From Script to Stage to Script

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So, I’m going to be talking, as you’ve heard, this evening about ballads, and you may instinctively be just a tiny bit disappointed, thinking those are rather different and maybe a bit less tremendous than plays. I’m going to try to change your mind a little bit, because I’m also going to show how influenced Shakespeare was by ballads, in rather exciting ways. And that’s why I’ve started with this picture.

This picture gives us a very 18th-century idea of Shakespeare, but a rather delightful and intriguing one. You can see Shakespeare is standing there—pretending to be Peter Holland, for those of us who know him. There’s a blind harpist playing and a child is singing a ballad from a broadsheet. And Shakespeare, as you can see, is being totally inspired by this. And his inspiration is taking a rather odd form. He has a quill pen in one hand, and he has a lot of ballads flopping over his monument. So, it’s not actually entirely clear whether he is simply imbibing these ballads, or whether he is, in fact, writing ballads. Why has he got that pen? Because I’ll show you a close-up of those upside-down sheets on his monument. They are "Ballad of the Jew," "Robin Hood," and "Constant Susanna." So, this picture is saying that Shakespeare’s plays sometimes have their source in ballads, sometimes use ballads, and are sometimes advertised by ballads. And I’m going to look at all those three things in my talk.

My talk will have three parts. I’m going to start by talking about ballads and performance. I’ll then talk about ballads and printing; and finally, I’ll talk about ballads and Shakespeare.

**Ballads and Performance**

So, Part One, ballads and performance. And I just want to start by describing what it is I mean when I say "ballad." Ballad comes from *ballare*; it really means a dance. Our word "ballet" comes from it. But by Shakespeare’s time, ballads had become songs, often to dance tunes that were very, very popular – so popular that they were sold on broadsheets for a penny. And a broadsheet ballad—and I’m going to be talking throughout about broadsheet ballads—a broadsheet ballad looks like this.

So, here’s a sort of standard one. It has pictures, and a normal broadsheet ballad has generic pictures, though, as we’ll see, sometimes a specific picture is made for a ballad. But this one has generic pictures: a posh man and a posh lady, in this instance. They’re in black letter. Black letter was a familiar type from which you learned to read—also, the typeface in which you got your proclamations. So, it had an easiness of appearance.

Ballads are to be sung to a tune, but they name the tune, and they seldom to never provide the music. You have to listen to the ballad seller in order to learn the tune if you don’t already know it. I’m going to tell you a little bit about this ballad. I’m going to highlight—so that bit, I’m just going to blow it up. So we can see we have:

A most excellent Ditty of the Lover's promises to his beloved. To a sweet new tune called, *Live with me and be my Love.*

[And then we have:]

The Lady's prudent answer to her Love. To the same tune.

These are, in fact, Marlowe’s famous "Come Live with Me and Be My Love" and Raleigh's famous reply to it. So the point I want to make here is that a ballad could be freshly written for a specific occasion, and very often was, but it also could be rather high-level poetry that has been set to music. A ballad could be all sorts of things. So, this particular ballad was a set of poems first, and they were printed in 1599. But here, by 1603, they’re being printed with a tune as a ballad. And it’s as a ballad that they make their way into *Merry Wives.* This is Sir Hugh Evans. He’s incredibly frightened, and he deals with that by singing.

Sir Hugh Evans: Pless my soul!

*(Sings.)*

*To shallow rivers, to whose falls*

*Melodious birds sing madrigals.*

*There will we make our peds of roses*

*And a thousand fragrant posies.*

*To shallow—*

(*The Merry Wives of Windsor*, 3.1.15–20)

He’s starting again. He’s going round and round. "Mercy on me, I have a great dispositions to cry." So, this is *Merry Wives.*

*Merry Wives,* however, is entered into the Stationer’s Register in 1602, whereas that song as a ballad is not entered until 1603. And we will find throughout in this talk, dating is very, very, very problematic with ballads. Ballads are often not entered into the Stationer’s Register at all. When they are entered, they may well have been circulating, and indeed printed, long before entrance. And surviving ballads are not always in any way near the date of the entrance in the Stationer’s Register, if there is one. So, we’ll come across quite a lot of dating issues. I was just starting with that one.

Now what do we know about Shakespeare’s interest in ballads? Well, we can work out some things. For instance, he really loves the tune "Light o' Love."

Julia: Best sing it to the tune of "Light o' Love."

(*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, 1.2.88)

Margaret: Clap 's into "Light o' love." That goes without a burden [without a chorus]. Do you sing it, and I’ll dance it [keeping the sense that a ballad was both a song and a dance].

(*Much Ado About Nothing*, 3.4.43–44)

[And here we are dancing]

Daughter: The morris . . . to the tune of "Light o' love."

*(The Two Noble Kinsmen*, 5.2.74–77)

So there are particular tunes we can see he really likes and sort of promotes in his plays. If you knew "Light o' Love," you’ll now have it in your head.

He also really liked the other side of ballads. Not the tune side, but the print side, the pictorial side. And I’m going to give you a very intriguing instance of that. This is from *The Tempest*. The song, "Rout 'em and Scout 'em," has just been sung, but Caliban corrects his fellow singers, "That’s not the tune." Ariel, currently invisible, then plays the correct tune on a tabor and pipe, which is to say pipe and a sort of drum. This is therefore, a popular rhythmic tune, the correct tune.

What is this saying: "This is the tune of our catch played by the picture of Nobody." (*The Tempest,* 3.2.38–39)? Now this is a bit of a joke. On one level he’s saying, Ariel is invisible, we can’t see anyone, this tune is played by nobody. But everyone at the time will have known the famous picture of Nobody at the front of the play *Nobody and Somebody*. The joke is, "Nobody” doesn’t have a body, he just has breeches that go up to his neck. So, that is Nobody, and John Trundle was the publisher of the play of *Nobody and Somebody.* He was also selling pictures of Nobody, and he also set up his shop at the sign of the Nobody. So, any reference to Nobody is on some level a reference to John Trundle. But more than that, when we look at the actual bit in *The Tempest*, we’re talking about a tune, a tune that is played on a tabor and pipe. And John Trundle, who published that play of *Nobody and Somebody,* also published many, many ballads.

We have a late ballad, but this ballad shows Nobody again. And Nobody has leaped out of the world of plays and is now a ballad character. So, this is the top bit of a ballad. This is: "Nobody his Counsel to choose a Wife: Or, The difference between Widows and Maids. To the Tune of the wanton Wife of Westminster," for those of you who want to sing along. “Nobody” in this ballad explains that it’s better to marry a widow, because she’ll do anything, than a maid, because they’re a bit capricious. So, it’s a rather annoying ballad. But what is intriguing about it is that we can see that actually the "counsel" doesn’t have to be given by “Nobody”. It could be given by, as it were, “Anybody”, but Trundle is advertising himself by sticking Nobody all over the place.

And Shakespeare is advertising Trundle’s ballads by playing a tune, presumably a tune to one of Trundle’s ballads, and by referring to the catch and the picture of Nobody. So, here we see a rather interesting connection between Shakespeare and Trundle, with Shakespeare, as I say, promoting and seemingly playing a Trundle ballad. And this is just before we hear about the isle being "full of noises." We tend to think about the "twangling instruments," but what we’ve just heard is a ballad.

Here’s another ballad that Shakespeare really liked. Once again, it has generic pictures, standard pictures. But I’m going to highlight the very first verse of this ballad. And this is a ballad which doesn’t have an entrance in the Stationer’s Register, which is very normal for ballads.

*A poor soul sat sighing under a sycamore tree,*

*Oh, willow, willow, willow,*

*With his hand on his bosom, his head on his knee,*

*Oh, willow, willow, willow*

So that is the famous Willow song. We know it from *Othello* in Folio; it’s not in the quarto. In the Folio, however, there is a crucial difference.

Desdemona: My mother had a maid called Barbary.

She was in love, and he she loved proved mad

And did forsake her. She had a song of willow

(*Othello,* 4.3.28–30)

So Desdemona, a woman, refers to her maid Barbary, a woman, and Barbary’s "song of willow."

Desdemona, *singing*: *The poor soul sat sighing by a sycamore tree,*

*Sing all a green willow.*

*Her hand on her bosom, her head on her knee,*

*Sing willow, willow, willow*

*(Othello,* 4.3.43–46)

So, it’s the same song, but the gender has been changed. As we meet it in *Othello,* this song is wonderful. It unites women of different class—the maid. It brings Desdemona’s childhood in here. It’s a woman’s song, sung by women about a woman’s grief. But it’s a man’s song about a man’s grief. Will the audience have known this? Well, this depiction, in some ways, seems to expect that they will. For instance, it has the reference, "Nay, that’s not next." Demanding that you think, what is "next"? What is next is, in fact, a rhyme about death. So, on some level this song wants you to know the Willow song, and indeed promotes the Willow song, and yet it’s been perverse with the Willow song. Maybe that’s because, although this is clearly a song about female grief, you have the song about the male abandoned lover and the male grief in your head. And that is, of course, equally true of Othello. Possibly by doing this, Othello’s sorrow and Desdemona’s sorrow are both able to be in the play at that moment.

Shakespeare also maybe comes up with ballads, promotes or comes up with ballads. This, of course, is a very famous bit in *The Winter’s Tale,* where we have a ballad singer on stage. What’s interesting is the ballad singer, ballad seller, Autolycus, has therefore also, as it were, sold ballads to us, in that we the audience have been hearing these ballads that he is selling. And indeed, we’re going to leave the play with, in our heads, tunes from this ballad, the ballad of "Get You Hence, for I Must Go," which is sung on stage. So, we’re going to leave *Winter’s Tale* humming "Get You Hence, for I Must Go." And maybe quite primed to purchase it, were someone to sell it to us.

Here’s this bit in the play. Again, it gives us a sense of the way ballad tunes and ballads had a slightly different circulation. For instance, "we had the tune on 't a month ago." This ballad is new to the women, but they’ve "had the tune" for a month. So, that’s because you would get many, many different ballads set to the same tune. To my knowledge there are, I think, 147 ballads surviving to the tune of "Fortune My Foe." So:

Dorcas: We had a tune on 't a month ago.

Autolycus: I can bear my part. You must know 'tis my occupation. Have at it with you.

[And then we get this ballad.]

*Song.*

Autolycus: G*et you hence, for I must go*

*Where it fits not you to know.*

Dorcas: *Whither?*

Mopsa: *O, whither?*

Dorcas:  *Whither?*

Mopsa: *It becomes thy oath full well*

*Thou to me thy secrets tell.*

Dorcas: *Me too. Let me go thither.*

(*The Winter's Tale,* 4.4.331–342)

So, this is not a great ballad, but we get a lot of it. We get a lot of it. As I say, there’s a weird moment of ballad promotion.

And we even get this odd moment later on in *Winter’s Tale.*

Second Gentleman: The King's daughter is found! Such a deal of wonder is broken out within this hour that ballad makers cannot be able to express it.

(*The Winter's Tale,* 5.2.25–27)

Weirdly, then, this play links itself to ballads. In the very process of saying this is the kind of thing that is too tremendous even for a ballad, it therefore kind of “en-ballads” itself. And, as I say, I’m very interested in what we’re starting to see as a kind of promotional—as plays promoting some particular ballads in some major ways. And I’ll come back to that.

Here’s a ballad. It’s late in date, but must be a later reprint of a much earlier ballad, and I’ll show you why. So, this bit is a ballad of the "New Mad Tom of Bedlam," and this bit is a ballad of "The Man in the Moon Drinks Claret," and there’s a picture of him. So, here’s a specific picture, because there is the Man in the Moon and he has a flagon of wine in a glass. And if you’ve got a specific picture, obviously quite a lot of additional money has been spent on your ballad. So, this was clearly anticipating being a very popular ballad.

"The Man in the Moon Drinks Claret, As it was lately sung at the Curtain Holywel." Well, the Curtain Theatre closed in 1624, and the play *The Man in the Moon Drinks Claret* was performed in the Curtain in 1621. So, this seems to be a ballad linked to that 1621 performance, even though we only have it from post-Restoration. But if you look at the woodcut of the poor "Man in the Moon Drinking Claret," he’s got an awful lot of wormholes in him. So, you can see it’s quite an old woodcut. But what I’m interested in is, here we then have a ballad that specifically links itself to theatrical performance.

And when we think of it, there are many links between ballads and theatrical performance, not least, that plays ended with jigs. At least until 1612, and largely after 1612 as well, Shakespeare’s plays will have ended with jigs. What is a jig? Well, a jig is, in fact, a ballad. A jig is a comic ballad with some performance aspects in it.

And this—which, as you can see, looks like a conventional ballad—is in fact a jig. And not only does it say that it is a jig in the title, but if I blow this bit up, you can see that we have stage directions in it. There’s an exit. And here’s a different kind of entrance direction. Because it’s a ballad/jig entrance direction: "Enter Richard, Bess’s husband, to the tune of 'the Jewish Dance,'" because the ballad is changing tune at this moment. And this text—you probably can’t see those—but it is filled with such entrances and exits. So, it’s a theatrical text. And as I say, there is this particular jig for sale.

But let’s think of the fact that every single play ends with a jig. You’re going to leave the play then, humming whatever ballad tune was in the play, but really humming the ballad tune you’ve just heard. In fact, your last experience before leaving the theater was a ballad. That therefore, of course, makes you very, very primed, in an ideal situation, to purchase a ballad. And we have seen these plays promoting and putting forward some certain ballads that you might particularly want to buy. And perhaps it’s not surprising then, that there were sometimes ballads written specifically to promote plays. There’s a total link between ballads and plays, sometimes.

The bit of ballad I’m going to talk to you about now is a ballad that doesn’t survive, except in a law case. But I’ll tell you about the law case. So, this is a rather horrible story, another misogynist horrible story. There was a widow, and there was a nasty young man who wanted to marry her and get all her money. So, he and his friends made an agreement to get her so spectacularly drunk for such a long time that she wouldn’t know what she was doing, and she would marry him. And they successfully did this. They got her into The Greyhound and they kept her in drink without sleep for three days, at the end of which she married the young man. And then there was a legal case about, Was that a proper marriage? Did he have the rights to her property or not?

And as part of the legal case, the story became very well known. And rather horribly, there’s a play, a lost play, that told that story for amusement on the stage. And not only was it staged, but it was also instantly made into a ballad, and the ballad promoted the stage performance. And a bit of the ballad is in the legal case, and I’ll just read this particular lost stanza to you:

*And you who fain would hear the full*

*Discourse of this match-making,*

*The play will teach you at the Bull*

*To keep the widow waking.*

So, that ballad, which was then viciously sung under the window of the poor widow, that ballad is clearly a ballad that is promoting the story, and is promoting the play, and we have direct advertising then between the ballad and the Bull Theatre.

Well, let’s think a little bit about Shakespeare’s plays. We’ve had ballads being in Shakespeare’s plays, and we’ve had him being interested in a tune and interested in their pictures. Was there also a promotional strategy for getting ballads to help advertise his plays?

Well, let’s take *Romeo and Juliet.* In 1596 in the Stationer’s Register, a new ballad of "Romeo and Juliet" was entered. And I should mention here that the Stationer’s Register is actually in there in the room next door for anyone who wants to see that fantastic text. So in 1596, we get the ballad of "Romeo and Juliet" entered; it is now lost. And it’s not until 1597 that we get the play of *Romeo and Juliet* entered. Here, then, we certainly have a ballad promoting a Shakespeare play, before the book of the play is published. So, now we want to ask, is there a kind of theater strategy? Is the theater involved in this, or are balladmongers spotting an opportunity and coming up with a ballad, or is the theater involved in some way?

Let’s keep thinking. Here is a surviving Shakespeare ballad, or connected-to-Shakespeare ballad, which is the ballad of "The Lamentable and Tragical History of Titus Andronicus." That ballad was entered into the Stationer’s Register in 1594, though the surviving one I’m showing you is much later. But, as I say, it’s very difficult with dating ballads.

I do want to think a bit about the picture, which, once again, is actually a specific picture for a specific ballad. And let’s just think a little bit through this picture. It tells the story of *Titus Andronicus,* not in play order, in a rather odd order. Top left, the hunting scene, during which Lavinia will be raped. Top middle, Lavinia having been mutilated, writing the names of her aggressors in the sand with a stick. Bottom left, Aaron the Moor buried in sand, at the end, to die. Next to that, Lavinia holding the bowl while Titus cuts the throats of Chiron and Demetrius, and there’s a kind of Monty Python arc of blood going out of the neck into the bowl. Then there’s an inset picture: bottom right, Tamora about to have a lovely, delicious pie, which contains her children, and, delightfully, there’s a nice duck accompaniment.

But "above": I’m interested in "above." That’s some kind of statement of place. The place the play takes place in, in the ballad, is Rome, but that doesn’t particularly look like Rome. What it actually looks like—the middle building looks to be a theater with its flag flying, a round theater with its flag flying. I would suggest that therefore this picture is promoting the ballad and promoting the playhouse, reminding you that that’s where you came across that story.

Here’s a ballad. Again, I’ve given you a later version. The earliest version of this, of "King Lear and His Three Daughters," I know of is from the 1620s. But it was already well known in the 1620s, because in the 1620s it was gathered together into a book called a garland. And a "garland" was a name for a book containing many well-known ballads, and one of those was the King Lear ballad. I have, however, given you this depiction largely because I wanted you to see a picture we’re not familiar with of King Lear and his three breasty daughters.

So, the question then is, was the playhouse actively involved in what is clearly some kind of connection with ballad writers and ballad printers? Or was it not directly involved in that? Was that just happening? Well, when you look around, you find some contradictory, but interesting evidence.

So, for instance, we do have—and, of course, as we all know with documents, you have to work with what survives, and what survives is random-ish. We do have a contract between Philip Henslowe and John Cholmley the grocer for his playhouse. Henslowe will not permit any person other than John Cholmley

to utter sell or put to sale, in or about the . . . play house . . . any bread or drink

So certainly, those commodities, "bread or drink," are given to a particular salesman, and he has purchased, he has acquired the right, to sell those in the playhouse.

And we also have a document from rather later for the Whitefriars:

[If any] profit can or may be made in the said [play]house either by wine, beer, ale, tobacco, wood, coals, or any such commodity, that then . . . Martin Slatyer . . . shall have the benefit thereof

So, here we have two examples, both of the playhouse running the commodities being sold in the playhouse, but also of those commodities not clearly involving print. So, that’s confusing. Were there other documents that were about print salesmen? Or, as I say, was the relationship between print and playhouse not as formalized as this one? It’s a little bit open to question.

But we should maybe think a little bit more about the various different, lovely things you could buy while you were in the playhouse. And one thing we should bear in mind is there were no tickets in those days. You would buy the right to be in a particular area of the playhouse. So, you would arrive at a playhouse very, very early in order to get a good spot in the area you were prepared to pay for, twopence or sixpence or whatever. And so you would usually arrive at the playhouse about an hour before a performance. And then you’re just sitting there, and people will wander around, and you’ll buy anything. So, there’s all kinds of food and drink.

It’s certainly the case that books were sold in the playhouse. Here’s Henry Parrot. This is interesting on a number of levels:

I’ll not enjoin thee, but request in love

Thou so much deign my book to dignify,

As first it be not with your ballads mixed;

Next, not at play-houses 'mongst pippins sold [pippins being apples].

Here he seems to separate his book from ballad sales, but thinks his book will make playhouse sales and thinks that playhouse sales are some kind of mixture of food and books.

So that maybe takes us back to the grocer; maybe other commodities might in fact include print. Here’s Fennor:

I suppose this pamphlet will hap into your hands before a play begin, with the importunate clamor of "Buy a new book," by some needy companion.

So, he once again is assuming his book will be sold in the playhouse. And you can see that the playhouse is emerging as a place where very many commodities are being merchandised—not simply plays. And we can also see that the playhouse is a place where you are purchasing and dealing with print on some level.

And maybe we should think of the conflicted relationship between orality and print that the playhouse anyway sets up. We often see that as a sort of tussle, but I’m suggesting that they may be rather more commodiously related then that.

And this is Middleton’s *The Roaring Girl.* *The Roaring Girl* "may be allowed both gallery-room at the playhouse and chamber-room at your lodging." *The Roaring Girl* then is anticipating being read in a playhouse, as well as being read in your house. And that says something rather interesting about the idea of going to watch a play and reading another play in advance of it. As I say, the print-oral connection, and the sense that the playhouse is a place where you market print. Now, of course, where better to sell a playbook than an audience full of people who like plays? But there were certainly other things being sold around the playhouse. Is it by the same sellers as the books or by different sellers?

But look at this. This is Robert Greene and he has a joke about a pickpocket, and the event, the pickpocketing event, happens just outside a playhouse. And Robert Greene talks about the "unsufferable loitering quality in singing of ballads and songs at the doors of such houses where plays are used," so Greene says. And he then talks about a ballad singer outside a playhouse and how people get pickpocketed. This is a very normal story about ballad singers. But he says the ballad singers are to be found "at the doors" of playhouses. But, of course, that makes sense. There’ll be a queue at the door—sorry, a line. There’ll be a line of people at the door of playhouses ready to be entertained, ready to purchase things. And as ballads were sold by being sung, this would be nice pre-play entertainment.

But we then have plays that end with jigs, so they end with ballads. And if you’re going to purchase ballads outside the playhouse, or hear them outside the playhouse, we actually have plays framed by ballads, plays within the world of the ballad.

Sir Christopher: Thou'lt be a ballad monger.

Vicar Catchmey: I shall live to see thee

Stand in a playhouse door with thy long box,

Thy half-crown library, and cry small books.

(William Cartwright, *The Ordinary*)

So this anticipates someone who will sell books and ballads, again at the door of the playhouse. I’m interested in that location at the door. As I say, I think it’s partly just because that’s where the lines are. But I wonder if it’s because they’re not allowed inside? I don’t quite know. I haven’t worked it out, and this all depends on whether we think that the theater has actually sanctioned those sales or not.

We have said that Shakespeare seems to be on some level promoting ballads, and that there are ballads about his plays that therefore seem to be promoting Shakespeare. There are other moments where one just wonders, and I’m not going to do any more than just wonder. But there’s this famous bit in *Antony and Cleopatra* where Cleopatra worries that:

Cleopatra: Scald rhymers [will]

Ballad us out o' tune.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

And I shall see

Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness

I' th' posture of a whore.

(*Antony and Cleopatra,* 5.2.262–268)

Well, we’re always very alert to the second bit. Students love the second bit: Oh, no, you know, she worries that there’ll be a play of Cleopatra, and there is one, and this is the very play that she’s worried about. But there’s the earlier worry that there’ll be a ballad of that play. And that only, totally, makes complete metatheatrical sense if there is also an "Antony and Cleopatra*"* ballad. That’s, anyway, a story about which there was likely to be a ballad, though I don’t know of one. But imagine leaving *Antony and Cleopatra* and being able to purchase the ballad, should you so want, of that play.

And here’s one that really does seem a bit like some kind of maybe product placement or something. This is *Midsummer Night’s Dream.* Bottom emerges from his strange ass experience.

Bottom: I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream. It shall be called "Bottom’s Dream" . . . and I will sing it in the latter end of a play.

(*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 4.1.224–227)

Although he doesn’t, in the text we have, ever sing "Bottom’s Dream." But he might have after *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* as a whole, or maybe again this was something you would purchase on your way out, "Bottom’s Dream" as part of your experience of having seen that play, and a nice memento of that play. As I say, that's all speculation, but we have seen how performance and ballad are richly and weirdly tied together.

And sticking with performance just a little longer: I want to talk a bit about the ballad sellers and what they were like. When you sell a book, there are kind of designated places for selling books. What’s great about being a ballad seller is that you just go to any place of entertainment, and you’d stand on a stool, or whatever, and you sing your ballads. You don’t need a license, and you can just purvey those ballads. So, for one thing, their location is places of entertainment: fairs and markets, taverns, playhouses—they have that entertainment connection.

But for now, there’s another thing that’s illustrated here in this big, complicated picture of the Royal Exchange in London, which was sort of a shopping mall. And this is that shopping mall in 1644, and I’m going to blow up that picture. That’s a picture of a ballad seller, and the reason I’ve showed her is that she’s a lady. So, a woman couldn’t perform in a play, but she could perform ballads. She could perform play ballads, for instance. Now, unfortunately, this ballad singer is a bit of a loser. No one is thronging around her, and her ballad is kind of drooping out of her hand. Possibly the idea is that the Royal Exchange is the future and the ballad singers are the past, I don’t quite know what Hollar is saying there. I am interested in her femininity. Here’s a more successful ballad singer—an Inigo Jones one—and there he is, in the act of singing his ballads.

But I want to think a little bit about singing those play ballads. What would it be like to hear someone sing the song of a play in first person, as though they have gone through all those actions? And what would it be like for you to purchase that play ballad and sing it to yourself, and internalize being that hero? I’m going to, well, I’m going to speculate about that. I’m thinking of the "Titus Andronicus" ballad that we’ve already referred to, which is one of the many, many ballads sung to the tune of "Fortune My Foe."

The verse I’m interested in is a verse where there’s a different murder every line. And it might have sounded a bit like this.

*Matthew Lillo, singing:*

*Myself bereav'd my daughter then of life;*

*The Empress then I slew with bloody knife;*

*And stabb'd the Emperor immediately;*

*And then myself; even so did Titus die.*

That was Matthew Lillo, everyone! Thank you so much! I realized I had a whole paper and ballads without any singing.

**Ballads and Print**

Now, we finished with performance, we’re going to go into print. This is a quicker one. Here’s an entire ballad. I’ve made it really small, because there’s not much here I’m interested in. The bit that intrigues me is this, which says:

You may read more of this bloody tragedy in a book printed by authority, 1624.

And here’s the book, also 1624. And you can see that the ballad and the book have the same picture. In fact, it’s largely the picture that promotes ballad and book. And in this way the ballad, one genre, sells the book, another genre, and vice versa. What is intriguing for me here, though, is that ballad and book don’t seem to be published or printed by the same people. They seem to be by different people. And then you realize that there’s some connection going on between publishers, where they are co-sharing woodcuts, if it will help promote more than one piece of literature. So, as I say, so here we have a ballad very clearly promoting a book, with that incredibly horrible picture of water torture happening in Amboyna.

Well, the same is true of a lot of plays and in rather interesting ways. So, here we have a ballad, probably in its 1633 version, and it is the ballad of "Arden of Faversham." And there is also a play of *Arden of Faversham,* and here’s the play in its third edition. As I say, this ballad wasn’t entered until 1633, and it’s only the third edition of the play which has that title page, and then this next page, 1635.

As you can see, it’s got the ballad picture, but you can also see that the ballad picture wasn’t made for the play. They haven’t got, actually, a page that suitably fits the picture, and they’ve had to flop it on the side. We tend to use this picture as telling us something about the play and performance, but actually, it’s more likely to be telling us about the ballad. But the ballad and play are co-advertising one another through the medium of that picture.

Exactly the same can be said of *Spanish Tragedy.* There’s the ballad of "The Spanish Tragedy" and here’s the play of *The Spanish Tragedy*. As I say, which one is promoting the other, or if they’re just co-selling one another, it’s a bit difficult to tell. But having seen ballads promoting plays in performance, we’re now certainly seeing, through pictures, ballads promoting plays in print, and likewise, plays promoting ballads in print. As I say, there’s a strange, weird connection that’s drawing these separate things together, because they have a shared aim, I think, and a shared audience.

This is a very weird one. This is the "Doctor Faustus" ballad, and, as you can see, it’s got a somewhat rubbish picture of Doctor Faustus, his armillary sphere, his books, and his devil. But it’s clearly some kind of version of this picture that we get on the fourth edition of the play. I am going to suggest that this woodcut, that the play woodcut, was also a ballad woodcut, and got itself used up in some way, or ruined in some way, and was replaced by this rather bad replica of it. They’re clearly connected; they’re clearly the same picture. And a further reason I have for thinking that, is that although that familiar Doctor Faustus picture is lost from the ballad, it survives on a different ballad, "The Tragedy of Doctor Lambe."

And I’m ultimately led to think that pictures we have, when we have playbooks with pictures—that they’ll be connected to ballad tie-ins. You know, if you’re going to make a specific picture, it's worth marketing two kinds of literature with it—ballad tie-ins or sometimes chapbook tie-ins. But I’m also going to suggest that the picture usually originates in the ballad, not the playbook, because a ballad has to have a picture, or more than that you expect a picture with a ballad. You don’t with a playbook; I think that’s a kind of "after" thing. So that’s kind of good and bad news with respect to those pictures, insofar as it’s true.

Sometimes it’s said that there were only a very few ballads that were fully about plays. Only a few of them, and that they weren’t popular and therefore ceased to be published. This is not the case. What is the case, and what’s very awkward if you’re interested in ballads, is that ballads stopped being entered in the Stationer’s Register, for the most part, in about 1603. Somehow under King James, you didn’t have to enter ballads anymore. Because you didn’t have to enter ballads, we’re then reliant only on surviving ballads. And there is no list anywhere of all surviving ballads. They’re still very, very scattered. They’re so ephemeral. There’s a wonderful website, EBBA, which I’ve been using a lot, which has pulled some of the larger collections of ballads, but there are still scattered ones all over the place.

When ballads are entered in the Stationer’s Register, you can see patterns like this. So, you can see *Tamburlaine,* play and ballad, *Spanish Tragedy,* play and ballad, *Jew of Malta,* play and ballad, *Knack to Know a Knave*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Four Apprentices of London.* These all yield plays and ballads, and at this point the ballads seem all to be being published by John Danter. He seems to have the monopoly on play ballads. And you can see, it’s for different playhouses.

Later in time—as I say, it tends to be said that there aren’t really play ballads. I think I’ve found about 57 of them. I’m still looking. But you can’t always tell, because if either the play doesn’t survive or the ballad doesn’t survive, you can’t tell whether the title is simply a well-known proverb or whether they really are closely connected. But we can see that right in the 1620s, Brome's plays are all being manifested as play and ballad, for instance, as this shows. And as I say, I think I have 57 such connections, but it’s a real problem that you can’t tell when a ballad is a source, or when a ballad is a reflection. Though that is, of course, very interesting in own right.

And the thing about ballads is, I’ve already said that they spread out from place of entertainment to place of entertainment. And they also spread much more quickly into the countryside, I think, than other texts. Because they’re cheap, because they’re very, very portable, because you have dedicated ballad singers, who will go out selling those things. Here we have a complaint about:

Lascivious songs, however in London they begin . . . thence . . . spread as from a spring . . . in every peddler’s pack. . . . The sellers swear they are published by authority, and people far off think nothing is printed but what is lawfully tolerated.

So, people are seeing that these ballads are allowed. They're often not allowed, but there they are anyway.

And that gives us an interesting sense of bits of plays, and things about plays, having a further reach than actual plays do. They are often just in the playhouse. These ballads can get anywhere. They are in a way more popular, and on some level they're selling those plays, but on another level they’re just having their own life. The story has a bigger life than its manifestation in a play.

And people would be interested in ballads, obviously, because they wanted to sing them. You know ballads are exceptionally oral, and you buy them through hearing singing, but they’re also exceptionally printy, and you would buy them because of the print. People who, “though they cannot read, yet will have many ballads set up in their houses that so they might learn them”; they want to learn the ballads, even if they need help making out the words.

Cokes. O Sister, do you remember the ballads over the nursery-chimney at home o' my own pasting up? There be brave pictures.

(Ben Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair)*

Pictures make ballads sell. And those ballads that you liked, you would stick in your house. They become your domestic decoration.

And they were also in all the pubs:

Piscator: I’ll now lead you to an honest ale-house, where we shall find a cleanly room, lavender in the windows, and twenty ballads stuck about the wall.

(Izaak Walton, *The Compleat Angler*)

So, this was the look of domestic or drinking environment. It was a ballad look.

One struggles to find English pictures, because they are all a bit bad in this period. But here is a woman in Utrecht. She has her bird, her glass of wine, and her ballad on the wall. And here’s a Dutch picture of "Boors Singing in a Tavern." And, as you can see, the tavern itself has ballad pictures, but the boors have purchased their own ballad and are singing from that. This printed text is therefore going directly back into orality. It's sociable. It’s a sharing occasion, singing that ballad.

But at the opposite extreme, very posh people collected ballads—a bit like collecting stamps. One of the great ballad collections is Pepys’, but it didn’t even originate with Pepys. It originated with John Selden and Pepys acquired his collection and built on it. So ballads, as I say, it's actually rather hard to give them a sort of social position, because their pictures made them very desirable, also, to collect, to trade, and to have in books. As is the case here, with Pepys’s collection.

**Ballads and Shakespeare**

I’ll now go very briefly to my final part. So we’ve looked at ballads in performance and we’ve looked at ballads in print, and we’ve found very strange connections, it seems, between theatricality and ballads. And so our final question has to be: Was Shakespeare actively involved in any of this? Might he have written ballads to market his plays? Might he have been involved in that process or not?

To look at that, I’m going to move first, briefly, to Ben Jonson. We’re used to saying that Ben Jonson was rather earnest about his literary nature. And we might think therefore that he’d be a sort of “not ballad” type person. The reverse, however, is the case. In his masque, again a rather elevated form of drama, in his *Masque of Augurs*, we have John Urson entering with his bears. And I’ll just give you the first verse:

*Though it may seem rude*

*For me to intrude,*

*With these my bears, by chance-a;*

*'Twere sport for a king,*

*If they could sing*

*As well as they can dance-a.*

Okay, John Urson and his amazing dancing bears and the *Masque of Augurs,* 1622!

Here’s a play, a little bit difficult to date, as it’s in manuscript. But it’s a play that includes that standard story of a ballad singer and pickpockets, and so forth. The ballad singer is called Bidstandand he is selling the latest new ballad.

Come sirs, pence a piece, here is a new ballad, a dainty new ballad, newly printed, and newly come forth, concerning his majesty's subjects, the bears, in the palace garden, and Urson their reverent instructor.

He’s singing, he’s selling, the Jonson ballad: "Run boys, run! A new ballad, a new ballad." And Bidstand starts to sing:

*Though it may seem rude*

*For me to intrude,*

*With these my bears, by chance-a;*

*'Twere sport for a king,*

*If they could sing*

*As well as they can dance-a …*

Simple: Have they any fine pictures I tro at them?

Bidstand: Yes, of three dancing bears and Urson.

So, here we are told that there was a ballad, that Urson’s ballad was printed, and that it had a picture of Urson with his three dancing bears.

Now, that ballad as a broadsheet does not survive, but what does survive from the 1650s is a book of hilarious bits and pieces, in the middle of which we get this, and this is clearly not a picture made for the book, because it’s stuffed in the middle. In fact, the book has quite a few random pictures stuffed in the middle, and it seems that in the 1650s, pictures from ballads have made their way either to Sir John Mennes or maybe to M. Simmons the printer. There we clearly have the picture of Urson and his three dancing bears, and under it, "Though it may seem rude / For me to intrude," etcetera.

So, although we don’t have the broadside, we’ve got the shattered bits of it, and can kind of reconstruct the thing, and see that it seems pretty clear that that bit from a masque was also a popular ballad.

And, indeed, we have another such reference. This is from a John Chamberlain letter:

For lack of better news here is . . . a ballad . . . of Ben Jonson’s in the play . . . at the Lord Marquis at Burley [that play was *The Gypsies Metamorphosed*]. . . . For which [for the ballad], for which and other good service there done, he had his pension from a 100 marks increased to 200 pounds per annum, besides the reversion of the Mastership of the Revels.

So, his ballad, enclosed in this letter (it no longer survives), was so fantastic it got him loads of money, and it looked as though it was getting him the Mastership of the Revels. Again, I say the ballad doesn’t survive, but that same book has a ballad from that play, and with this wonderful picture of the gypsies. So I think we can say that Ben Jonson promoted even his rather serious work in ballads, and that now takes us then back to Shakespeare.

We have things like this. This is "When that I was and a little tiny boy," at the end of *Twelfth Night.* Could it be a Shakespeare ballad? It’s at the end of a Shakespeare play. It could also be the jig. If it’s the jig, it's more likely to be by one of his clowns. Armin was a known ballad writer, and Kempe was a known ballad writer. So, that’s kind of nothing, neither way.

Here’s a story. We needn’t trust it, it’s 18th century. But it’s a bit intriguing:

[Shakespeare] made a frequent practice of deer-stealing . . . robbing . . . Sir Thomas Lucy. . . . For this he was prosecuted . . . To revenge that ill-usage, [Shakespeare] made a ballad upon [Lucy]. And though this, probably the first essay of his poetry, be lost, yet it is said to have been . . . very bitter.

So this 18th-century story tells us that it believes Shakespeare’s first piece of writing to have been a ballad. And there are a couple of 18th-century supposed versions of that ballad, that then come into being.

But this funny one—and this is my last slide—this gives us more pause for thought. Chettle writing in 1603. He’s writing *England’s Mourning Garment.* England is mourning because Queen Elizabeth has just died. And Chettle not only honors Queen Elizabeth in his poem, but also tells of all the other poets who haven’t done likewise. He does this under coded names, so you have to work out who he’s talking about.

Here he’s talking about someone he calls "silver tongued Melicert." "Silver tongued Melicert" is one of the people who haven’t written something sad about the death of Queen Elizabeth:

Nor doth the silver tongued Melicert,

Drop from his honied Muse one sable tear

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Shepheard, remember our Elizabeth,

And sing her Rape, done by that Tarquin, Death.

This tells us that Melicert was Shakespeare, writer of *The Rape of Lucrece,* whilst also, incredible creepily, suggesting that Death has raped Elizabeth. I don’t really want to go there. But, however, it is the reveal that tells you who Melicert is.

And we also hear that Melicert, who so wickedly hasn’t written on the death of Queen Elizabeth, did write on other things. “After the dissipation of the Spanish Arma[da] … thee hast heard the songs of . . . smooth tongued Melicert . . . touching those accidents." So, naughty Melicert would write on the Spanish Armada, but would not write on the death of Elizabeth.

Now we have surviving about 27, 28 ballads about the Spanish Armada: that tended to be how that victory was popularly celebrated. As I don’t really believe or approve of stylometrics, I’m not going to suggest you hunt any of those to see if Shakespeare wrote them. But I am going to suggest that we have some hints in here that Shakespeare may have been a ballad writer. But whether or not he was a ballad writer, he was certainly a ballad promoter in his plays. And similarly, the ballad writers, whoever they were, were certainly also promoters of Shakespeare’s plays.

But I want to leave you, maybe, with this question. We’ve seen ballads having a funny trajectory in and out of plays and around and in slightly different areas from play text. And I suppose one of the problems with telling a narrative in this way, is that it’s always assumed that the play is at the core, that the play is ultimately where everything is tending towards. But that’s not necessarily what ballad writers think, or what people thought. As I say, maybe what’s actually—what people are keen to purchase, is the story in a number of manifestations, of which the play was only one. The play is not the core. The play is a particular way of telling a story.

Either way, I think what I want to leave you with is the broadside ballad as an extraordinary, and I think, under-studied document. It’s a song, but it’s a document, and I think it’s a document that has an intriguing bearing on the document of the play text, and on the fact of performance.

Thank you very much.