The Canterbury Catch Club 1826

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Music in the Frame

By

Chris Price

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For Sonia

The application of the following slight anecdote, may, perhaps, be in favour of the work:—it happened, that Messrs. Boyce and Arne met one morning in Mr Garrick's parlour, before they acquired academical degrees. Talking of music, Mr Arne remarked, that, when he took up a score, he looked for the faults in the first place, and, if they were numerous, he laid it aside. "You may be right," said Mr. Boyce, "although I differ from you; where I find many beauties, I wish to see no faults."

John Stafford Smith, *Remarks on the Various Compositions; Musica Antiqua* (Preston, 1812), p. 11.

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My other employer is Canterbury Cathedral, in whose service as a Lay Clerk in the choir I have spent most of those intervening four decades; they, too, have supported some of the more idiosyncratic aspects of the project, with concert venues and conference support. Particular appreciation, however, must go to the outstanding staff of the Cathedral Library and Archives, who have given nothing but unstinting assistance with their usual calm professionalism and unfailing good humour when confronted with the most inconvenient requests, including the removal of all the tables in the Reading Room for several illustrated public lectures. To all of them I am deeply grateful. Their colleagues in the City Library and Museum service also deserve fulsome thanks; they toil with little public recognition to keep our heritage alive, and it was humbling to see something of their work at close quarters for a while. Also in the city at large, Artistic Director Rosie Turner and her Canterbury Festival team made it possible to bring the work to a wider public. Further afield still, the staff of the Lewis Walpole Library at Yale University, Sue Walker and Kristen McDonald, have been indefatigably supportive and wonderfully patient with the many queries from this unseen scholar from across the pond.

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found themselves singing a very odd repertoire they could never have imagined—and have done so with gusto: delighted appreciation.

To Dr Richard Hall, whose knowledge, intelligence, sensitivity, and understanding I can never hope to emulate or reciprocate: love and thanks for forty years of music-making, book-swapping, motorcycling, and friendship. This would not have started without him.

For my wife Sonia, without whom there would be little point: the most profound gratitude. This would not have been continued, let alone finished, without her love, wit, and wisdom. Every day.

List of Abbreviations

BHAK	Beaney House of Art and Knowledge (including Canterbury City Library & Museum)
BL	British Library
BM	British Museum
CCA	Canterbury Cathedral Archives
CCL	Canterbury Cathedral Library
CERC	Church of England Record Centre
LP	Lambeth Palace
CC	Catch Club
QMMR	Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review
DCc/DB	Dean & Chapter; Dean's Book
DCc/TB	Dean & Chapter; Treasurer's Book
DCc/OP	Dean & Chapter; Officers' Papers

Note concerning monetary value 1825–6

The following table shows a rough equivalence between sums mentioned in the book (source: "Five Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a UK Pound Amount, 1270 to Present", *MeasuringWorth*, www.measuringworth.com):

Item	Old currency			2018 equivalent
	£	s	d	£. p
Club subscription 1802		10	6	42.65
The cost of the Catch Club print (B&W)		12	0	45.20
The Catch Club print (colour)		15	0	58.00
{	100	0	0	8,194.00
Middle-class income: range {	300	0	0	22,600.00
{	1,000	0	0	75,330.00
Debt risking prison	2	0	0	150.70
Musician fee for one Club night performance		7	0	25.00
Cost of piano 1812	20	0	0	1,507.00
Mr Goodban's bills refunded	60	0	0	4,520.00

Editorial Practice

Late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century punctuation and typography seem quaintly idiosyncratic to modern eyes. Shorter quotations in this book retain original punctuation and, for example, the use of capital letters—either for nouns or for emphasis—and italic font; in longer quotations punctuation (usually only a matter of removing surplus commas) has been modernised for ease of reading.

Introduction

Every picture is a work of fiction, carefully constructed to show whatever it is the artist and/or commissioners wish to display. But, as they say, what people want to tell you is just advertising; what's news is what they don't want you to know. So the interesting thing about a picture is what is—probably inadvertently—let slip in the showing. More interesting still is what has been excluded. Even more interesting than that is what was excluded unwittingly: decisions about content which may have been made without thinking. The deepest reasons behind the way in which we present ourselves to the world may be hidden even from ourselves.

The subject of this book is a picture: a lithograph entitled *The Canterbury Catch Club*, dated 1826. It is a finely detailed depiction of a room full of gentlemen, most of whom are sitting at long tables in relaxed poses, whilst an orchestra plays in the background: a scene of quaint, genial conviviality. At first glance, it may seem odd to take any great interest in it. After all, few today would recognise much of the information the print offers about itself, in the writing beneath the image: names, mostly, of the Club and its chairman, and those responsible for its production—artist, printer, and commissioning newsagent. Another faded remnant of an era of frock coats and neckcloths, it's a glimpse of a phenomenon known to music historians but little regarded: the 18th- and 19th-century sociable singing club.

In fact, our view of this particular picture is illuminated with quite startling brilliance by a remarkable archive.

On 21 October 1915, the Beaney Institute—Canterbury's city library—received a bequest. Most of it was music: over 70 volumes of vocal music containing about 3,000 pieces by over 300 composers, and about 200 instrumental part books; hand-written volumes containing separate orchestral parts for over 700 pieces by 200 composers. Brian Robins describes this as "the largest and most important collection in existence,"[1] but for anyone interested in the socio-cultural milieu which generated this extraordinary archive, there is much more. In addition to the music, there was a motley assortment of artefacts. There were a number of paintings, by an artist or artists unknown: individual portraits of half a dozen Worthy Gentlemen in early nineteenth-century dress along with pictures of the rather better-known George Frederick Handel and Arcangelo Corelli. There was also an impressive representation of Saint Cecilia at a keyboard; she is accompanied by a verse from Dryden and a couple of cherubs. There were beautifully bound books, most hand-written in the copperplate script of the age: one gives a record of the concert programmes between September 1825 and February 1837—almost twelve seasons' worth—but, most significantly, four splendid volumes record the minutes of committee meetings covering a period of activity from 1802 until 1865. And there was a desk, and a chairman's gavel.

All this, meticulously inventoried in the final pages of the last of the Minutes Books by the Beaney Librarian in 1915, had been the property of the Canterbury Catch Club. By then, the Club had been defunct for half a century, all but gone from living memory. Without wishing to romanticise what might accurately be described as a bundle of old music and some bric-a-brac, the preservation of this eclectic collection of artefacts in the dark days of the Great War might wonderingly be called an act of some considerable faith: an assertion, perhaps, that something of our national heritage was in here, somewhere, if it could but be found, and that it should be preserved, at a time when so much was imperilled.

Whatever the archivists' motive, the material had had an interesting journey by 1915. The music had originally been the property of those musicians who made up the very first Canterbury Catch Club

Orchestra in the late eighteenth century—an early example of an artists' co-operative, though they would have been puzzled if anyone had told them that. In 1802, the Club took possession of the material, and added to it in the following decades to create the substantial collection of vocal and instrumental music which now survives. When the Club folded in 1865, it loaned the music to the "new Catch Club", of which no records survive. Ten years later, in 1875—and there is no clue as to where it had been for that decade—all the property of the "old" Catch Club was given in trust to the St Lawrence Amateur Musical Society, "on the understanding that should a Catch Club be revived here, it [the property] will be handed over to it".[2] No new Catch Club appeared, despite the confident statement reported in the same newspaper article that "there would be little or no difficulty in reviving the musical evenings which were so regularly celebrated in the winter months from 1779 down to a comparatively recent date." Thirty more years passed. In 1905, the last surviving Trustee of the Society—one George Johnson—bequeathed the entire archive by Deed of Gift to the "Mayor, Aldermen, and Citizens of Canterbury".[3] Once again the trail goes dark until that day, ten years later in 1915, when the Beaney Institute gave it shelter. In its storage it stayed, through another war and beyond. In 1989, the books and music were taken under the wing of the Cathedral Archives and Library, while the artefacts remained at the Beaney.

Of all that material, only two of the portraits are on permanent display today.

The Catch Club print never was part of this remarkable archive, having been created—as explained in Chapter 1—as the result of a local newsagent's entirely independent entrepreneurial initiative. Practically nothing is known of its distribution: how many copies were printed, who bought them, whether another print run was thought feasible, whether the plates survived, or whether Mr Ward ever made any money out of it. All we have are the five copies surviving in the city today: one in the Beaney collection, acquired at some unknown point entirely independently from the material discussed above; one in the possession of the Cathedral Archives; two in the possession of the King's School; and one in private hands. Another copy was sold at auction in 2003; at the time of writing, its whereabouts are unknown.

None of these are presently on public display, but all those who have one in their care have made their copies readily available for inspection. And so the archival collection and the print may hold each other up for scrutiny; hence this book.

It still might never have been written but for a chance encounter. Chatting idly one day in the office of the Archivist of Canterbury Cathedral, my eye fell upon the book open on the desk in front of her: a catalogue of some sort, of the Canterbury Catch Club music collection. Even upside-down, the words "As Thomas was Cudgell'd one Day by his Wife" were legible from where I sat. The thought occurred that however good, bad, or indifferent the music was, on grounds of textual interest alone such repertoire should not languish in obscurity. Thomas should be cudgelled once more.

And so he has been, with the help of some of my fellow Lay Clerks, over the past few years. Those of us who sing in cathedral choirs up and down the country are only dimly aware, now, of a few snatched relics of the music such a club might have known and loved: some of Purcell's saucier catches, perhaps, or a part-song by Henry Rowley Bishop or John Liptrott Hatton. But we had little idea how very varied—both in aesthetic intention and in musical quality—this repertoire could be. There really are pieces which probably should never be in circulation—ever, anywhere—again, for reasons to do with music, text, taste, and decency. Fortunately there was much we could perform and record. And along the way, this repertoire—bawdy, convivial, cynical, fatalistic, patriotic, optimistic, and mawkishly sentimental—raised questions about those who wrote, performed, and consumed it. The music in the Club archive—its composition, its performance, and its reception—became an important lens for an examination of the print, and the Club it claims to represent.

As Evelyn Waugh says of Uncle Peregrine, the Catch Club "could have occurred nowhere else but in England and in no period but [its] own".[4] Once a week, for thirty weeks of the year, for almost a century,

the Club's members created a space for themselves defined by an intensely convivial—and faintly subversive—character. It must be doubted that they ever paused to consider the reasons for doing so and, at this distance of time, any exercise in psychoanalytical hindsight is fraught with risk. What this book may show, however, is what they thought they were doing; why they might have been inclined to do it; at what cost—human and monetary— it was done; and just how enjoyable it probably was.

Chapter 1:

Prologue: The Image of Convivial Song

On 6 December 1825 the following advertisement appeared in the *Kentish Chronicle*:

> Shortly will be published
>
> a view of
>
> Canterbury Catch Club,
>
> Dedicated by permission to Charles Delmar, Esq., President and to the Members of the Club.
>
> Henry Ward, Stationer, Sun Street, Canterbury, respectfully announces to the Public that he intends publishing a VIEW of CANTERBURY CATCH CLUB, with correct and striking likenesses of several of the Members, Gentlemen of the Orchestra, &c.
>
> The Style in which the Publisher intends submitting this View to the Public, will be such as he feels confident will give the greatest satisfaction.[1]

Mr Ward's entrepreneurial idea was an innovative but risky piece of marketing. The attributions at the bottom of the finished article make it clear that he had commissioned the best men for the job: the artist T.M. Baynes was in great demand at the time as illustrator of landscapes and architecture, and Hullmandel, the engraver, enjoyed a reputation as one of the best craftsmen available. Both were London-based; the execution of this project would not come cheap.

In style, then, it needed to be a safe bet, and on this point Henry Ward must have been keenly aware of a problem. He and his potential customers would have known very well the sort of treatment convivial songsters had always endured, and were continuing to suffer, in the caricatures of Hogarth, Cruikshank, Gillray, and Rowlandson—to name but a few—so Ward's coy reference to a representation "which he feels will give the greatest satisfaction" is a coded assurance that the print they might order would not look like any of those. This would have been a legitimate concern for anyone considering a commitment of 12 shillings (15s. for a coloured version) to support the project. Figure 1-1 shows what they got; a larger reproduction is to be found at the front of this book.

Although the serried ranks of gentlemen are not all turned squarely to face the viewer, their orderly arrangement is reminiscent of the interminable parade of Victorian photographs produced in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Its construction is solidly formal: rules of perspective are studiously observed, as seen in the straight line running through the centre of the scene between the trestle tables either side of the viewpoint and by the lines of the tables leading to the vanishing point in the unseen distance; the perpendicular lines of the walls and proscenium arch enclosing the orchestra are reinforced by the parallels of the chandelier, the portraits, the screen on the right, the chimney-breast on the left, and the alcove housing the organ, dead centre at the back of the picture. The focus of attention is the crowd of faces, and those in the foreground are drawn with exquisite detail. The solidity of structure encodes a significance: the intention here is to convey a strong sense of socio-political order. The formality of the image serves to underline the assured respectability of this cultured assembly.

In fact, this image represents a dramatic break with representations of sociable singing from the previous century. Of these earlier examples, Gillray's *Anacreontick's in Full Song* (Colour Plate 1-1) is

probably the most revolting. It presents a scene of inebriated anarchy whose focal point is the punch-bowl. There are, ironically, features in common with the Canterbury image: pipes (including some broken on the floor); a mockery of a chandelier; a portrait (this of Bacchus, to whom the Anacreontics appealed for their classical credibility in song); glasses and bottles; and hats hung on pegs on the walls. Here, however, the overall effect is chaotic, emphasised by the apparent disregard for formal structure. This is more illusory than actual: with the exception of the figure slumped in a chair, behind—and partially obscured by—the two men on the left of the picture, the faces are carefully placed to show various poses: slumber, slavering mouths agape, caterwauling, and short-sighted inspection of the one piece of music visible in the picture. This is presumably the *Anacreontic Song* penned by John Stafford Smith, from which the caption across the top of the image is drawn. The consumption of alcohol appears to be the prime purpose of the gathering; the singing of anything, even the Club song, is relegated to a very minor role. The overall effect is not an edifying spectacle; however carefully positioned the characters might be, the image depicts a chaotic scene of thoroughly transgressive behaviour, and its superficial lack of formal design pummels the point home.

Fig. 1-1: Thomas Mann Baynes: *The Canterbury Catch Club* (1826) (Printed by Henry Ward, 1826). Lithograph, 51.2 x 62 cm. © Canterbury Museums and Galleries, CANCM:10840.1

The Catch Club print is the very antithesis of this both in structural formality and in the behaviour of the figures in the image. The Canterbury gentlemen, for the most part sitting erect in their places, appear to be entirely sober. Furthermore—and crucially, in view of the fact that this is a picture of a Catch Club meeting—they are not singing anything. What music there is in the image comes from the orchestra at the back of the room: twenty-five players crowded into a somewhat inadequate space are apparently working

their way through a piece, though few members seem to be paying it any attention. The absence of singing, in a picture of a catch club, is a significant artistic decision.

There were good reasons for this. Although Gillray's image is probably the worst of its kind, it is not alone. Richard Leppert sums up the iconography of informal music-making: "The wretched playing [he might also have said, "singing"] of amateur musicians was a standing joke so widely appreciated as to produce a virtual sub-genre of visual satire."[2] In fact, within this sub-genre, there is a further sub-group of pictures which draw their inspiration very directly from actual pieces of music.

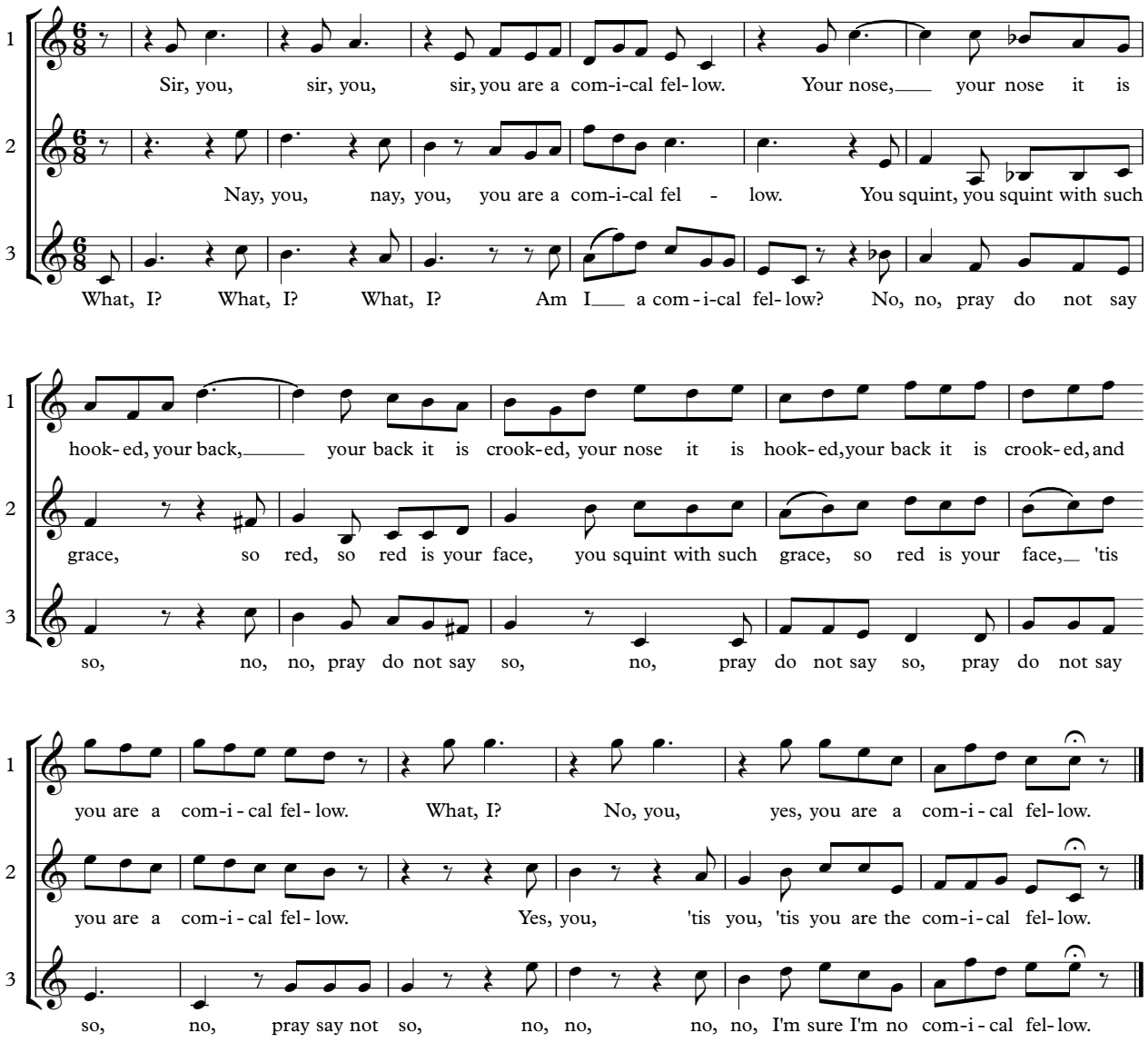
Fig. 1-2: Robert Dighton: *A Catch; Une Chansonette* (Printed in London by Bowles & Carver, 1785-1786) Hand-coloured mezzotint on paper, 354.5 x 24.7 cm. London, British Museum, 1935,0522.1.76 © The Trustees of the British Museum

Fig. 1-3: Dighton: *A Glee; Une Allegresse* (Printed in London by Bowles & Carver, 1786) Hand-coloured mezzotint on paper, 35.3 x 25 cm. Courtesy of The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University; lwlpr31071

These two scenes of alcohol-assisted disorder and effortful amateurism (Figures 1-2 and 1-3) are the work of one Robert Dighton (1752-1814). Dated 1786, they claim to represent a catch (*Une Chansonnette*) and a glee (*Une Allegresse*): the words are reproduced beneath the picture. Both pieces of music are in the Canterbury collection. Dighton's French titles seem to be a piece of whimsy, since both pieces are by English composers: the catch is *The Comical Fellows* by William Bates, and the glee is by Thomas Arne: *Which is the Properest Day to Drink?* The choice of subjects (that is, the pieces of music) for each image is worth consideration: even by that relatively early stage in the development of the English glee, there were many examples of more serious pieces available to the artist for visual realisation. Arne (who had died eight years previously, in 1778) had penned the miniature gem, *The Emperor Adrian, Dying, To His Soul*, and Samuel Webbe's mighty *Discord* had won the Catch Club Prize in 1772. Fifteen years before that the earnest ambitions for the English catch articulated by William Hayes in the Preface to his *First Book of Catches, Glees*

and Canons in 1757 had made great social claims for this diminutive genre: "I found [them] to be productive of the most desirable effects: viz., Cheerfulness and Good Humour, Friendship and a Love of Harmony,"[3] he said, of his genteel Oxford gatherings. So the selection of two of the more light-hearted examples of these closely-related English genres would appear to be a deliberate excuse for caricature.

Example 1-1: William Bates (*fl.* c. 1750–1780): *The Comical Fellows*



The resulting pair of prints is relatively benign, especially compared to Gillray's treatment of the Anacreontics. In keeping with the charming absurdity of the catch (Example 1-1), in which the three singers hurl abuse at each others' physical deformities, the general tenor of Dighton's image is quite good-humoured: although catastrophe may be imminent, given the spaniel's grip on the tablecloth and its proximity to decanter and punch bowl, it is held in abeyance for this frozen moment of time, apart from the disaster which has befallen the central gentleman's wig. No wine has yet been spilt, and the clear majority of the participants seem to be engaged in the singing—from memory, it would appear, since they seem able to gesture at each other in the accusatory manner demanded by the piece without too much reference to the music lying on the table. Lest the text beneath the image be insufficient clue, music books are strewn about, one of which is closed so that the cover may be seen to be displaying the title "Catches and Glees".

Arne's glee (Example 1-2, p. 6) is one of his more frivolous. Dighton's representation of this piece is remarkably similar to the first; the central table is virtually identical, though the dog is of a less active breed. Noticeably, however, the singers seem to be investing rather more effort in their performance of the glee; that, at least, represents a nod to the slightly more serious intentions of the genre.

The question under discussion (that is, the question as to which is the most appropriate day to drink) rapidly elicits the conclusion that every day is entirely proper for the consumption of alcohol, and prompts the counter-enquiry as to why anyone should be asked to choose "but one day". This may not seem very serious stuff, but the six singers engaged in the work are clearly giving the matter earnest attention, gathered closely around the one copy of the music. Here, too, it is clear that the singing is not compulsory; two figures are paying slightly more attention to their pipes while a third seems happy to listen, but we should note that the music has centre stage.

Dennis Rose puts the two pictures in context:

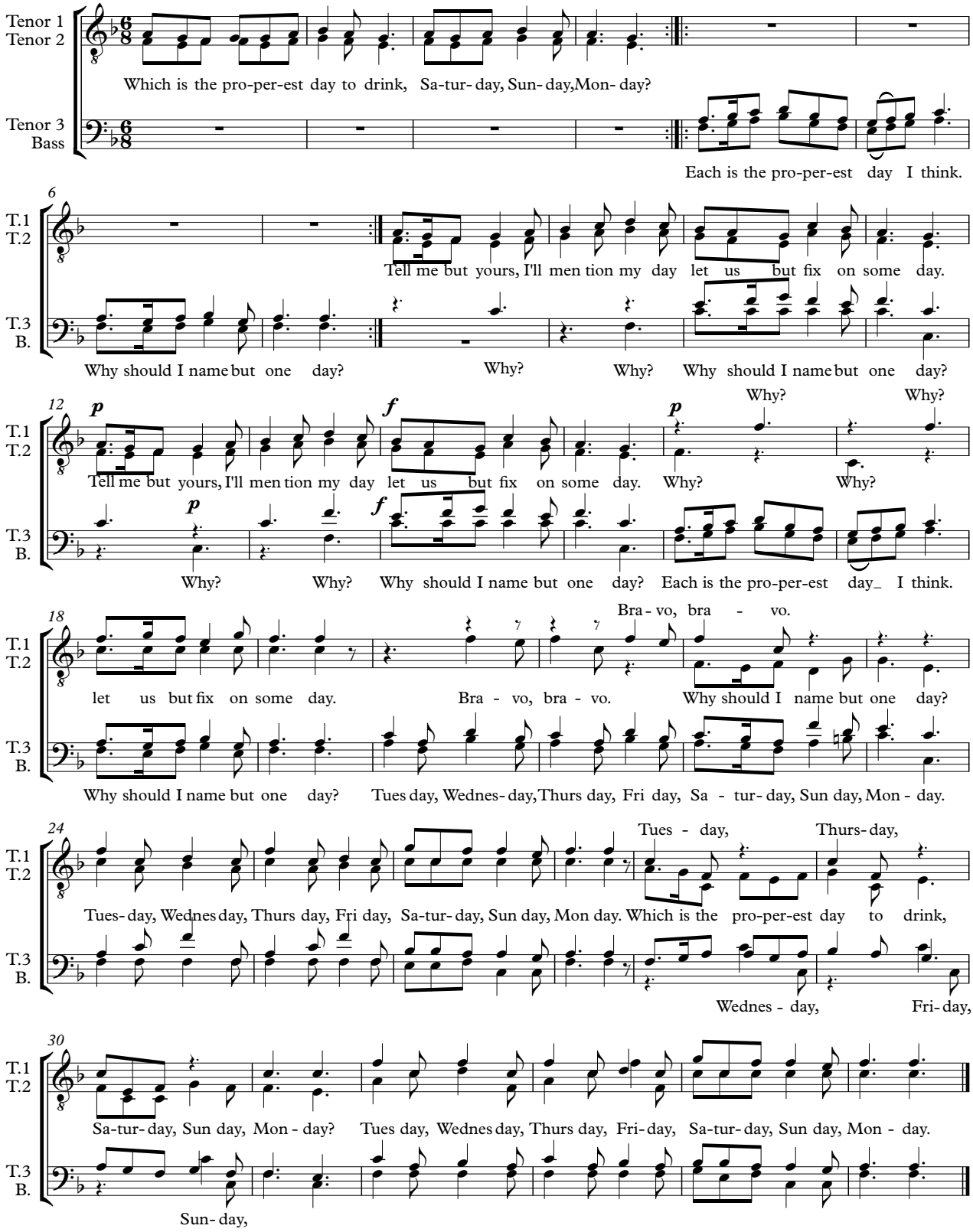
> [These prints] are a humorous depiction of the Glee Club which used to meet in Mr Robert Smith's house in St. Paul's Church Yard where Dighton's publishers had their offices. The Glee Club used to meet informally from 1783 until it was founded officially in 1787. At the Club's meetings the members sang glees, catches and canons between the drinking of wine punch. […] It was probably Dighton's involvement with the theatre that introduced him to the club.[4]

Fig. 1-4: Anon: Glee Singers (1818). Hand-coloured lithograph on paper, 22.7 x 33.4 cm. London, British Museum, 1878,1012.382 © The Trustees of the British Museum

It is clear from the various accounts of contemporary and later writers (notably Thackeray) that sociable singing of this nature was a popular pastime amongst the literate strata of British society throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—Pepys mentions the singing of catches several times, for example. So Dighton's involvement with the theatre, which was extensive, may not have been absolutely necessary to bring him into contact with this convivial company. The rest is speculation: neither Rose nor the British Museum can offer any further detail about the subject of these pictures. But it is tempting to wonder whether the characters shown would have been as instantly recognisable to contemporary viewers as Ward claims his will be. For now, we should note that a glimpse through the window of *Une Chansonnette* shows a city skyline, complete with church spire, and the modest scale of the room reinforces the impression of an essentially domestic scene in which friends may or may not

participate in some sociable singing, as they wish.

Example 1-2: Thomas Arne (1710–1778): ***Which is the Properest Day to Drink?***



In most visual representations of catch and glee singing from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries it is usually clear that the music constitutes the *raison-d'etre* for the gathering, but the essential

ingredients of a convivial evening—music, smoking, drinking and good company—combine in more or less equal measure to create an impression of light-hearted sociability. These images offer an indulgent, good-humoured view of the activity they depict, encouraging sympathy rather than derision—most of the time. As we consider other such images, it becomes clear that Gillray's treatment of the Anacreontics is unusually harsh. Quite why he should wish to discredit them so is not clear, given that his treatment of other informal musical scenes comes nowhere near such squalid debauchery. For example, the representation of singing and playing to be found in *A Little Music, or, The Delights of Harmony* (Colour Plate 1-2) elicit amused sympathy: we recognise that some, at least, of the participants apparently aspire to a degree of seriousness, but something always subverts it: consider the ferocious expression of the cat, the child furiously blowing on what is apparently a toy trumpet, the ornamental statues on cupboard and mantelpiece which seem to be cavorting about as they join in with the music, and the fact that the candle has set fire to the female singer's ludicrous feather headdress while the dog chews her gown.

Fig. 1-5: Gillray: The Rt. Honble. Catch Singers (Printed in London by William Humphrey, 1783) Etching; sheet 26 x 35 cm. Courtesy of The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University; lwlpr05192

The problem is exacerbated by the fact that the singing of catches was occasionally appropriated by satirists for political purposes. One example must suffice: in *The Rt Hon'ble Catch Singers* (1783), Gillray depicted Lord North sitting at a table with Fox. Even by the venal standards of eighteenth-century politics, the coalition government formed by these two men—who loathed each other—was a glaring example of political opportunism, and was deeply unpopular with both George III and with the public at large; for once, the populace found itself in sympathy with their monarch. Gillray's dim view is made abundantly clear in visual terms by his generous depiction of their slovenly corpulence; by the obliteration of parts of the monarch's crown and the 'G' of 'G.R.' on the side of the tankard as North, "scowling with the effort"[5], blows the froth off the beer onto a petition calling for parliamentary reform; and by their triumphalist poses as they sing. The satirical lyric makes the message clear: "Bring every Flow'r that can be got / Pinks, Hyacyinths & Roses, / We two will drink out of one Pot / And Fuddle both our Noses. / With Treasury Juice the Pot shall Foam / For Reynard [Fox, obviously] & for N——h [equally obviously, North] / The People still may wish for some / And they shall have - the Froth." This representation of leading politicians of the

day sitting around a drink-laden board singing catches were not intended to flatter; and the association of catch singing with such reprehensible exploitation does nothing for the reputation of a genre already held in low esteem..

Political satire is the point of another caricature which, like Robert Dighton's pair of images discussed earlier, takes as its inspiration an actual piece of music. In fact, the artist Thomas Rowlandson (1757-1827), created at least three visual representations of catches and glees.

Example 1-3: Garrett Colley Wellesley, Earl of Mornington (1735–1781): *'Twas You, Sir*

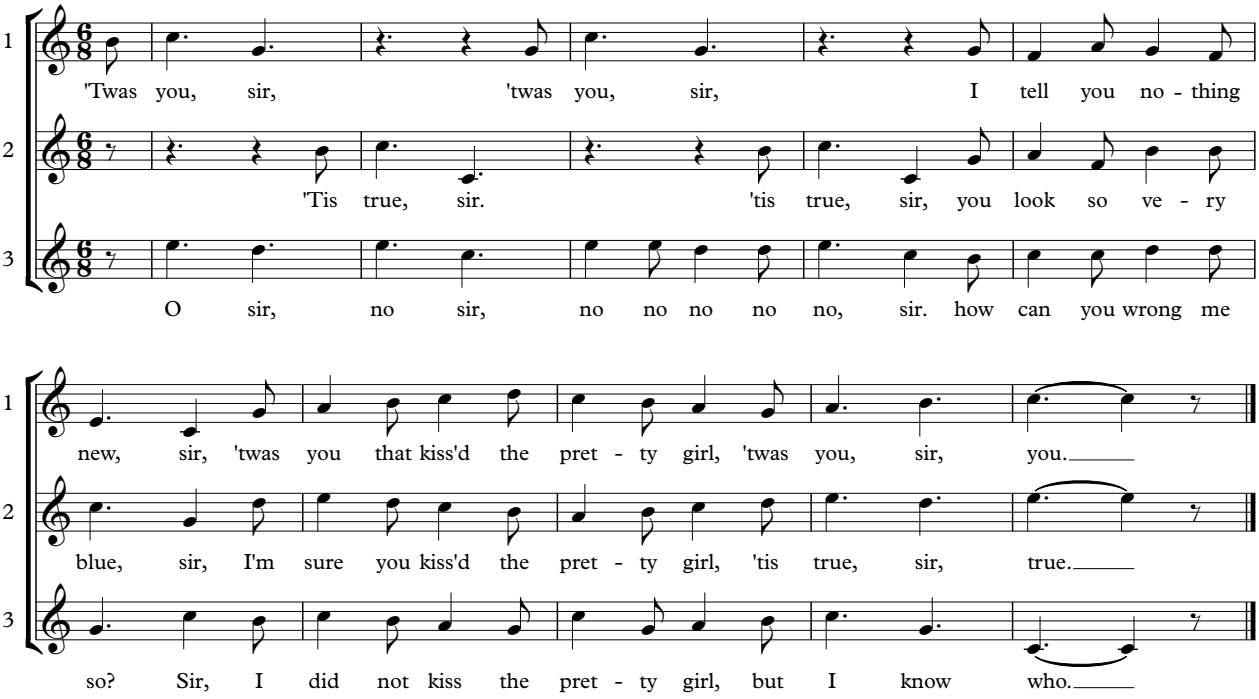


Fig. 1-6: Rowlandson: An Old Catch, Newly Revived (Published by Thomas Tegg 1809) Hand-coloured etching, 23.5 x 34.2 cm. Courtesy of The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University; lwlpr10959