

# EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



## John Wilson's Music for Richard Brome's *The Northern Lass*

Keith Green

Independent Scholar

Richard Brome's play, *The Northern Lass* was first performed in 1629 at the Globe and Blackfriars theatres. Music features strongly in the play; Julie Sanders suggests that its continued popularity well into the eighteenth century was in part due to its 'particular emphases on music and song and its genuinely charming female protagonist'.<sup>1</sup> In addition to a number of ballads and catches that feature in the play (in all calls for music or song), there are five solo songs attributed to John Wilson (1595-1672). Wilson was a slightly younger contemporary of Brome (1590-1652), *The Northern Lass* being the only play of Brome's for which Wilson wrote the music. Later composers such as Daniel Purcell (1664-1717) also wrote music for later stagings, but it is the original music by Wilson with which I am concerned here. Scores of the five main songs are to be found in two collections in the New York Public Library known as 'Drexel 4041' and 'Drexel 4257'.<sup>2</sup> Drexel 4041 is dated between 1640 and 1650 and contains a large number of songs from plays. Drexel 4257 is dated a little later and is known by the title *John Gamble, His Booke, Amen 1659*. Together these commonplace collections represent a vital source of songs from the early to the middle of the seventeenth century. Vincent Duckles rather ominously says of the Gamble manuscript that it 'furnishes an ideal territory for the exploration of English song in one of its darker ages'.<sup>3</sup> The period in question is seen as a transitional time between two musical and poetic eras, roughly characterised as a shift from

---

<sup>1</sup> Julie Sanders, Introduction to *The Northern Lass*, ed. by Julie Sanders, from *Richard Brome Online*: <<http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/brome/>>. All quotations from the play are taken from this edition and are cited parenthetically.

<sup>2</sup> Elise Bickford Jorgens, John Gamble, 'His Booke, Amen 1659', *English Song, 1600-1675: Facsimiles of Twenty Six Manuscripts and an Edition of the Text* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1987), Drexel 4257 and Drexel 4041.

<sup>3</sup> Vincent Duckles, 'The Gamble Manuscript as a Source of Continuo Song in England', *Journal of the Musicological Society* 7.2 (1948), 23-40 (p. 24).

conventional lyric to metaphysical wit in poetry and from modal to tonal harmony in music. It was also the time when a song-style that prefigured the operatic aria was emerging and the very nature of dramatic song was changing. I wish to show here that John Wilson's music, in particular that written for *The Northern Lass*, both reflects the changing nature of the relationship between words and music in the early modern period and anticipates later developments in the role of song in drama.

Wilson was a renowned lutenist and teacher, succeeding Robert Johnson as principal composer for the King's Men in 1615. He was succeeded by William Lawes in 1634 and entered the King's Musick the year after. He was Professor of Music at Oxford University from 1656-1661, after which he joined the Royal Chapel until his death in 1672. In a contemporary account it is said that he was 'the best at the lute in all England', though he more often 'presided the consort' at the university.<sup>4</sup> Wilson was only twenty when he began composing for the King's Men, and by then he had already collaborated with Nicholas Lanier and John Coperario in producing music for *The Masque of Flowers* (1614). His compositions for *The Northern Lass* are relatively early pieces in his long life as a musician and composer. However, he produced a large number of compositions for the court and theatre between 1614 and 1639,<sup>5</sup> writing music for plays by Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher, Ford, Jonson, Heywood and Brome.

The amount of music associated with plays in England between about 1610 and 1642 is remarkable in its demonstration of the close links between words and music in the early part of the century. An increasing tension was evident in the relationship between poetry and music as Elizabethan conventions became outmoded, while at the same time the links between music, words and drama were strengthened.<sup>6</sup> Ian Spink notes that between these dates there are 'at least fifty-two plays... for which songs survive that are almost certainly proper to them'.<sup>7</sup> A large proportion of these plays were originally acted by the King's Men, who were, as Spink states 'the most musical' company.

---

<sup>4</sup> Anthony Wood, *The History and Antiquities of the Colleges and Halls in the University of Oxford*, ed. by John Gutch, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1786).

<sup>5</sup> John Cutts, 'Thomas Heywood's "The Gentry to the King's Head" in *The Rape of Lucrece* and John Wilson's Setting', *Notes and Queries* 8.10 (1961), 384-7.

<sup>6</sup> There is a growing body of research on music in Renaissance drama. For a discussion of songs in their dramatic contexts see Tiffany Stern, *Documents of Performance in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 120-73; and Leslie Dunn and Katharine Larson (eds.), *Gender and Song in Early Modern England* (London: Ashgate, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Ian Spink, 'English Cavalier Songs, 1620-1660', *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, 86<sup>th</sup> Session (1959-60), 61-78 (p. 69).

After his period of writing for the theatre, Wilson seems to have concentrated on compositions for the lute, showing increasingly radical and experimental harmony.<sup>8</sup> His work as a whole spans a particularly intriguing time in the history of English music, as Duckles suggests, occurring as it does shortly after Dowland's last book of lute ayres was published in England in 1612, through to firm establishment of tonality in baroque works (roughly 1650). The early period in particular is seen as a transition period between the lute song and what came to be known as the continuo song. This represented a shift in the way that verse was declaimed in song, from polyphonically-conceived harmony allied with conventional verse-figures, to more homophonic or monodic settings of verse in the process of freeing itself from those conventions.<sup>9</sup>

These developments in musical practice and composition should be borne in mind when we approach the work of John Wilson and *The Northern Lass*. They should also be seen in conjunction with changes in English poetry as it moved away from the conventions of Elizabethan verse and towards more speech-orientated rhythms and irregular lines. As the editor of the Drexel collections, Elise Bickford Jorgens states, the first half of the seventeenth century saw the styles of both lyric poetry and music in England undergoing significant change, and that there is 'evidence in the solo songs that modes of musical interpretation of poetry change too, in response to alterations in poetic taste'.<sup>10</sup> Of course, the songs in *The Northern Lass* and other dramas of the period are conventional in the sense that they naturally draw on the poetic taste of the time, sharing many of the characteristics of the lyric poetry of the Elizabethan era (characteristics that did not simply disappear, of course, in the Jacobean period, despite the general shift in poetic style). However, the music of *The Northern Lass* draws heavily not only upon the ballad tradition but also on a newly emerging blending of words and music: song that points forward to the operatic aria. Sanders has called attention to the 'aria-like qualities of Constance's [the heroine of the play] song-performances'.<sup>11</sup> The songs in *The Northern Lass*, far from being examples of song in one of its darker periods, as Duckles states, crucially look both to the past and the future of English song and its place in drama.

---

<sup>8</sup> See Vincent Duckles, 'The Curious Art of John Wilson (1595-1674): An Introduction to His Songs and Lute Music', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 7.2 (1954), 93-112.

<sup>9</sup> For a fuller discussion of the shifting relationship between poetry and music see Diane Kelsey McColley, *Poetry and Music in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> Elise Bickford Jorgens, *The Well-Tuned Word: Musical Interpretations of English Poetry 1597-1651* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> Sanders, Introduction to *The Northern Lass*.

The two main strands of art music in the latter half of the sixteenth century were the lute song and the madrigal, both essentially polyphonic musics.<sup>12</sup> With the English madrigal, the lyric is set for a number of voices with parts overlapping and with frequent repetitions of elements of the poem (which also may not be an example of the best verse available). With the multi-layering of voices and independence of parts, the words naturally become much more difficult to hear. However, despite this, the English madrigalists frequently indulged in ‘word painting’, an attempt to match the tone of the music to the semantics of a particular word or phrase, for example having the music ‘ascend’ as you sing of ascending to heaven.<sup>13</sup> Unsurprisingly, the madrigal rarely features in the dramas of the Caroline period, not only because they were generally unsuited to the dramatic conventions of the time, but also because their popularity was waning.

The lute song seems superficially to be the antithesis of the madrigal: it is sung by a single voice with clear declamation of the verse. Yet the associated lute accompaniments were often conceived of polyphonically (not just with a succession of simple chords underneath, for instance), where the lute provides counterpoint for the voice. Once again, parts of the verse may be repeated and there is a complex matching of musical ‘meaning’ with the semantics of the text. John Dowland’s books of lute ayres (1597-1612) most clearly exemplify this type of song. Although the lute ayre itself was no longer fashionable in the Caroline period (that is, the conventional, sorrowful ayre exemplified in the work of Dowland and Campion), songs with lute accompaniment were still being composed until their final waning in the eighteenth century.<sup>14</sup>

In the early part of the seventeenth century, as I have intimated, a new kind of song was beginning to emerge, or at least a new way of setting words in a musical context. A few preliminary observations can be made in order to give a context for Wilson’s work, however. In what has come to be known as the ‘declamatory ayre’ the harmonic language of the accompaniment is strengthened and yet simplified as is the link between the mood of the music and the mood of the text. The English lute song, exemplified in the music of Dowland, was intimate and largely polyphonic, as well as being, as Spink suggests, ‘too exquisite in style for the stage’.<sup>15</sup> The court masque and the stage could not accommodate

---

<sup>12</sup> Though essentially a voice accompaniment, the lute was not merely chordal in its exposition. For a fuller discussion of both the lute ayre and the madrigal, see Bruce Pattison, *Music and Poetry of the English Renaissance* (London: Methuen, 1970).

<sup>13</sup> The classic call for the music to match the words in this way is to be found in Thomas Morley, *A Plain and Easy Introduction to Practical Music*, ed. by R. Alec Harmon (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1973).

<sup>14</sup> For a fuller discussion of the history of the lute see Matthew Spring, *The Lute in Britain: A History of the Instrument and its Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Ian Spink, *English Song: Dowland to Purcell* (London: Batsford, 1974).

either the monologic 'I' of the verse or the intimacy of declamation. It is not the case, though, that the lute song is entirely absent from Caroline drama, for it still figured when an intimate atmosphere was to be evoked, or when the conventions of courtly love are recalled, as in John Ford's play *The Broken Heart* (1633). The association of music and love, whether courtly or 'public' is, as Katrine Wong suggests, at its 'richest and most complex' in Ford's drama.<sup>16</sup> We might say, though, that the declamatory ayre is characterised by a certain more public dramatic quality not evident in the tradition of the lute song. As Spink states:

The declamatory style sought to make the rhythm and the melody of the voice part dependent on the accents, quantities, and inflections of the verse, at the expense of purely musical considerations.<sup>17</sup>

Here, then, is the text taking priority over the music, directing the music's rhythm and meter. The music becomes not so much a vehicle to carry the words' meaning or a secondary layer of signification as support for the primary semantic meaning of the text, but a separate, formal discourse driven by the formal features of the verse.

At the time of his compositions for *The Northern Lass* Wilson's music developed in tandem with the public, at least more public than was the case for the lute song, face of the theatrical spectacle. We must not forget that the Wilson songs under consideration here are part of a *drama*, so they cannot be 'read' as discrete pieces functioning exactly like solo song. On the other hand, they clearly do exist as songs with a life apart from the dramatic context, for they are collected in the mixed bag of musics that comprise the commonplace book. It is rare to find the scores of songs in the play-texts themselves. It is this dramatic aspect that pushes them into that as yet unformed place where emerge the dramatic aria-like songs.

The manner in which English song was developing in the first quarter of the seventeenth century was significantly related to the development in drama, as well as those developments in verse. The effect upon music was to simplify the harmony and accompaniment as noted earlier (often a chordal accompaniment with static bass) and combine this with a more declamatory treatment of the vocal line. This development is vital to our understanding of the music of Wilson, for as Spink observes, this new style

---

<sup>16</sup> Katrine Wong, *Music and Gender in English Renaissance Drama* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 124.

<sup>17</sup> Ian Spink, 'Campion's Entertainment at Brougham Castle, 1617', in *Music in English Renaissance Drama*, ed. by John Long (Lexington: Indiana University Press, 1968), pp. 57-74 (p. 59).

of song 'was born and grew up in the masquing hall'.<sup>18</sup> He further states: 'No sooner had declamatory elements appeared in the song of the court masque than they began to emerge in playsongs'.<sup>19</sup> This shows the close relationship between court and stage and of course between the extent to which playwrights were influenced and driven by the court masque. Wilson's musical apprenticeship was served in the playhouse, the court and the masquing hall.

There are five main songs in *The Northern Lass*, four with original music by Wilson. The fifth, 'Peace Wayward Barn' (4.3), was set to an extant tune, 'Ballow My Babe'. Of the original songs by Wilson, three are sung by Constance – 'You say My Love' (2.2), 'Nor Love Nor Fate' (2.3) and 'A Bonny Bonny Bird' (3.2) – while 'As I was Gathering' (4.3) is sung by Holdup (the prostitute). The scores for each of these consist of a treble line for voice and an unfigured bass line.<sup>20</sup> Drexel 4257 contains scores for 'A Bonny Bonny Bird', 'As I Was Gathering' and 'Nor Love Nor Fate'. Drexel 4041 contains scores for 'You Say My Love', 'A Bonny Bonny Bird', 'As I Was Gathering' and 'Nor Love Nor Fate'. Naturally they are the work of different scribes (perhaps three different scribes in 4257 and a single scribe for 4041), but there are some variations in the scoring of the songs and some minor differences in the words.

It has been noted that the transcriptions of the scores in Drexel 4041 are the work of a single scribe, although Wilson has signed a number of the scores. In general they follow the conventions of the day in terms of key signatures and accidentals. Tonal centres are mostly C major, while 'A Bonny, Bonny Bird' is built around an E-flat triad. At this time bar-line conventions were also not fully established and there are bar lines crossed out and half bars on separate lines. The issue of bar lines leads to a problem in interpretation, although the difference may be small in terms of our hearing of the music. The most consistent barring suggests a compound duple meter of 6/4, although Julia Wood has cast the songs in triple meter, 3/4. There are a small number of minor discrepancies in the words, compared with the quarto edition of the play.<sup>21</sup> Throughout the settings are largely syllabic, though Wilson was not always so resolutely so. Spink complains that Wilson's music in general suffers from being caught between modal and tonal worlds.<sup>22</sup> He makes these further observations about the songs:

---

<sup>18</sup> Spink, *English Song*, p. 45.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p. 53.

<sup>20</sup> Figured bass did not begin to appear with any regularity before the baroque period.

<sup>21</sup> This is the edition upon which the online version, edited by Julie Sanders, is based. It was registered on 24 March 1632 and published in quarto form later that same year.

<sup>22</sup> Spink, *English Song*, p. 109.

At first glance they seem inept, vague in melodic outline and harmonic progression. It has been suggested that in this way Constance's deranged state of mind is conveyed: alternatively, that Wilson adapted a North Country folk-idiom appropriate to the character.<sup>23</sup>

It appears, then, that for Spink, the music either represents madness or North Country folk. The musical world of *The Northern Lass*, however, is not as undefined as may first seem. A close look at these songs might reveal the extent to which either of these speculations is true.

Of the four songs with original music by Wilson, Constance sings three and Holdup, the 'cunning whore' as labelled in the *dramatis personae*, sings one. We might expect both music and text of these two characters' songs to be very different; after all, Constance is the sweet, enchanting northern heroine and Holdup the prostitute impostor. And yet, as Matthew Steggle points out:

Remarkably, [then] the play stresses not the differences but the similarities between the heroine and the prostitute... Holdup's songs... have generally been read as a pointedly amoral contrast with those of her double... but again, the similarities seem much more striking than the differences.<sup>24</sup>

The same can certainly be said of the musical settings. The songs share the same rhythmic features as well as elements of declamation. 'A Bonny Bonny Bird' is more straightforwardly in ballad form, while the Drexel 4257 version of 'Nor Love Nor Fate' is more evidently modal in character. However, as is the case with the texts, the songs' similarities are more striking than their differences.

The Drexel 4041 score for 'You Say My Love' ('Some Say My Love' in Wilson's score) is typical both of the time's notational conventions and of the songs from *The Northern Lass*. As indeed with many of the various songs in John Gamble's book, the musical meter suggested is compound duple time, 6/4. Typically this meter is associated with both the violin tune and the dance tune, as well as being a variation on the ballad form. Duple meter songs tended to be more serious than those in triple meter; incidental music and light-hearted dance tunes were more suited to the skipping beat of three. For this reason I would suggest that these songs are in 6/4 rather than 3/4 as Wood has them. A fairly

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 59.

<sup>24</sup> Matthew Steggle, *Richard Brome: Place and Politics on the Caroline Stage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 26.

straightforward I, IV, V harmony (tonic, subdominant and dominant), characterises ‘You Say My Love’ – hardly suggesting the ‘deranged state of mind’ that Spink, among others, has noted.<sup>25</sup> However, at this stage Constance is more melancholic, rather than deranged. As is also increasingly the case around this time the (unfigured) bass line is rather static and not altogether suggesting a particular harmony. One might think that this was because the lute would flesh out the harmony, polyphonically. Yet although Wilson was an accomplished lutenist there is no evidence here that this was written primarily with the lute in mind. Indeed, the intimacy of the lute song would seem to be inappropriate here unless some ironic reference to the conventions of courtly love were intended. More ‘public’ calls for song are littered throughout the play with occasional references to incidental instrumentation such as the flourishing of cornets (2.3.364).

In common with the other songs from *The Northern Lass*, ‘You Say My Love’ has the characteristics of the declamatory ayre and the emerging more aria-like style. What this means in effect is that Wilson eschews word-painting and any suggestion of a contrapuntal harmony, privileging instead melodic phrases based on the essential units of the poetic thought. Thus the music does not shift in order to accommodate the semantics of a word or phrase, nor does it seek to establish a confluence of syntax and melody, but rather it links musical thought with poetic thought by allowing the text itself to drive the melodic shape. But it is also clear at this point that the songs are not full-blown declamatory ayres in that they hesitate between intimacy and proclamation. Between the lute ayre and the later declamatory ayre we have songs such as Wilson’s, for *The Northern Lass* that fall somewhere between the two.

The words are in ballad form alternating iambic and trochaic tetrameter and trimeter:

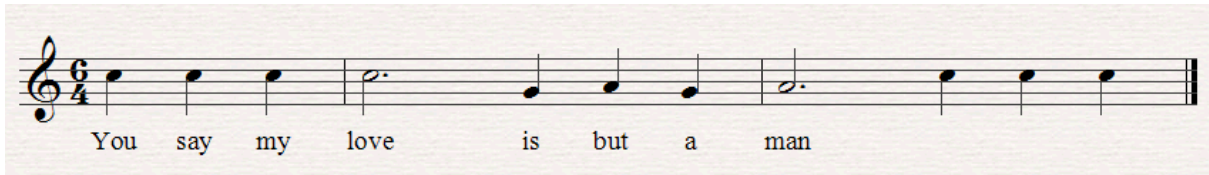
You say my love is but a man  
But I can find more odds,  
’Twixt him and others than I can,  
Find between him and Gods (2.2.262)

In the declamation of this short, through-composed song, Wilson has shifted the essentially iambic poetic meter onto what in effect is an anapaestic or dactylic rhythm:

---

<sup>25</sup> See Julia Wood, *Music in Caroline Plays* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1991) and Lucy Munro, ‘Music and Sound’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theatre*, ed. by Richard Dutton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 343-59.





The poetic stress, however, is:

/ / x / x / x /  
 You say my love is but a man

The initial trochee usefully accommodates the emerging anapaestic feel, but the latter part of the line obviates the stress on ‘man’, throwing it onto ‘is’ (as the first word on the second beat of the bar), while keeping it on ‘love’. Thus the song has the feel of triple time in duple meter (as 6/8 and 6/4 times are counted in two). The stress is mirrored by the long notes held on ‘love’ and ‘man’. Up to this point the poetic meter and the musical meter interact quite subtly, with no awkwardness of phrasing. In the second line, however, a greater disparity between the words and the music (in terms of rhythmic phrasing) begins to appear. The line, ‘But I can find more odds’, seems more straightforwardly iambic (trimeter), but the music awkwardly throws the stress on the ‘But’ in the initial three-crotchet phrasing:



Long notes on ‘find’ and ‘odds’ serve temporarily to regain the confluence of poetic and musical meter, but in attempting to set the verse with attention paid to the syntax rather than the line arrangement (where cadences, for example, would fall at the end of a line or phrase within a line) Wilson has set an entire line with a crotchet pulse beginning at the last crotchet in the bar. The result of this is the rather curious stress on the word ‘can’ (a long note with dominant harmony implied in the bass). The crotchets that follow in bar six seem to give no heed to the sense of the text, until, that is, we get to the word ‘God’, which reassuringly returns to tonic (C major). There then follows two bars where the poetic stress is ignored in favour of straight crotchets leading both to the words ‘eye’ and ‘majest - y’, with a rising in the voice to an F on the final syllable of ‘majesty’. The F forms the dominant seventh, so the hint at word painting with the word ‘majesty’ actually climaxes with a harmony that strongly demands resolution. Word-painting, that trope so beloved of the earlier madrigalists, is not pursued by Wilson here. Although the melody

rises on ‘majesty’, it actually falls on ‘divine’, with the subdominant chord as harmony. Here, Wilson might have ironically returned to the tonic with a plagal cadence (IV-I) – the stock cadence of hymn tunes – but he prefers to move between the subdominant and the dominant before ending on the final perfect cadence (G-C), a clear signal of the simple emerging tonality. Here, then, is a ballad verse set as part tuneful ayre and part dramatic aria – a remarkable blend of the past and the future.

The extent to which Wilson’s setting of ‘You Say My Love’ captures the ‘deranged’ state of mind of Constance is open to question. Spink treats the songs as a whole in his suggestion that that is their purpose, but if we examine each song separately in its dramatic context the picture is not so homogeneous. David Lindley, in his discussion of Shakespeare and song, suggests that singing was ‘the theatre’s or perhaps Shakespeare’s, addition to the iconography of the mad woman’.<sup>26</sup> Certainly Renaissance dramas had linked female madness with song (Ophelia’s singing in *Hamlet* is the archetype here), but Constance’s reputation as a ballad singer is well established before the onset of her ‘madness’. In ‘You Say My Love’ Constance is urged by mistress Trainwell, her governess, to ‘dissemble your sorrow with a song to pass a little time’. This is not simply a musical interlude but an integrated musico-dramatic moment that substantiates Sanders’ claim that the play explores the ‘cultural and performative power of song and music’.<sup>27</sup> Constance sings neither a simple plaintive ballad nor a richly dramatic aria; rather she declaims her sorrow through a largely tonal song that exploits the relationship between musical and poetic meter.

The second song, ‘Nor Love Nor Fate’ has two strophic versions. In Drexel 4041 the song is in C major with two verses set (as written in the play itself). In Drexel 4257, however, the key is D major. Both versions contain a verse not present in the quarto publications. Here is that ‘missing’ verse (spelling modernised):

You rural gods that guard the plains  
And chastise all unjust disdain  
Oh! Do not censure him for this  
It was my error and not his  
The only boon of you I crave  
To fix these lines upon my grave  
Like Icarus I soared too high  
For which alas I fall and die.

---

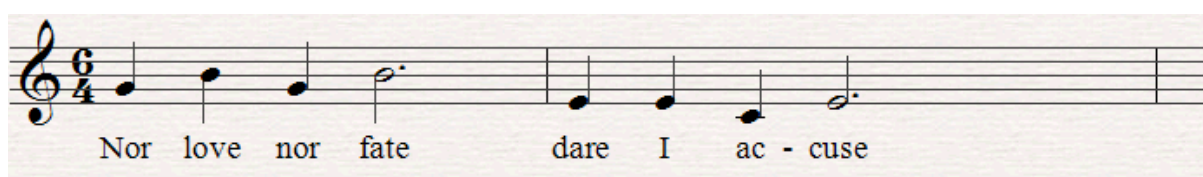
<sup>26</sup> David Lindley *Shakespeare and Music* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), p. 154.

<sup>27</sup> Sanders, Introduction to *The Northern Lass*.

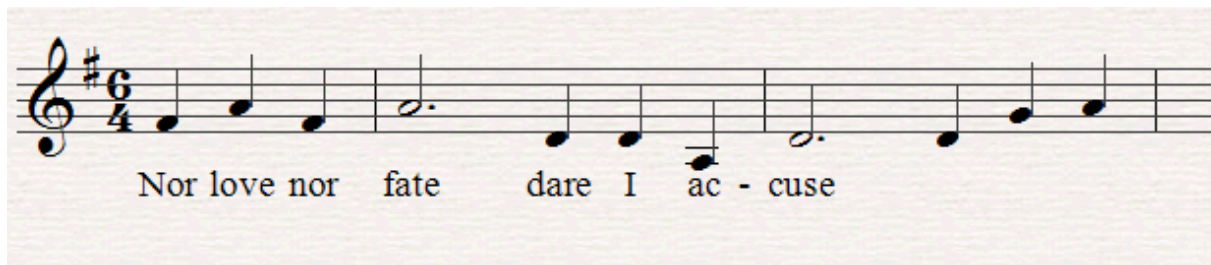
The earliest occurrence of this verse is to be found in a volume published three years before Gamble's commonplace book, *Choyce Drollery: Songs and Sonnets being a collection of several eminent authors never before printed* (1656). The complete three-verse poem is printed under the title 'Of a Woman that Dies for the Love of a Man'. The poem also appears in a later volume of 'drolleries' as 'The Forsaken Maid: A Song'. In these later occurrences some of the text differs from the Drexel text. 'Plains' becomes 'swaines' in the 1656 version and the final line becomes 'For which offence I pine, I die'.

The song is also set in compound duple meter but the implied harmony is more complex. The bass line is still quite bare and initially very static, becoming more animated towards the close. There are two verses set strophically, although only the first (up to 'Too divine for human choice') is represented in the score. Seeming anomalies in the Drexel 4041 score include a G sharp bass under a G in the treble (bar 12) and descending parallel fifths in bar four. Certainly the version in Gamble's volume is the more convincing and clear, making as it does the more musical sense. The Drexel 4041 version not only contains the anomalous harmony but also has some unnecessary duplication of notes when a single longer note is clearly required (two dotted minims in bar become a dotted semibreve in the Gamble version). The later version also more obviously complies with the musical conventions of the time in that it begins an upbeat anacrusis (as the second half of the 6/4 bar), where the earlier version has a full bar of 6/4. As for the problematic harmony of Drexel 4041, the dissonance of G/G# is altered (in the new key of D major) to G/A#, a shift much more in keeping with both the implied harmony and the feel of the song as a whole. I can only assume that the earlier version's error is the fault of the scribe, as Wilson was not yet so daring in his compositions (as I stated earlier, his later lute compositions were harmonically adventurous). The problem is that some of the differences cannot be accounted for in terms of minor differences of transcription.

The most striking difference between the two versions, however, lies in the tonal centre. The opening melodic motif, for instance, familiar to us in its rhythm, begins with the interval of a major third in the 4041 version but a minor third in 4257. Thus the whole character of the song is changed. Here is the 4041 version:

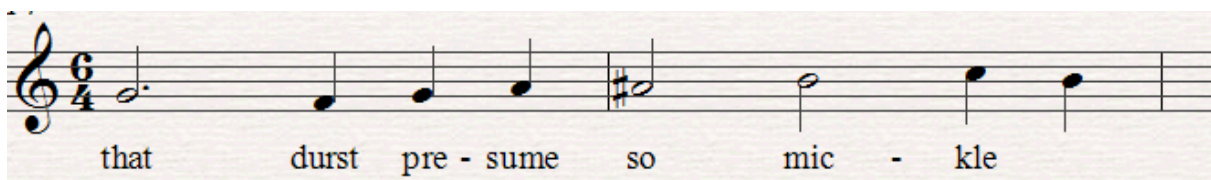


Here is the 4257 version:



The latter version is more clearly modal, suggesting D mixolydian (essentially D major with a flattened seventh, C natural).<sup>28</sup> This song is central to our understanding of Wilson’s craft and of his treatment of song in drama. It is also the song that more clearly reflects Constance’s state of mind. She sings ‘Nor Love Nor Fate’ at the beginning as the masquers have entered and before the dance begins. Once again her song becomes part of the drama not in a contingent or arbitrary way but as part of the performative calling of music in the drama. ‘Nor Love Nor Fate’ is a song that changes a character’s (Philip) course of action in the play. As Wood notes further, the song is also ‘part of an embedded masque and the subsequent dance reinforces the song’s effect of Philip’.<sup>29</sup> The relationship between poetic meter and musical meter is once again exploited to dramatic effect, particularly in Wilson’s employment of the hemiola.

Duckles suggests that the hemiola is ‘one of the distinguishing features of English song during the transition period’.<sup>30</sup> This musical rhythmic figure is an alternation between duple and triple meter, which is usually systematic. This alternation of meter, combined with the erratic barring of phrases contributes to the difficulties in editing the songs. In a song in 6/4, for example, the two beats may typically be made up of the following rhythm:



In the first bar the two beats are clear – falling on the first beat of the dotted minim and the first crotchet. In the second bar, however, the second minim breaks the duple meter clearly making the bar triple meter. This example from ‘Nor Love Nor Fate’ shows Wilson’s technique in setting words to what may look initially like a dance rhythm. The minim falls naturally with the stress of ‘pre-*sume*’ while the second minim also serves to emphasise ‘so mic-kle’, with its lighter vowel sound, is set with the last implied beat of

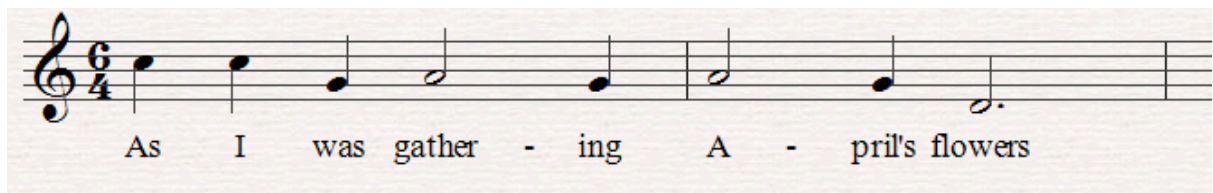
<sup>28</sup> This is the modern term for the mode on the fifth degree of the scale. It does not correspond to the nomenclature of the mediaeval church modes, based as they were on earlier Greek modes.

<sup>29</sup> Wood, *Music in Caroline Plays*, p. 149.

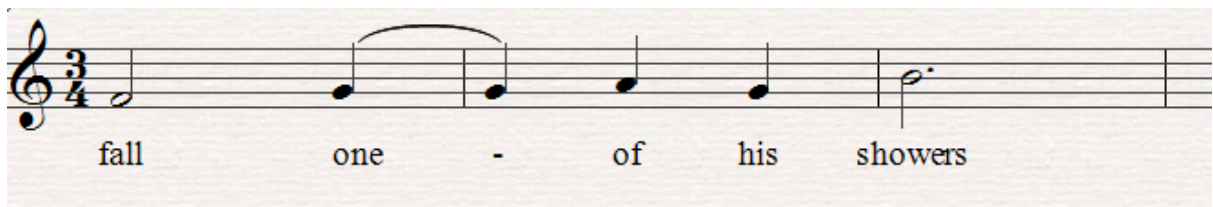
<sup>30</sup> Duckles, ‘The Gamble Manuscript’, 36.

the bar. The hemiola effect does little to reinforce the meaning of the words; rather it enables the rhythm of the music to interact with the rhythm of the text in such a way as to bring out the logic of the poetry. The iambic nature of the verse is given subtle variation through use of this conventional musical idiom, perfectly encapsulating the relationship between the language and the music. English is essentially an iambic or trochaic language; the compound duple meter (6/4) combined with the use of the hemiola enables the dance rhythms of the renaissance to accommodate the steady iambs of Elizabethan and early Jacobean verse. Such a relatively simple relationship was not to last.

‘Nor Love Nor Fate’ is most usefully compared with ‘As I was Gathering’ – the song sung by Holdup and discussed briefly earlier. I suggested that contrary to Spink’s assertion the music hardly seems to indicate an opposition between Constance and Holdup, despite the verse being darker in the latter’s song. The two versions of ‘As I was Gathering’ are set to different musical meters – or perhaps more accurately, are barred differently suggesting a different rhythmic feel (Wood has gone for the 3/4 reading). The 4041 version is barred somewhat erratically, beginning with bars of 3/4, while the 4257 version is more straightforwardly duple (6/4):



The difference is primarily one of ‘feel’ here, despite the fact that 3/4 time is counted as three beats and 6/4 as two. Although 6/4 is the most natural time signature here the different barring nevertheless successfully accommodates the hemiola in the fourth bar. In 4041 this simply means tying the third crotchet beat over to the next bar, as in:



Here we can discern the duple time feel in a triple time context. At this period, however, consistent and regular barring was not yet fully established, so it is not surprising that even different time signatures are implied by variations in barring conventions.



Towards the close of the verse (the song is strophic), the bass line becomes more animated, but in general once again its function seems primarily as a primitive anchor rather than a prompt for elaborate harmony. In all the songs looked at so far there is a strong leaning towards the features of the tuneful ayre, balanced with aria-like quality, in particular the response to the sense a feel of the words rather than to close interpretation of phrases or subtle declamation. One might think that this is the opposite of how something should be declaimed in drama, but it is important to remember that these songs, as with other songs of the theatre at the time, are both within the play and also outside it. They occur as part of the play in that they are written and ascribed to a particular character in the way any other utterance is, but they are also outside the play in that they are printed in italics and are not part of the dramatic ‘movement’ or the action. It is true, however, that the relationship between the songs and the play as a whole is more organic than in the plays of other contemporary dramatists. As Julie Sanders notes:

The embeddedness of song in the plotlines and effects of this play... suggests as well a more integrated understanding of musical and song-based culture on the part of Brome that went beyond pure theatrical effect or innovation.<sup>33</sup>

The final song under discussion, ‘A Bonny Bonny Bird’ is another strophic setting in 6/4. Once again the two Drexel versions differ in that 4041 has a three crotchet anacrusis while 4257 is in 6/4 from the first bar. The anacrusis gives that particular setting a feel of three rather than the two of 6/4, but the difference is only slight. This song is more clearly in the ballad tradition, telling as it does the story of the loss of love. The text begins in the past tense (‘A bonny bonny bird I had’), moves to the present in both time and tense (‘But he is fled’), and finally to the modal indicating intention (‘I would not change my love’). As with any strophic song the musical mood of the first stanza is continued through subsequent lines irrespective of the change of mood in the text itself. This makes it less obviously ‘dramatic’ in the sense of an aria or the emerging ayre. It is not the case, of course, that the ballad cannot be dramatic, but the drama will often lie in the interplay between the plaintive lyric and the simple, memorable tune. The extravagant claims made by Constance about ‘Phillip’, are a more public mythologizing of her unrequited love. She once again is implored to sing, and wastes no time in taking the opportunity:

*Constance*: What mun I do than? Shall I ever get him by singing row ye? In troth I would never but sing if I thought that were the gainestway.

*Trainwell*: I had rather hear you sing though, than see you weep.

---

<sup>33</sup> Sanders, Introduction to *The Northern Lass*.

*Constance*: It must be of my love, then, my sparrow, as I told you. And thus it goes. (3.2.504-6)

This once more demonstrates the embeddedness of music and song in not only in terms of Constance's character but also in the development of the play as a whole. At this point in the drama, Constance has recourse to the traditional music of the ballad but the duple meter of the setting underlies its essential seriousness. The echo of Shakespeare's sonnet twenty-nine ('I scorn to change my state with kings') adds to the sense of pathos and despair.

Wilson's music for *The Northern Lass* is surprisingly varied, despite the initial appearance to the contrary. The variety lies in Wilson's subtle blend of the tonal and modal, his expressive use of the hemiola and his awareness of the need to integrate the music with the dramatic development of the play. Brome's *The Northern Lass* is a drama where music is no mere adjunct but is fully integrated with the action and motives of the principal character, Constance.