and practices, including music.

Public concerts and ballad operas had become well established in major American centres in the 1730s, and from around 1750 the concerts were drawing much of their performers and repertory from the theatre.⁸³ Before 1780, America’s musicians had to rely almost completely on imports from Europe for secular music, but a new influx of European immigrants in the period following the Revolution led firstly to a change in the musical culture and secondly to the establishment of secular music publishing in America itself. Publication of sheet music was firmly established by the 1790s, and often had a link to the new theatrical companies set up around that time.⁸⁴ The publication of a song “as sung in” a particular opera is not necessarily evidence for a performance of the opera in that locality, but it is still worth noting that songs from *Rosina* were being published as such in New York by the late 1790s, and Harvard College Library’s collection of early playbills show that *Rosina* was being performed in Boston, New York and elsewhere from no later than 1797.⁸⁵

81 *The Times*, 21 July 1825, original source the *Morning Register*.

82 *The Scotsman*, 15 July 1837.

83 Wolfe 1980, 39.

84 Krummel 2001.

85 The LOC catalogue lists *Sweet Transports, Sung in the Opera of Rosina*, and *When Bidden to the Wake or Fair: A Favorite Song in Rosina*, both ca. 1798, and *Her Mouth with a Smile. A Favorite Song as Sung by Mr. Darley in Rosina*, and *Whilst with Village Maids I Stray. Sung in the Opera of Rosina*, both probably from

The first major American centre of music publishing was Philadelphia, then the largest city. The first publication to use the new method of engraving using punching tools was a collection of Scots tunes with variations published by Alexander Reinagle, who had recently emigrated from Scotland, and it was engraved by another Scot, John Aitken, who had emigrated some time before 1785.⁸⁶ Reinagle's father was Austrian, one of the many continental performers working in Edinburgh in the late eighteenth century, where Alexander was born and brought up. Alexander Reinagle had led concerts in Glasgow in the 1770s, and had published a collection of tunes there in 1782 which might have formed the basis for the American volume.⁸⁷ Reinagle is said to have persuaded Aitken to branch out into music publishing, and they collaborated on many publications in the years to follow;⁸⁸ Aitken was the sole music publisher in Philadelphia until 1793. Around 1797, he published a volume with the partly familiar title *The Scots Musical Museum: Being a Collection of the Most Favorite Scots [sic] Tunes: Adapted to the Voice, Harpsichord and Piano by John Aitken*. Since many of the tunes are "adapted by Pleyel", it would seem that Aitken helped himself to Thomson's publications amongst others. The book also contains probably the first American printing of a song entitled *Auld Lang Syne*, the tune in question being M-1 and the text, as we may expect, Ramsay's.⁸⁹

The database *Early American Sheet Music and its European Sources* (EASMES), which catalogues over a thousand different printed editions and manuscripts up to 1830 in mostly American libraries and archives, gives twenty-two different sources for a tune named "Auld Lang Syne" or "Should Auld Acquaintance Be Forgot".⁹⁰ Nine of these—mostly the earlier sources—are from the British Isles. EASMES cites the incipit (or start) of each tune, and makes it possible to check if these tunes at least start off as M-1, M1, or M2. The only source for M1 is volume V of Johnson's *Scots Musical Museum*, but there are seven for M-1, including Aitken's *Museum*. All date from the eighteenth century, include most of the standard sources, and cover a date

the first decade of the nineteenth century; all four songs were printed at J. Hewitt's Musical Repository, 131 William Street, New York. According to Wolfe 1980, Hewitt's was one of the most important music circulating libraries at the time. Mr Darley, who would later appear in early American performances of *Rob Roy Macgregor, or, Auld Langsyne*, was singing at the Federal Street Theatre in Boston around 1804–1805. Another edition of *Whilst with Village Maids I Stray* was published in Philadelphia by G. Willig, a prominent publisher, around 1798. Harvard University Library holds playbills for performances of *Rosina* in February 1794 at the John Street Theatre in New York; in January 1797 at the Hay-Market Theatre in Boston; in October and December 1800 at the Federal Street Theatre, Boston; in 1802 at the Holliday Street Theatre in Baltimore; in December 1805 at the Charleston Theatre; and in January 1806 at the New Theatre in New York.

86 Wolfe 1980, 41.

87 Farmer 1947. Both volumes were called *A Collection of the Most Favourite Scots Tunes with Variations for the Piano Forte or Harpsichord*.

88 Reinagle also set up a theatre company in Philadelphia, with Thomas Wignall, which was successful enough for them to open another theatre in Baltimore at a later point. See Lawers 1964, 95 ff.

89 I am grateful to the staff of the Winterthur Library, Delaware for quickly providing a copy of the song as Aitken printed it.

90 The database can be found at <https://www.cdss.org/elibrary/Easmes/Index.htm>

range from 1724 (the music to Ramsay's collection) to ca. 1798 (*The Caladonian* [sic] *Muse*, published in Philadelphia); most are from around the time when Ramsay's and William Thomson's collections appeared. Then, there is a gap, and when the name "Auld Lang Syne" appears again, in a commonplace book dated roughly to 1811 or later, the tune referred to using this name is consistently M2. Three sources appear to be elaborated forms of M2, in collections of military band music.⁹¹ Most of these later sources are American.⁹² The EASMES database is interesting because of the very clear distinction it presents—a kind of "before" and "after" relating not only to Thomson's publication of the song, but also the appearance of Davy's opera. The sources listed include several tutors for various instruments—M2 also pops up in tutorial books in later decades as well.

Other bibliographic sources confirm this general pattern. The song was in circulation from no later than the second decade of the nineteenth century: at least two Baltimore songbooks printed it in 1812, and an American edition of N. C. Butler's arrangement *Auld Lang Syne. A Much Admired Scotch Ballad* can be dated with certainty to July 1817.⁹³ There is then an upsurge in publications of the song or which use the tune from ca. 1818. One source frequently published in America was D[aniel] Ross's variations on *Auld Lang Syne*, probably the earliest of the many sets of instrumental variations on the tune: Wolfe notes twelve different editions of this piece issued by a number of American publishers in the period from ca. 1818–ca.1825 (the end date of his survey). Ross's variations were originally published in Edinburgh and probably predate Davy's opera.

Again, the degree to which we can trace the development to the opera or to other factors is something of a moot point. These other factors would include an increase in the total number of publications, and possibly also an increase in the number that have survived. Anne Dhu Shapiro notes that the popularity of Scots songs in America at this time, and their general significance, is completely disproportionate to the actual number of Scots and descendants of Scots living there (emigration to Canada was much more popular). She also suggests that "it was the double impact of Burns and Sir Walter Scott that made Scottish sounds so important in early nineteenth century America"; Burns provided the songs, but "it was Scott [...] who brought the idea of the romance of Scotland to the fore and gave the singing of Scottish song a political and cultural significance".⁹⁴

Bibliographical aids such as EASMES and Wolfe's bibliography are dedicated to sources with music, so they give only a general clue as to the distribution of the song. Parodies and contrafacta pad out this image. American broadsides and sheet music in

91 Two are from publications by Edward Riley, whose various tune books include over 700 of the most popular tunes of the day and may have been the source for the third source, a manuscript collection (Beach manuscript). See Camus 1982 for more on this source, and the cultural context.

92 Interestingly, Thomson's *Select Collection* is not included in this list

93 Wolfe 1964, 141 (record 1417); date is taken from a newspaper advertisement.

94 Shapiro 1990, 74.

this period are rarely dated, but there are at least two contrafacta on *Auld Lang Syne* in the collections of the Library of Congress which deal with events from the early 1830s. The earlier of these is a broadside song telling the sad tale of Mr Joseph White, murdered in his bed at the age of eighty-two on 7 April 1830. The song proper is prefixed with the following:

Shall auld acquaintance be forgot, and never brought to mind?
 Shall "horrid murder" be forgot, in the days of Auld Lang Syne!
 No! let this tale be treasured up, that young and old may know,
 That they taste not the bitter cup of sin, death, and wo.
 Tune, "Auld Lang Syne"⁹⁵

The broadside itself is not dated, but was published by L. Deming of Boston, Massachusetts, who was active as a publisher of broadsides from ca. 1831–1837 as a sideline to his work as a "trader and barber".⁹⁶ Deming also published the "second part" of *Auld Lang Syne*, consisting of five new verses which are of interest primarily since they tell of an imminent parting.⁹⁷ The other contrafactum tells the tale of the murder of Sarah M. Cornell, whose body was found in a small community in Rhode Island in December 1832.⁹⁸ It is one of two ballads on the incident published on this broadside, the other to be sung to the tune of *The Star-spangled Banner*. Cornell, it was discovered, had been pregnant and the trail led to a local (married) minister, who was later tried for her murder but exonerated; the case provoked national attention, and the contrafactum calls for him to be hung. Another early American parody, a rallying call for the Republicans, appears in the *Adams Sentinel* (Gettysburg, PA) of 17 October 1836 and is given with "Tune—Auld Lang Syne, or Coming thro' the Rye". Also around this time, two instruction books for elementary school teachers suggest that children might be taught the alphabet to the tune of *Auld Lang Syne*.⁹⁹

M2 also became one of the most frequently used tunes for songs of the American temperance movement. In his extensive survey of temperance parodies and contrafacta, Paul D. Sanders gives the lyrics for no less than twelve different sets of temperance lyrics to M2 from the 1840s alone, with even more appearing later in the century. Several appear in the publications of John Pierpont, more famous as the writer of *Jingle Bells* (or *A One-Horse Open Sleigh*, as it was originally called). Since temperance meetings often aimed to recreate the social atmosphere of the tavern without the alcohol, songs

⁹⁵ LOC, Collection "American Song Sheets", digital ID as109040.

⁹⁶ Howay 1928, 71 n.2.

⁹⁷ See Chapter 6, below. These verses seem to have formed the basis for another broadside published by J. Andrews in New York, who was active until at least the late 1850s. It contains four of the five verses published by Deming, with minor changes. While the chorus in Deming's version includes a repetition of the last two lines of the chorus, the chorus of the later version is taken from the original song. LOC, Collection "American Songs and Ballads", digital ID sb10012b.

⁹⁸ LOC, Collection "American Song Sheets", digital ID as103610.

⁹⁹ McGuirk 1997, who gives these books as being Ephraim Bacon, *Infant School Teacher's Guide to which is Added, a Source of Instruction Suited to Infants' Sunday Schools*, published in Philadelphia in 1829, and Samuel Read Hall, *Lectures to Female Teachers on School Keeping*, published in Boston in 1832.

and singing were a vital part of their programme, and again most were parodies and contrafacta. The popularity of Scottish songs generally around this time meant that they were often used as a basis: apart from *Auld Lang Syne*, Sanders also notes the very frequent use of the tunes and lyrical structure of *Scots Wha Hae* and *Coming Through The Rye*.¹⁰⁰

There is also evidence of the tune being used in religious contexts. Two hymnbooks in common use in Illinois used the tune of *Auld Lang Syne* for a hymn called *Hark From The Tombs*; the tune is printed under the name "Plenary".¹⁰¹ And in November 1841, the hymn *When I Can Read My Title Clear* was sung to the tune of *Auld Lang Syne* by a group of thirty-five Africans about to embark on the journey home: they had taken part in the revolt on the Spanish slave ship *Amistad* off the coast of Cuba in 1839.¹⁰²

By the 1830s, the Scots phrase "auld lang syne" had firmly entered the English vernacular, introduced most frequently when writers to *The Times*, or speechmakers, felt obliged to remind readers how much better things were in years gone by.¹⁰³ A poem printed privately in Dublin in 1830, of extremely questionable quality, and dedicated "To good and kind Aunt Margaret", is called *Auld Lang Syne* and recounts the poet's childhood memories, including a verse eulogising the family spaniel.¹⁰⁴ When the new baronet Sir John Leman made a visit to Castle Donington in Nottinghamshire, and proved full of sympathy for the dire straits of its locals, "many a bumper was drunk to his health and the days of 'auld lang syne'".¹⁰⁵ An 1839 performance of *Rob Roy Macgregor, or, Auld Lang Syne* at the Theatre Royal English Opera House was followed by "an entirely new Burletta, entitled THE TURN-AMONG THE KNIGHTS OF CHIVALRY IN THE DAYS OF NOT LANG-SYNE",¹⁰⁶ while a report of a collection of Gothic armoury to be auctioned in London ends with the remark that "those who unite good taste to wealth will do well to lay out a part of the latter in obtaining some

¹⁰⁰ Sanders 2006.

¹⁰¹ These are *Missouri Harmony*, which appeared in several editions from the 1820s, and *Southern Harmony*, which first appeared in the 1820s. I have been unable to establish whether M2 was used in the earlier editions of the former. Information derived from Peter Ellertsen, "At Springfield's First Public Hanging" (12 February 2006, <http://hogfiddle.blogspot.com/2006/02/at-springfields-first-public-hanging.html>). Ellertsen is relating a story told by the singer Terry Hogg of how the condemned man sang the hymn immediately before execution.

¹⁰² "Departure of the Mendi Africans", *New York Journal of Commerce*, 27 November 1841.

¹⁰³ For example: (a) "Are these utopianists aware of the expense of attaining even a fair medical education? If not, let the following be a criterion of what it was in 'Auld lang syne'." Letter to *The Times*, signed "A MASTER MASON, Twickenham, No. 21, 1836", printed in *The Times*, 28 November 1836. (b) "I was lately [...] taken to see two fountains, by the side of which a tale of auld lang syne was related", unnamed Bishop at a meeting of the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge in Walsingham, *The Times* 1 November 1837; the tale is of a warrior knight leaving for Palestine.

¹⁰⁴ Bib. II/1830/1.

¹⁰⁵ *The Times*, 2 November 1838.

¹⁰⁶ Advertisement in *The Times*, 9 September 1839.

relics of the warfare of ‘auld lang syne’”.¹⁰⁷ The motif of “auld acquaintance” also crops up, for example in a caricature now held in the Wellcome Library and featuring the reunion of Wellington and “John Bull”, the prototypical Englishman.¹⁰⁸ And by the 1840s, the first of at least two racehorses to bear the name *Auld Lang Syne* began to run—rather too slowly as it would appear, thus causing it to unexpectedly live up to the developing traditions of the song by frequently coming last.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ *The Times*, 29 April 1841.

¹⁰⁸ J. Doyle (artist), 1831; available at <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/hcf5rp3y/items>

¹⁰⁹ Various articles from the Sporting Intelligence section of *The Times*, 1842–1846. The second horse with this name ran in the 1860s, and won at least one race; various articles in *The Times*, 1868.

